

**A CULTURAL POLITICAL ECONOMY ACCOUNT OF  
HIGHER EDUCATION IN MERCOSUR**

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**This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**Faculty of Education**

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## **DECLARATION**

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my thesis has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

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Aliandra Lazzari Barlete

Cambridge, 01 April 2019

PhD Viva date: 02 May 2019

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*Dedico esta tese à minha família:  
tão longe, tão perto.*

*Aliandra*

## ABSTRACT

### **A Cultural Political Economy account of Higher Education in Mercosur**

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This thesis looks at the Common Market of the South (Mercosur) and its Education Sector (SEM) to explain the role of HE in region-building over time. Mercosur is a regional organisation launched in 1991 among Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay. Venezuela became a full member in 2012, and Bolivia is in process to acquire full membership. The research aims to shed new insight on the changing place, players and space of HE in region-making by means of a historical analysis of Mercosur HE projects from 1991 until 2016.

It argues that understanding Mercosur's HE sectoral regionalism should be done in relation to the broader development of Mercosur as a region, as well as to the different scales of rule that shape these social relations. The thesis aims to answer the main question: 'what is Mercosur HE a case of?' I understand Mercosur HE as a relational space (Harvey 2006), therefore constructed in relation to Mercosur as a region. This process spans external and internal influences grounded in economic, cultural and political dynamics (Robertson, Olds, Dale, & Dang, 2016) that are specific to the experience of Latin American regionalisms.

The study adopts a Critical Theory approach to understanding social worlds, including social change (R. W. Cox & Sinclair, 1996). It used critical realism in order to identify the relationship between the outcomes and the action of mechanisms in context (Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Sayer, 1992, 2000). To address the research questions, I traced the historical trajectory of Mercosur's HE using Process Tracing (Falleti, 2016; Trampusch & Palier, 2016). The framework of Critical Junctures (Collier & Collier, 1991) indicated five moments of change and legacy in the historical development of Mercosur HE. The data analysed was a combination of documentary analysis, unstructured observation and interviews, collected in two fieldwork trips to Latin America in 2016 and 2017. I analysed them as text using critical discourse analysis (CDA) with a focus on external relations of texts (Fairclough, 2003).

The analysis shows that, in considering Mercosur HE as a spatial regional organisation, there are four features which are transversal through time: first, the role of the Coordinating Committee (CCR) in shaping the HE Sector; second, the weak institutionality of Mercosur HE limits the resources and capacity to implement decisions and activities; third, the events of the meetings appear as the principal mechanism for governing the HE Sector and setting the pace of the changes in HE in the region; and, finally, the evident role of Argentina and Brazil in leading the HE Sector. Results also point out Mercosur HE's contradictions. On the one hand, its weak institutionality prevents the efficient shift from ideational to material, yet the awareness of this deficit does not alter the regularity of its meetings and the Sector's operation. On the other, the high level of diversity amongst its Member States' HE systems did not hinder creating outputs, such as the accreditation and the mobility projects. Finally, a key aspect to impulse the legitimacy of Mercosur HE is to fulfil its primary role of promote regional integration by strengthening its relationship with Mercosur's economic and political project. One can only exist in relation to the other.

Keywords: Regions, Higher Education, Latin America, Mercosur, process tracing, critical junctures.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ALADI	Latin America Association for Integration
ALALC	Latin American Association of Free Trade
ALBA	Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America
ANDIFES	Brazil's National Association of Rectors of Federal Institutions of Higher Education
ANEAES	Paraguay's National Agency for Higher Education Accreditation and Evaluation
ANEP	Uruguay's National Administration for Public Education
ARCU-SUR	Mercosur's University Degree Accreditation System
BP	Bologna Process
CAB	Andrés Bello Agreement
CAN	Andean Community
CAPES	Brazil's Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CCR	Mercosur Education Sector's Regional Coordinating Committee
CELAC	Community of Latin American States
CEPAL / ECLAC	UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
CHE	Higher Education Area Commission (CHE, CRCES in Portuguese and Spanish)
CINTERPLAN	Inter-American Centre for Research in Educational Planning
CJ	Critical Juncture
CONAES	Brazil's National Commission for Evaluation of HE
CONEAU	Argentina's National Council for University Evaluation and Accreditation
CONES	Paraguay's National Council for Higher Education
CONSECCTI	Unasur's South American Council for Culture, Education, Science, Technology and Innovation

CR	Critical Realism
CRES	Regional Higher Education Conference
CT	Critical Theory
CSE	UNASUR's South American Education Council
CSUCA	Central America University Council
EAI	Enterprise for the American Initiative
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ERES	Mercosur's Regional Higher Education Space
EU	European Union
FOCEM	Mercosur's Structural Convergence Fund
FTTA / ALCA	Free Trade Agreement of the Americas
HE	Higher education
HEI(s)	Higher education institution(s)
IO	International organisation(s)
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LA	Latin America(n)(s)
MARCA	Mercosur's Programme for Regional Academic Mobility
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MEC	Ministry of Education and Culture
MERCOSUR	Common Market of the South ( <i>Mercosul</i> in Portuguese)
MEXA	Mercosur's Experimental Mechanism for Degree Accreditation
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NDA	Non-disclosure agreement
NEIES/NEPES	Mercosur's Nucleus for Research in Higher Education
NRT	New Regionalism Theory
OAS	Organisation of American States

OEI	Organisation for the Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture
OREALC/UNESCO	UN Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America
PASEM	EU's Programme for Supporting the Mercosur Education Sector
PEAS	Mercosur's Strategic Plan of Social Action
PMM	Mercosur's Mobility Programme
PT	Process Tracing
RIACES	Ibero-American Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
RME	Meeting of the Ministers of Education
SAFTA	South American Free Trade Area
SEM	Mercosur Education Sector
SICA	Central American Common Market
SIM-Mercosur	Mercosur's Academic Mobility System
SM	Senior Manager
RME	Mercosur's Meeting of the Ministers of Education
RTA	Regional Trade Agreement
UDELAR	Uruguay's University of the Republic
UN	United Nations
UNASUR	Union of South American Nations
UNESCO	United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNILA	Brazil's Federal University for Latin American Integration
US	The United States of America
UTE	Mercosur's Education Technical Unit
WB	World Bank
WG	Working Group
WTO	World Trade Organisation

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## PROLOGUE

It was a cold day in June 2016 in Montevideo. I sat alone outside the closed doors of the Conference Room where one of the meetings of the Mercosur Education Sector (SEM) happened. I waited for a participant to do an interview. Mercosur, short for the Common Market of the South, is a regional organisation formed by Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela. Its Education Sector coordinates and implements educational policies at the regional level, which includes activity in the area of higher education (HE). My trip to Montevideo was planned to coincide with the meeting of SEM's Commission for Higher Education (CHE), as I was hoping to observe it. It did not work that way. It was my first visit to the Mercosur Headquarters, and I found the building rather quiet.

The interview was part of my first outing to collect data in the Mercosur Member States for this study on the development of a HE project within a Latin American trade agreement whose initial inception was in the early 1990s. The emergence of a formal Education Sector in the early days of a trade agreement (trade agreement) was a unique development in region-building around the world. Aware of this, I was eager to experience the region from the inside. However, whilst my participant was inside the room, I waited alone looking at the closed doors, reflecting back on the negative reply to observe the meeting. At the time, I thought that the combination of being an academic and a citizen of the region (Brazil) would give me the necessary credentials to attend it. Disappointed for the missed opportunity to collect data for my research, I remember grumbling to myself: "Who are those people, and what do they do that enables them to make decisions about HE for the region? How are projects even negotiated given the ongoing political crises in Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela<sup>1</sup>? Will, or could, any of these plans ever be implemented in this context?" As I kept on waiting – outside alone in a silent building – more questions whirled around my head: where is 'everyone'?

Anxious, I got up and asked one of the (only two) security guards for permission to take a photo of two large murals in the building's entrance hall. Each painted mural measured about six meters long per two meters high and are painted in black and red colour. The

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<sup>1</sup> Argentina was absorbing a new set of reforms under President Mauricio Macri. Brazil was in the middle of President Dilma Rousseff's impeachment process, which she was ousted in August 2016. A succession of oil prices crises since 2014 brought devaluation to Venezuela's currency and an 800% inflation rate in 2016. It drove the country into the largest social and humanitarian crises in its history.

security guard's reply was warm and reassuring: "Yes, of course you can take photos. This is a public building!" Then, it hit me. I realised that I had somehow come to understand *public* as being 'for everyone to access *and* for free'. This was likely the source of my sense of entitlement to attend that SEM meeting.

After the interview, I left the building and looked out over at the grey La Plata River. Walking slowly towards Montevideo's city centre, I thought of the upcoming changes to my research questions. I pondered (worried, too) where to begin explaining how and why projects in HE emerged in Mercosur. The contradictions in the literature about Mercosur and its Education Sector were confronting. For instance, there were different positioning about the nature of the HE project. On the one hand, Mercosur HE was seen as an 'alternative' solidary model of regional cooperation in HE. And yet its outcome had led to members states asserting their own sovereignty in a dispute for regional hegemony (Botto, 2015a). On the other, the principle of a democratic organism permeated much of the SEM official discourse - which I had taken time to read before my visit. And yet institutional involvement with SEM activities was restricted, either as a result of few actors being invited into decision-making debates, or of disinterest in the region (Krawczyk & Sandoval, 2012). So, what am I looking at? What type of sector Mercosur HE is, and what role does it have? After 25 years of SEM, how much has it changed? What would cause any changes? How might I approach the study of this regional project in such a way to grasp hold of shifts in meaning and relations of power over time?

To be sure, there had been efforts to study Mercosur as a regional project, but often the framing was limited to the visible outputs of the HE regional project, such as the successful implementation of the accreditation project ('Arcusur', see Chapter 6). Instead, I was growing curious about where the broader set of ideas for HE in Mercosur, including, the accreditation project, came from. The relationship with the European experience is often cited as the 'model'. Scholars indicate a spectrum of perceptions on this – from quite a lot (Azevedo, 2014) to rather little (Hermo, 2014). Where is this influence clear? How much of an inspiration can be assimilated in diverse contexts? And what about the United States – is it always the elephant in the room?

And yet, despite this avalanche of questions, as I left the Mercosur building, all I can remember is silence. Not only the building was very quiet, but there was no mentioning of the Education Sector's meetings on the news or in the daily newspapers. And I do not mean to

say that nothing had been done. Quite the contrary: the large number of meetings and official outputs (minutes, protocols, research) proves otherwise. From my reading so far, I could not pin point where its legitimacy, authority and bureaucratic expertise were. It made me think of Daniela Perrotta (2013)'s indication that one of periods of Mercosur was marked by visibility. Who was meant to see the results of these efforts? From my positioning as a citizen of the region and as a researcher I (unfortunately) could not. Could regionalism exist only in the eye of the beholder?

Intrigued, I decided to look backwards at Mercosur HE. I would start from the beginning: a careful and thorough tracing of the history of SEM as an educational project within the early days of the economic regional organisation (the common market), and the emergence of the HE Sector until its recent past (end of 2016). Through analysing the region's discourses, I hoped to look for shared meanings, new understandings and the materialisation of ideas of regionalism and regional HE. Inspired by political geography I was keen to understand Mercosur HE – a sectoral regional project – as a space, shaped by social relations in the context of a region located in the developing world (Massey, 2005; Santos, 1975, 1977, 1985). Its complexity, embedded in an unstable political economy, produced a unique configuration looking for possibilities within, and in spite of, their large differences. In the following pages of this thesis, I hope to show how and why.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Locating the problem

In December 1991 the Common Market of the South (Mercosur<sup>2</sup>) instituted an Education Sector in the form of a Meeting of Ministers of Education. This event followed the signature of the Treaty of Asunción, which established Mercosur as an economic regional organisation in March 1991, with members Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay (MERCOSUR, 1991). Although absent from text of the Mercosur Treaty, the Member States' Ministers of Education agreed that education had 'a fundamental role' for the regional integration to consolidate and to project itself (MERCOSUR/RME, 1991, p. 1). Within months, an education sector became a formal structure in the Mercosur trade agreement.

From its early days, the Mercosur Education Sector (SEM), defined three objectives: (a) to develop the region's citizens' *consciousness favourable to integration*; (b) to train *human resources* to contribute for development; and (c) to *harmonise the education systems* in the region (MERCOSUR/RME, 1991). A Triennial Plan, elaborated in early 1992, aimed to transform these goals – regional consciousness, human resources, system harmonisation – into action. The Plan laid out the necessary institutional framework and conditions for setting up regional mechanisms in three levels of education (basic, technical and higher).

The discourse in the 1992 Plan demonstrates an awareness of national, regional and global processes at play in the historical context of the early 1990s. It displayed the conviction that regional blocs would be the heaviest actors in the XXI century (Uruguay, 1992b). Indeed, this was a distinctive process in the making: by creating an educational sector in the early days of the trade agreement it allowed the development of a cultural and sectoral regional project<sup>3</sup> growing alongside Mercosur's political and economic goals.

SEM is still active today. In fact, it is regarded as 'the most active Sector' in Mercosur: in 2017, 39 out of the 193 meetings<sup>4</sup> during the Argentina's Pro-Tempore

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout the thesis I use the Spanish version of the acronym, *Mercosur*, instead of the Portuguese version, *Mercosul*. Although both acronyms are official and Portuguese is my mother tongue, I made the decision to use the term in Spanish for understanding that it is the convention amongst colleagues studying and publishing about Mercosur in English language.

<sup>3</sup> The concept of a 'project' will be used extensively in the thesis, meaning the course of achieving a purpose or an intention; rather than the outline of a plan which is set to be implemented (Dale, 1994; Ozga, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> The 2018 Mercosur Organigram indicates 105 different sectors in the region, out of which 22 are Ministerial meetings. RME is one of them.

Presidency (PPT) were about in Education.<sup>5</sup> As the Sector's activities progress into its third decade, about questions about its nature, role, development and achievements arise, in spite of an institutional framework that is both seen as weak (Azevedo, 2009), or solid (Perrotta, 2016).

Persistent throughout these years is the understanding of the central role of education in building Mercosur. Where did these ideas come from? As I will later explore in this thesis (Chapter 2), scholars suggest the influence of the European Union (EU) experience in regional integration in shaping SEM (Azevedo, 2014; Bartesaghi & Pereira, 2016; Krawczyk & Sandoval, 2012; Perrotta, 2016). Others propose that the EU was an inspiration rather than a model (Hermo, 2014). What is indeed contested is the question of how much of the European model of integration in the education sector was to be emulated, or discarded, in SEM.

As one of the motivations for the shape of SEM was the belief that education had a role in creating shared values and identities for shaping Mercosur as a region (Piñon, 1993). In the words of Uruguay's Director of Education in 1992, "our capacity as Latin Americans to reconnect in our common values and to claim our identities before the challenges of the contemporary world depends to a large extent on education" (González Rissotto, 1992, p. 7). Regional integration in Mercosur was no longer only about economy, trade and tariffs, as specified in the Treaty of Asunción (Perrotta, 2012). The Education project brought a new cultural dimension to the region<sup>6</sup>: more than a network of structures and hierarchies leading to its political and economic goals, it was planned as a platform for creating shared values and meanings. To live in this new regional society, a 'citizens' consciousness' was required; a task reserved for Education to do. As previously mentioned, remarkably for Mercosur, no other trade agreement has been to establish such a consensus over the role of education and formalise an education sector to develop – and survive – alongside the economic project<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> According to the Calendar of meetings during the Argentinean Presidency from 01 January to 30 June 2017. Available at: <https://calendario.mercosur.int>, accessed on 21/07/2017.

<sup>6</sup> Regions are acknowledged as social organisations that have different shapes and forms – for instance, as a subnational (the Basque region in Spain), cultural (Latin America), or supra-national (The European Union). This work is committed to the international dynamics of regions, i.e. arrangements between countries.

<sup>7</sup> The North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), launched in 1992 and active from 1994, started their dialogue in education during the talks prior to the signature of the trade agreement. However, the debate over higher education was never institutionalised under the trade agreement or regionally coordinated (Altbach, 1994; Crespo, 2000; NAFTA, 1992; Sá & Gaviria, 2012; *The Educational Implications of NAFTA*, 1994). In Asia, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)'s education project was materialised in 1992, 15 years after the signature of the trade agreement (ASEAN, 1967; Chao Jr, 2016). The Pacific Alliance in Latin America started in 2012 and in 2014 launched a sector focused on vocational

Mercosur was established as an intergovernmental arrangement and this matters as a particular governance structure and thus a form of regionalism. As this thesis will suggest, the region's mode of governance will become crucial for understanding not only the Education Sector, but also Mercosur as a region. In all of its sectors, decisions were (and still are) made by consensus. In short, it presupposes equal power and value of both *vote and veto* for all of its Member States. Under this condition, SEM slowly flourished from having two distinct forms and moments of governing, a Meeting of Ministers of Education (RME) supported by a Regional Committee (CCR), into a complex structure that today mobilises 10 countries (Chapter 3, Annex1). SEM's purpose also changed in the course of the years. Whereas in 1992 Education was a *contribution* for the development of Mercosur policies, since 2006 it figures as an *essential* instrument for the building of an integrated education space by coordinating education policies (Argentina, 2006, 2012, my italics).

Despite its innovative goals, its organisational structure and governance model, there are other elements that also instigate scientific curiosity about SEM. To start with, its outcomes and impact are largely imperceptible. This was the distinct impression I also had during two fieldwork trips to Latin America (LA). Visibility was not overlooked. It often appeared as a matter of concern in the SEM official documents. Indeed, the extensive data analysis for this research reveals that the lack of visibility impacted not only on the number of institutions participating in HE projects (Annex 17). It also reflected in the wider societal understanding and legitimacy of the Sector itself. To illustrate, one of the interviewees recalled giving only one or two interviews about the work of the Education Sector in over 20 years of involvement with SEM. How can a Sector with a prolific number of events (projects, protocols, meetings) remained broadly unknown? In this case, to what extent do aspects, such as the conditions for engagement, become of increasing importance and how does this affect its authority and legitimacy? Shouldn't consensus, as a governance strategy, provide the necessary conditions for success in education projects once all Member States agreed to their implementation?

Mercosur's Ministers of Education also asserted that education had a *role in economic progress with social justice*. This perception became the objective of 'training of human resources to contribute for development' in the 1992 Plan. This is precisely where the

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education. In the case of the EU, Corbett (2003, 2007) indicates how education entered the policy agenda in 1976, after the early discussions to establish a European university failed (1957-1961). Note that the CSUCA and the SEAMEO were first academic regions – cultural projects – with political and economic goals on the background.

relevance of HE comes in and takes centre stage in this region and in this research: HE is considered vital in providing tools to political and economic development through the shaping of knowledge economies (KE) (Dale, 2005; Naidoo, 2003; Olssen & Peters, 2005a; Robertson, 2005), as it will be explored in depth in Chapter 3. Regional HE projects can also be seen as an expression of the knowledge economy (Dale, 2005). In many ways, even if not exclusively, what the KE is after is a robust economy, and this is in line with the discourse of many regional organisations.

SEM proposed the first HE projects as early as 1993, with the focus on diploma recognition, accreditation and mobility (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 1993d; Uruguay, 1992b). These three themes connected to the goals set in the 1992 Triennial Plan, yet they remained high in the regional agenda up to today (March 2019). A HE Sector took shape when a Commission for HE (CHE)<sup>8</sup> was launched to make these ideas come true (Chapter 5 and 6). Along the years, their shape and layers of complexity have varied as a result of the influence of the Member States' normative and regulatory restrictions (and funding sources, too). How much of the 'regional' can grow out of the relationship with the 'national' HE ensembles (Chapter 3)? Inversely, what are the national benefits for taking part in regional HE projects? At a conceptual-theoretical level - how to expand this understanding from the dichotomy of the 'national – regional' into understanding the regional in relation to multiple scales (Gomes, Robertson, & Dale, 2012)?

Whereas ideas continued to be innovative and tailored for the Mercosur context, their process of implementation happened at a remarkably slow pace. That is to say, change takes time in Mercosur's HE Sector<sup>9</sup>. Although one of the earliest experiences in regional accreditation known, the project for the accreditation of undergraduate programs, for instance, took 10 years after its inception to be implemented (from 1998 until 2008, as I will detail in Chapter 5). Even more intriguing is the fact that setting up a mobility project – one of the very first objectives of Mercosur HE – became a reality no earlier than 2006 (15 years after the launch of SEM). What barriers, events and mechanisms hampered regional HE projects, and consequently integration, and where do they come from? What properties do

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<sup>8</sup> I will use Commission of HE and HE Commission as synonyms in the thesis, under the acronym 'CHE'. For clarity, CHE will aggregate the changes in the denomination of the HE Sector throughout the years: Sector HE, Technical Commission (CTRES), Regional Coordinating Commission, and the current Area Commission (CAES).

<sup>9</sup> Throughout the thesis, I will use HE Sector and Mercosur HE interchangeably. HE projects is reserved for the activities the HE Sector plans.

they have that make them what they are, and how different would the region be if other mechanisms had been in place, such as a funding mechanism?

Finally, SEM's intentions toward training of human resources for development reveals the influence of other scales<sup>10</sup> of rule in Mercosur (K. R. Cox, 1998). Dale and Robertson (2002) point out that regional spaces are part of a web of influences from different scales of rule, which can be local, national and global. As such, the scales 'rule' because they have a power conferred to them. Nonetheless, dealing with a variety of scales is not new to LA (Chapter 2). Research has discussed how, during the early 1990s, regional and international organisations, such as the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL) and the World Bank, pressured LA countries to reform their education systems as part of structural reforms to control the debt crises from the 1970s and 1980s (Alcantara, Llomovatte, & Romão, 2013; Demange, 2009; Laredo, 1992). Considering the aforementioned role of the EU as a reference for SEM and the pressure the aforementioned structural reforms caused in LA countries (Chapter 5), we are left wondering how the relationship with other scales influenced the shaping of Mercosur HE. What 'borrowed' mechanisms converse with Mercosur HE projects, and how do these intertextualities (Fairclough, 2003) appear across time and space in the texts? Could they reveal more than influence and inspiration?

## 1.2 Positioning the study in the literature: filling in gaps

Research about Mercosur HE produced across LA as well as outside the region indicates the following features: it is largely descriptive and exploratory in nature, overwhelmingly qualitative and interpretative, and it privileges its accreditation project – the most successful HE project thus far. It is also scarce<sup>11</sup>. Ana Lúcia Marran and colleagues (2016) identified only 13 PhD and masters theses about Mercosur HE produced from 1996 to

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<sup>10</sup> Scales are the socially produced sets of practices and discourses, set up in bonded spaces (Delaney & Leitner, 1997; Muhr, 2016; Paasi, 2009), see Chapter 2 for further conceptual development on the theme.

<sup>11</sup> To illustrate the scarce research produced in this topic with a simple quantitative measurement, a search in the ERIC database reveals 12 documents containing the words "Mercosur" and "higher education" – no documents if searching for texts in Portuguese or Spanish. The SciELO database, a repository of research in Latin America, lists no more than 15 papers in different points in 2017, 2018 and 2019. To SciELO, I applied a Boolean search with the words 'Mercosur/Mercosul' and variations of higher education terminology in Spanish and Portuguese ('*ensino superior*', '*educación/ educação superior*', '*universidades*', '*acreditación/ creditação*' etc). Note that the paper here exclude the articles published in the realm of SEM's knowledge building project (NEIES/NEPES) (see Chapter 3 and Annex 17).

2015 in Brazil. The topics researched were: education as tool for integration, accreditation, diploma recognition and mobility. There is no equivalent study done in the other Mercosur countries.

Accreditation is by far the most analysed theme in Mercosur HE. Many studies account for the project's implementation with some exceptions that I would like to highlight. The work of Daniela Perrotta (2012, 2013, 2016) offers a thorough socio-historical critical account of the emergence of the accreditation project from the perspective of international relations with a focus on the national-regional dichotomy. Solanas (2009, 2014b), in contrast, departs from the standpoint of policy networks and European public policy to suggest a framework of 'Mercosurisation' policies to explore the impact of the SEM accreditation processes in the Member States. Widely cited in LA is Fernández Lamarra's (2003, 2010) historical analysis of the issues of accreditation and institutional evaluation in SEM and in LA. However, and supposedly due to the exploratory nature of this work, his texts are vastly descriptive and remarkably uncritical. In Brazil, Gladys Barreyro and colleagues (Barreyro, Lagoria, & Hizume, 2016, 2015) have analysed the role of the Mercosur members' national accreditation agencies with regards to their implementation, autonomy, nature and structure.

By way of contrast with the accreditation project, HE mobility and other projects have not generated the same academic interest. The reasons are to be explored. Could this be as a result of an inability to generate data about the project, or the result of understanding the mobility project as more aligned with a market-making transnational HE project (Azevedo, 2014; Botto, 2015b; Perrotta, 2016)? In the few examples I encountered, research about Mercosur HE mobility has focused, on the one hand, on its implementation (Assunção, 2009; Guilligan, Brozzi, Manzur, & Cusumano, 2010; Modolo, 2014) and, on the other, on the relationship with the EU (V. P. Oliveira, 2014; Solanas, 2014b).

In terms of the relationship with the other scales of rule external to SEM – national, global or regional scales in any combination - there is a large interest in understanding Mercosur HE in comparison to, or in relation to, other regions in particular the EU (Azevedo, 2008, 2009, 2014; Botto, 2015b; E. Larrechea & Ciancone, 2013; Solanas, 2014b; Verger & Herno, 2010). Moreover, scholars have been thinking about the role of international organisations (IO) in LA education and in SEM. Most of the literature in this topic focuses on the usual suspects: World Bank, UNESCO, the CEPAL and the Interamerican Bank (Ordóñez Díaz & Rodríguez Mendoza, 2018; Rodríguez-Gómez & Alcántara, 2001). However, to my

surprise, there are no studies that critically problematise the role of the Organisation of the Ibero-American States (OEI) as a constant presence in the shaping of SEM. The surprise lays in the fact that *the OEI is cited in the vast majority of all official SEM documents analysed*<sup>12</sup> - it is one aspect I am intrigued by and hope to offer some reflections on. Could Spain, as the hostess of OEI, have a particular role in the shaping of the HE Space? Lastly, some comparative studies have explored the impact of the Bologna reforms<sup>13</sup> in LA, with some reference to Mercosur countries (Aboites, 2010; Brunner, 2009; Zmas, 2015). Although falling outside the scope of this thesis, some of these comparative analyses have proven to be a rich resource to trace the process of building SEM.

What has been missing from the texts reviewed is a deep and rich explanation of why things came to be what they are, and what mechanisms can account for the main changes in the HE region. With a few exceptions – particularly Daniela Perrotta’s work on the development of the Mercosur’s accreditation project (Perrotta, 2013), much of the analysis of SEM thus far revolves around description, impact and proposals for solutions – in short, on SEM outputs.

My proposals with this research are both complimentary yet at the same time distinctive. First, I propose to give an *explanatory account of HE in Mercosur as a sectoral region*, not a case study of a particular HE project or instrument within SEM. Second, I am interested in establishing causal relationships and in identifying the structuring mechanisms that might help explain why the HE Sector became what it is today, how it happened, under what circumstances, and with that consequences, for whom, at the different levels of decision-making. Most of the work done until now aims to highlight and position Mercosur as a unique global HE project (to which I agree), to identify its blank spaces, and propose solutions – in other words, to solve problems (R. W. Cox, 1996; Dale, 1994). Yet little effort so far has been put into looking for the causes of these shortcomings in any systematic way. Without a doubt the descriptive and explorative studies conducted until now do enable me to build on these whilst also taking a step beyond them in the study of Mercosur HE.

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<sup>12</sup> Rodrigo (2006) presents an initial approach to the role of OEI in the reforms in Argentina in the 1990s. The analysis does not offer a critical account of OEI’s objectives or possible interests.

<sup>13</sup> The Bologna reforms, or Bologna Process (BP), are a series of structural changes in 46 countries leading to the implementation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). I will explore the BP further in Chapter 7.

Third, there has been no much analysis of the actorness aspects of the region. That is to say, whether the HE Sector was an actor in, or for, itself that built its own social relations, rather than a sum of its individual Member States individual goals. Verger and Hermo (2010) hint to many of the preoccupations identified above in a comparative analysis of the emergence and development of the Bologna Process and SEM. However, when approaching SEM, their historical analysis focuses only on the development of the accreditation project. The authors also claim that “Mercosur has placed education at the top of their agenda” (Verger & Hermo, 2010, p. 117) but do not problematise why and how this interest materialised in the changing nature of the other sectors within the region.

Fourth, as suggested above, the scholarly production and interest in Mercosur HE is limited, especially when compared to the other regions, particularly the EU<sup>14</sup>. The analysis of the emergence of regions around the world has been the object of study of many disciplines in social sciences, in particular in the political sciences, international relations, law, history, economy, area studies (i.e. EU or Latin American studies), geography, as well as education. A regular allusion across the disciplines is the reference to the EU as an ‘ideal region’. As a point of reference, it stimulates comparisons to the EU model of regionalism (Chapter 2). In the same vein, much of the writing on HE regionalism tends to focus on Europe as the benchmark for other HE regions (Aboites, 2010; Azevedo, 2014; Chou & Ravinet, 2016, 2017; Vögtle & Martens, 2014). Whilst that project began in the 1950s, it was not until the 1980s and 1990s that HE became more centrally involved, and later took central stage with the advent of the Bologna Process in 1999 (Corbett, 2003). However, less attention has been paid to other regional agreements, in particular the Latin American, African and Asian regions. I hereby do not propose a comparative analysis of Mercosur HE and any other HE regional projects. Instead, I focus on the tracing of the development the Mercosur HE as a sectoral region over time.

Fifth, the way I propose to undertake this analysis is ontologically distinct. I will position this study within a critical realist meta-theoretical approach so as to uncover the underlying structuring mechanisms of changes in a very specific set of spatial and historical contexts. In itself, this is an addition to the body of literature for I have not been able to identify any study that runs a critical realist approach into the analysis of Mercosur HE. The

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<sup>14</sup> To compare, the search for “European Union” and “higher education” results in 671 hits on EBSCO and 19 hits on SciELO.

benefits are to be explained in Chapter 4 - Methodology. In looking for causal structuring mechanisms leading to HE outcomes, I make use of process tracing to conduct a theoretically-informed analysis of the temporal and causal relationships at play in the shaping of Mercosur HE, including shared meanings, new understandings and the materialisation of ideas of regionalism, and regional HE. The process tracing design relies on the analytical framework of critical junctures to establish periodisation and historical change in the development of Mercosur HE (to be developed in Chapter 4).

Finally, this research aims to contribute into a theoretical gap in the analysis of regional HE. Robertson and colleagues have exposed a persistent double gap in the study of HE as sectoral regionalism (Robertson et al., 2016). On the one hand, HE scholars have not incorporated the wider regional processes and their impact in the shaping of HE regulations. Traces of methodological nationalism are persistent in considering the national level as the only arena where policy gets made. As argued by Dale (2006), this is not to say that the state has lost its sphere of influence in policy-making, but only to acknowledge that there are other forces and processes that also shape education policies which are not necessarily tied to the Ministry of Education. On the other hand, academics who study regional processes have excluded a debate of HE as a Sector that also shapes regions, as Robertson and colleagues put forward (2016). This can be seen in the analysis of Mercosur. Using a neo-functionalist argument (Chapter 2), Malamud classified the education project as a ‘spillover’ of the regional integration (Malamud, 2005a). That is to say, education was an *unintended* consequence which turned out to be successful. As I hope to show in the next pages, there is a great deal of intentionality at SEM and the HE Sector, from different actors, at different scales of rule, with different agendas - sometimes conflicting, sometimes complimentary and yet persistent - to rule out the explanation of the emergence of Mercosur HE as ‘unintended’.

Last but not least, this work aims to contribute with new analytical and conceptual lenses for exploring the emergence of HE regional projects in the developing world. The key difference of this proposal is to have a framework that privileges the context of the HE region, rather than focusing on actions to emulate Europe’s experience. Spaces in the developing world, such as the East African Community Higher Education Area (EACHEA)(Oanda & Matiang, 2018) and other HE areas associated or not with trade agreements, may benefit from such an analysis that emerges from a HE region in the Global South.

### 1.3 Research aim, questions and hypothesis

This research draws from multi-disciplinary, multi-scalar and multi-spatial approaches with the broad aim of analysing the changing relationships between Mercosur's region-making project and its education project, with an interest in the role of HE in region-building over time (Dale & Robertson, 2002; Hettne, 2005; Hettne & Söderbaum, 2000; Robertson, 2009, 2014; Robertson et al., 2016).

The study aims to shed new insight on the changing place, players and space of HE in region-making by means of a diachronic, or historical, analysis of Mercosur HE's ideational and material project over time, from 1991 until 2016. It departs from the need to understand the nature and purpose of the HE Sector, and the explanations of how its HE project became what it is over time.

The main research question guiding this work is: *What is Mercosur HE a case of?*

Leading to this research question, and in line with the aim presented above, I have detailed two secondary research questions:

1. *What are the dynamics shaping the HE project in the Mercosur?* To explore this aspect, I will use subsidiary questions, such as: *What critical conjunctures over time have allowed this project to exist, and how did those historical moments help to legitimate it? And What has been the role of the Member States in shaping its nature, form and scope?*
2. *What are the dominant power dynamics in the HE project?* And will do so by asking: *How and why have these power dynamics shifted over time? To what extent and in what ways does the HE project reflect and perpetuate wider macro regional economic and political dynamics and power relationships?*

Based on the literature review and a first empirical approximation with the case while preparing for the pilot study in 2016 (Chapter 4), I have developed a few hypotheses to help guide the research:

- *The decision-making of Mercosur HE is bound to the actorness of the political actors that led the regional in a certain period of time.* I assume that the members of the Ministry of education involved in SEM are the most powerful actors in shaping the region.

- The *HE project has had little impact to region building for it is not institutionalised and legitimated to a degree that is useful to increasing regionness* (Hettne & Söderbaum, 2000).
- In line with the hypothesis above, I posit that the slow visibility, scarce funding and slow development of Mercosur HE happens because *there is little political interest in the educational project*.

## 1.4 Shaping an argument

This thesis argues that the understanding the Mercosur's HE sectoral regionalism can only be done if in relation to the broader development of Mercosur as a region, as well as to the different scales of rule that shape its social relations. In a way, Mercosur HE is a region within a region. It builds from the understanding that HE sectoral projects are also spatial projects of governance at a regional scale with economic, cultural and political dynamics (Robertson, 2014, 2018; Robertson et al., 2016). It is also connected David Harvey's account of relational space (D. Harvey, 2006, pp. 271–272). To Harvey, spaces are constructed out of the relationships of different influences, internal and external, taking place in different temporalities, for instance, present, past and future. Therefore, “there is no such thing as space of time outside of the processes that define them” (D. Harvey, 2006, p. 273). Inspired by the ideas of HE as a relational spatial project of governance, I will argue that the dynamics that shape the regional HE project in Mercosur and the Mercosur as a region are, in fact, relational: both the region (Mercosur, as a trade agreement) and its HE project can only be legitimate in the relationship to one another, and in a process of construction across external and internal influences and temporalities.

In a nutshell, my analysis of Mercosur HE builds on the relation of the events that mark the HE Sector and the broader historical and spatial-temporal context that underpinned the conditions for events to emerge in the first place. As such, it opens the perspective that regions emerge from, and thus are shaped by, different influences. It can be built *from within* – as social constructions following the projects and imaginary of its actors, becoming a regional for itself (Dang, 2016). They can also be built *from below*, meaning the purposes and aspirations of its Member States whose own political projects are projected upward. Finally, a region can be built *from outside*, influenced by the wider global projects, such as international

organisations. In the analysis of SEM, the study puts forward a case that regions are unique and must be analysed empirically and in light of the different spaces and histories that shape the region giving rise to what some have called variegated regionalism (Cammack, 2016; Robertson, 2014, 2018) (see Chapter 2).

## 1.5 Conceptual approach and methodology

How to access this very complex set of social relations in building Mercosur HE? The research brings forward a coherent system of scientific methods which are interested in a *critical explanation of historical processes of change* from its ontological, epistemological, theoretical and methodological instances. I have employed a *critical realist* ontological stance (Bhaskar, 2008; Sayer, 1992, 2000), and a *critical theory* epistemology (R. W. Cox, 1996; Held, 1980). I am ultimately interested in the role of *structuring mechanisms in context* (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) which could explain the principal outcomes or moments of change in the Mercosur HE project, with a special interest on its relationship with external influences, i.e. other scales of rule where decisions take place.

The study adopts a critical approach to cultural political economy (CPE) (Jessop & Sum, 2001; Robertson & Dale, 2015; Sayer, 2001; Sum & Jessop, 2013) as theoretical framework. A critical account of CPE is interested in the historical trajectory of region-building - hence not only concerned with the past but also with a continuing process of change (R. W. Cox & Sinclair, 1996; Robertson & Dale, 2015; Sayer, 2001). A set of philosophical positions to explain the social world, CPE argues that there must be a role for semiosis in order for individuals to make sense of the complexity of social life. Semiosis, defined as sense- and meaning-making (Sum & Jessop, 2013), relates to the individual's entry point into living and understanding a complex reality in/and its articulation to the existing structures historically framed by political economy. Sum and Jessop (2013) argue that semiosis plays a foundational role in the constitution of social life, for it articulates the discursive and the material as co-constructive foundational processes of social order. Therefore, explanations of social life must consider the material dynamics between structure and semiosis.

Such a large study in scope, breadth and depth has required comprehensive analytical and methodological tools for its development. Its full details will be elaborated in Chapter 4 –

Methodology, so a brief summary for now must suffice. To begin with, I defined an *intensive research design*<sup>15</sup> to set the stage for the search for substantial causal explanations of the production of certain events as well as in their relationships and meanings in context (Danermark, Ekstrom, Jakobsen, & Karlsson, 2002; Sayer, 1992, 2000). To approach the variety of data collected (see below), I relied on *process tracing (PT) as research strategy* (Falleti, 2016; Trampusch & Palier, 2016). PT allows to elaborate on how changes have happened by unveiling the mechanisms in context.

My analytical lenses were twofold: historical and textual. In combination with PT, the *historical analysis* made use of critical junctures (CJ) (Collier and Collier, 1991) to identify the foci throughout the timeframe of 26 years. The CJ framework is a conceptual and methodological tool to analyse moments of change resulting in a legacy (R. B. Collier & Collier, 1991) (Boas, 2014; Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007; R. B. Collier & Collier, 1991; Mahoney, 2004). While examining the history of SEM, I aimed to identify CJs to function as analytical temporal markers indicating key moments of change in the governance of Mercosur HE (see Chapter 4.3.3). To illustrate, as I will discuss in Chapter 5, the emergence of Mercosur and the Education Sector represented a CJ for each of the countries separately and for the enterprise collectively. *Textual analysis* was conducted using a framework inspired by critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2003). The very creation of Mercosur as a trade agreement and the event of the launch of SEM are examples of critical junctures, which I will further explore in Chapter 4 and Section II.

This study relied on a variety of primary and secondary data. I collected primary data as semi-structured interviews and unstructured observations in two fieldwork trips to the Mercosur region in 2016 and 2017. Both outings resulted in instrumental ethical lessons – a point I will return to later in Chapter 4. Secondary data comprised documents and publications collected throughout the three years of research and during fieldwork: Mercosur meeting minutes (see Annexes 3-5), global, regional and national HE policies, as well as publications created both by the region and its Member States. After completing the data analysis, I employed retroduction as the mode of inference to draw explanations and conclusions (Danermark et al, 2002, p. 84).

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<sup>15</sup> An intensive research design differentiates from an extensive research design for its focus on the exercise of abstraction rather than a succession of patterns, as suggested by extensive research (Chapter 4).

## 1.6 Organisation of the thesis

The thesis is organised in four segments: Introduction (Chapter 1), Section I – Concepts and Methods, Section II – The Case of Mercosur HE as Sectoral Regionalism, and Conclusion (Chapter 10).

Section I, **Concepts and Methodology**, will provide the foundations upon which the study was built. Its three Chapters lay out the conceptual framework and theoretical stances that guided the analysis of the data. In ‘**Regions and Latin American Regionalisms**’ (Chapter 2), I address the evolution of the ideas in region building, with a particular interest in the most recent explanations for LA regionalisms. Chapter 3, ‘**Regional Higher Education**’, will make a case for the relevance of the HE Sector as a tool for region building. This section will conclude with Chapter 4, ‘**Methods and Research Design**’, which will address how the study has been conducted in terms of social research methods, my processes of decision-making and the ethical lessons collected along the way.

Section II present the results of the empirical analysis of the case study. It pinpoints different critical junctures (CJ) across time, meaning the most relevant moments of change in Mercosur HE from 1991 until 2016. These are presented in historical order and follow the research strategy of Process Tracing. Chapter 5, ‘**Discovery and self-discovery: the emergence of a regional education project**’ is concerned with the emergence of Mercosur’s HE project as well as the first regional policies and mechanisms elaborated upon its creation in 1991 until 1999. Chapter 6 traces the relationships between the events in 1997 and the emergence of the first HE mechanisms, under a change from ‘**a Politics of homogenisation to harmonisation through the recognition of differences.**’ In ‘**New structures, new meanings: institutionalising the region and the production of a new common sense**’ (Chapter 7), I focus on the consequences of a new HE project and the search for legitimacy in the region. Chapter 8 will discuss the **Actorness in the HE Sector**. Finally, Chapter 9 explores recent changes in the **place, space and actors** of HE in Mercosur, when a new model of HE regionalism is proposed with the approval of a Technical Unit: for the first time in the history of SEM, a structure will function outside the realm of the Meetings.

Finally, the **Conclusion** will provide a summary of the research aim and analysed its findings in light of the proposals and the theoretical and conceptual understanding the thesis is based on.

# SECTION I – CONCEPTS AND METHODOLOGY

## Introduction

To understand regional HE projects as spatial projects of governance at a regional scale with economic, cultural and political dynamics (Robertson, 2014, 2018; Robertson et al., 2016) means to adjust theoretical and analytical lenses to a multiplicity of perspectives. This is because these governance projects happen in a plurality of levels, scales, sectors. They presuppose a complex nature of horizontal, vertical and transversal political relations which in turn involve a large set of actors (Jessop, 2005).

With this in mind, Section I lays out the theoretical and empirical pillars that shaped the development of this thesis. Its three Chapters will address, in order, the conceptual frameworks to understanding processes of region-making, the role of HE and HE regionalisms as an expression of global policy movements, and the choices for methods and techniques to collect and analyse data.

The first two Chapters provide the conceptual tools used to understand Mercosur's HE project as a case of regional organisation with its own cultural, economic and political features. *Chapter 2 – Regions and Latin American Regionalisms* will locate the global theoretical debates about regions and region-making processes (mostly in Europe) and distinguish them from the processes taking place in LA. It is concerned with the question of what the current debates in region are, and what particularities LA has. It reviews the emergence of regions as a consequence of global capitalism and argues that the different theoretical interpretations to understand the processes of region-making in Europe are insufficient to explain regionalisms in LA. It concludes by situating Mercosur as one case of LA regionalisms and discussing its features.

*Chapter 3 – Regional Higher Education* sets the conceptual lenses to look at HE as a key Sector in region-building processes. It intends to narrow the study into the case in point: the development of Mercosur HE as a sectoral region in the shaping of Mercosur. Moreover, the Chapter explores how such an event came about in the conditions it emerged. It does so by detailing the case of the HE project in Mercosur, what it is and what it does.

Throughout the Chapters there is a deep interest, as well as a concern, to employ Latin American experts looking at their own reality. I find two reasons for this. First, to explore and

acknowledge the knowledges produced in the South of the globe, as suggested by Connell (2007, 2014). Second, if assuming that different explanations for the intersect between HE and regions are contextualised, it becomes necessary to think with research developed in LA as part of the effort to understand the region-making.

*Chapter 4 – Methods and research design* has a double yet complimentary purpose. It first aims to offer the philosophical frameworks that informed the decision-making of the research – the ‘thinking about thinking’, as Andrew Sayer (1992) would put it. Second, it details the empirical and theoretical paradigms of the research. The Chapter will bring together social theory, philosophy of science as well as feature the data collection and analysis techniques I adopted to conduct the study.

## **2 REGIONS AND LATIN AMERICAN REGIONALISMS**

### **2.1 Introduction**

As mentioned in the Introduction, this thesis departs from the argument that HE regional projects emerging from regional trade agreements are extensions of their relationship with the broader region-making processes they are a part of (Robertson et al., 2016). With this in mind, my agenda in this Chapter is to establish the theoretical and conceptual bases for one dimension of that argument: those features, mechanisms and events of Mercosur as a region whose interactions might allow the emergence of a very particular kind of HE project. To do so will require that we grasp the wider milieu of global processes from which regionalisms have emerged, and consider the different conceptions to explain these phenomena, with special interest in the Latin American (LA) context that Mercosur is a part of.

Three objectives guide this Chapter. First, to review the existing literature on region-building. Attention will be paid to the main theoretical approaches used to explain different global regionalisms' historical moments, starting from early regionalism as proposed by Fredrik Söderbaum (2016). The review presented here goes beyond the main body of work that constitutes comparative regionalism, where Söderbaum paused. Instead it engages with Shahar Hameiri's proposition to analyse regionalism via its governance with a focus on the politics of scale which is argued to be central to understanding regional projects (Hameiri, 2013). Second, and departing from the 'new' regionalism theory, it will build a historiography of the theoretical resources used to understand LA regionalising projects, keeping in mind their uniqueness and diversity. Third, it will bring to the fore features of Mercosur as one of the key LA regions.

### **2.2 Explaining regions as global processes**

Nation-states have collaborated to set up regional organisations, projects and alliances driven by multiple rationales, among them the need to secure international trade, ensure peace, solve common problems, and shield themselves from competition from more powerful economies. Waves of regionalism across the globe have been identified as comprised of two main moments - after the Second World War (post 1945) and at the end of the Cold War

(post 1989). Accounts have been instigated scholars from different fields to make theoretical, conceptual and methodological claims to explain regional processes, albeit with varying degrees of success<sup>16</sup>.

‘Regions’ scholars have often mentioned the difficulty in arriving at a definition about what a region is and how regionalism can be understood (Börzel, 2012; Fawn, 2009; Hameiri, 2013; Hettne, 2010; Hurrell, 1995b; Söderbaum, 2016). What is apparent in the literature is that the more scholars think about theorising regions, the more complex the definitions, approaches, and labelling of the processes, become. Two arguments can explain why this is the case.

On the one hand, different disciplines bring to the fore different aspects when analysing regions, i.e. political geographers would emphasise the territorial marks or ‘territorial integration’ (K. R. Cox, 2002), whereas economists discuss ‘regional integration’ (K. Anderson & Blackhurst, 1993; Seligson, 1999), and Political Science, Integration studies and International Relations (IR) scholars tend to explore the role of regional organisations and their perceived authority, legitimacy and regulatory power (Avant, Finnemore, & Sell, 2010; Hurrell, 2007). Calls for a joint conversation amongst scholars in different fields, in particular those in international relations and European integration studies, have been made so as to overcome the problem of academics talking about the same subject, yet ‘speaking past on the other’ (Robertson, 2014; Söderbaum & Sbragia, 2010; Warleigh-Lack, 2006; Warleigh-Lack & Rosamond, 2010).

On the other hand, the search for an all-encompassing definition of the nature and purpose of regions has been unhelpful to solve the theoretical-conceptual conundrum resulting from these different disciplinary traditions. Until the late 1980s, regions were mostly understood to be arrangements led by geographically-close nation-states ceding a degree of sovereignty ‘upward’ – to the supranational – in return for mutual benefits. From the 1990s, the emergence of a ‘new’ wave of regionalism scholarship evidenced a multiplicity of other actors shaping regions - in addition to the nation-state. Moreover, regions presuppose a shared set of meanings – a *common grammar*, so to speak - rather than a defined set of formal or institutional (supranational) arrangements. This led authors, such as

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<sup>16</sup> The study of regions and of processes of region-making have been a topic of concern in different disciplines within the social sciences, particularly from international relations, European integration studies, economics, education, political geography, sociology and political science.

Fawn, to say that regions come to exist “when *actors*, including governmental, define and promulgate to others a specific identity” (Fawn, 2009, p. 13)(my italics).

To introduce the role of actors is a reminder that regions are, in fact, formed by *people*. Actors shape and are shaped by the social relations that are immanent in the regional spaces they are part. Particularly when in decision-making positions, their perceptions and interpretations of regionalism open the definition to include elements of power, shared meanings and common imaginaries of what a region should be like. Such insights led Hurrell to argue what was to become a widely cited claim that “...all regions are socially constructed and politically contested” (Hurrell, 1995b, pp. 38–39). The questions here then become which actors are involved, in what capacity, and what is that they want to get out of the region?

What is more, regions can behave like political actors ‘for themselves’ as they acquire some form of *actorness* in their own right (Wunderlich, 2012). These new understandings are key to viewing regions as mutually constituted, power-filled and meaning-making organisations. Yet, the way in which these dynamics appear in each region is unique (Cammack, 2016).

To explore the evolution of the ideas of region-making, three key concepts are clarified. First, this thesis understands *regions* as territorially based dynamic social organisations that shape and are shaped by the historical context within which they are located<sup>17</sup>. They can be contained within state borders or not, and their expressions are *variegated* as a result of combinations of their spatial, cultural, economic and political dynamics that constitute a specific kind of formation (Robertson, 2014, 2018). Their variegation presupposes that uneven forms of regionalism emerge out of the same logic (Brenner, Peck, & Theodore, 2010; Jessop, 2014; Peck & Theodore, 2007), their difference depending on the unique “underlying causal processes and mechanisms, and their constitutive outcomes: regional spaces, social relations, subjectivities” (Robertson, 2018, p. 2).

One way to access their differences is to diachronically trace the specific historical arrangements in anticipation such a process will reveal specific dynamics such as the

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<sup>17</sup> In a recent publication, Söderbaum (2016) makes a claim for the analysis of the deep historical roots of regionalism. A historical analysis could help to uncover more fluid types of regionalism, other than analysing institutionalised regional organisations as well as reveal the political context within which ideas and concepts of regionalism develop. His aim is to posit a challenge to those theoretical developments that do not consider the historical-temporal context within which a region was built. Ernst Haas, for instance, argued against the use of historical agents because such an approach “make an explanation too simple and too time bound” (Haas, 1970, p. 608).

changing geopolitics of power (Sassen, 2015), the (often short-lived) impact of presidential diplomacies (Malamud, 2005b), or even the impact of local cultures. Once again, the clear historical approach that permeates this work is not coincidental – it is part and parcel of the constitutive nature of region-making.

Two other key concepts follow. *Regionalism* indicates the processes, phenomena, and ideologies working in combination toward increasing connectivity between actors aiming to create a region. *Regionalisation*, or *region-building*, “denotes the (empirical) process that leads to patterns of cooperation, integration, complementarity and convergence within a particular cross-national geographical space” (Hettne & Söderbraun, 2000, p. 457).

### **2.2.1 Theoretical development of regions: global history in the making**

The ideas and concepts used to define region-making have evolved as the regionalising processes have also become more complex. Fredrik Söderbaum (2016) described the first experiences of region-making as ‘early regionalism’. These were executed by the use of coercion or violence, mostly as a consequence of European colonising processes<sup>18</sup>. Although early regionalism experiences left a legacy in that they shaped the nature of the international order, the idea of regions did not make the lexicon of international relations scholarship until the post-war period (Fawcett, 1995; Hurrell, 1995b) when the context of regionalism appeared in the 1944 United Nations (UN) Charter, and from there soon to become a global phenomenon.

#### *2.2.1.1 Old(er) understandings of regionalism*

The first regional organisations set up in post-war Europe aimed to manage inter-state relationships aimed at preventing further conflict (Hurrell, 1995b). Such a goal was underlined in the 1944 UN Charter: “...(n)othing in the Charter should preclude the existence of regional arrangements or agencies for dealing with such matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security” (United Nations, 1944, p. 8). After the UN Charter, regional organisations flourished around the globe, including the Arab League in 1945<sup>19</sup> and the Organization of American States (OAS) in 1948. Given that the authority for

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<sup>18</sup> One example of imperialism-led regional arrangements is the International Organisation of La Francophonie, a cultural region set around and for the French-speaking world. In spite of its deeper historical roots, these arrangements were institutionalised in the post-war, and still exist today.

<sup>19</sup> The Arab League is an intergovernmental region formed of Arab-speaking countries formed since the Second World War to prevent the advance of the ‘Axis’ towards the Arab world. Its headquarters are in Egypt, where 22 Member States meet.

deciding over engaging in conflict or not fell upon the national state leaders of the time, region-making was then understood to be a process led exclusively by nation states.

In addition to peacekeeping, regional integration was understood as both a process and an outcome arising from increased economic interdependence. Nonetheless, what was proposed as the outcome of regional processes was not a set of economic links per se but, rather, political integration and shared sovereignty. This view is the core of the *neo-functional theory* (NFT) (Haas, 1967, 1970; Hettne & Söderbaum, 2000; Hurrell, 1995b; Robertson et al., 2016; Söderbaum, 2016). Proposed by Ernst B. Haas in the late fifties to explain the ‘uniting’ of Europe, NFT has placed greater emphasis on the unintended consequences of cooperation as building inter-state interdependence. A key concept in NFT is the use of the metaphor of the ‘spillover’ to account for the value of unintended consequences as building blocks for interdependence<sup>20</sup>. To Haas, the use of common markets and economic independence were mechanisms to reach gradual supranational political unity so as to prevent another European war (Haas, 1967). The Coal and Steel Community,<sup>21</sup> the precursor the EU, was the ‘convergence of practical goals’ resulting from the actors’ perception and decision-making<sup>22</sup>.

NFT became central to the conception of European integration (Hurrell, 1995b; Söderbaum & Sbragia, 2010), but not without criticisms. One of the main criticisms lays on its inability to account for the external conditions for region-making, thus privileging regions as an endogenous process.

NFT’s perception that a region can only become a ‘proper’ region when governed by a supranational institution is still conceived as an ideal model for regionalism, based on the European experience<sup>23</sup>. This legacy has been used to address region-making in other parts of

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<sup>20</sup> Hurrell (1995, p. 59) makes a difference between two types of spill-overs. Functional spillover was predicted when economic projects in different sectors would increase interdependence and gradually *spill* onto the political realm. Partial cooperation in different sectors would trigger new problems to be solved by further cooperation. Political spillover would be a consequence of the political integration: the resulting supranational institutions would generate the need for regional capabilities.

<sup>21</sup> The European Coal and Steel community (1951) is the precursor institution to the EU. It was signed by six countries (Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) with the goal to mediate the effects of the Second World War, and avoid further conflict.

<sup>22</sup> Haas would emphasise organisational theory, in particularly the concept of path-dependency, to explain collective action in terms of regional integration: “the application of organizational theory to integration studies can tell us more about how the perception by actors of an increasingly complex environment leads them to redefine goals and mechanisms of accommodation so as to increase either adaptiveness or the capacity to control the environment” (Haas, 1970, p. 644)

<sup>23</sup> Neo-functionalism’s legacy permeates through the scholarship in regions until today. For instance, Kleinschmidt and Gallego Perez (2017, p. 5) recently defined integration to be the “targeted expansion of those regional activities that actually

the world, even if no other region has (or will) achieve the degree of supranationalism that NFT scholars promoted as the EU has ('Brexit'<sup>24</sup> here is a case in point that the EU integration has not been as perfect as it is pictured to be). It can also be argued that the shaping of a supranational institution is one of the most interesting contributions of NFT; that is, when states voluntarily cede their sovereignty to a new body that is not reducible to any of the Member States. To this new 'supranational level', states then transfer their decision-making powers in the name of regional integration. In other words, it creates a new 'scale' of rule (K. R. Cox, 1998; Delaney & Leitner, 1997), a point I will return later in the Chapter.

Intergovernmentalism is another argument developed to explain European integration. Suggested by Andrew Moravcsik in the early 1990's (Moravcsik, 1993; Moravcsik & Schimmelfennig, 2019), intergovernmentalism presupposed that States make use of "negotiated policy co-ordination" which reflects the "rational actions of governments constrained at home by domestic societal pressures and abroad by their strategic environment (Moravcsik, 1993, p. 474). Different to NFT, it imagines States as rational actors with power and interests, but who prefer to share some of their sovereignty rather than transferring it to a supranational institution (Barlete, 2008; Cini, 2003). Intergovernmentalism will be revisited throughout the thesis because it is the model adopted by Mercosur, hence it is how the Education Sector is governed too.

These two main approaches to region-building continue to leave a legacy, even today, though they are conceived of as 'old regionalism'. Their features of state-centrism and the duality state-region (or national – supranational) were largely unable to account for the new World Order emerging after the end of the Cold war, when a 'new' type of regionalism was conceived.

#### 2.2.1.2 *A 'new' regionalism for a new world order*

A renewed study of regions proliferated from the 1980s with the advent of a new wave in regional development, conceptually termed as 'new' regionalism theory (NRT) (Hettne, 2005; Hettne & Söderbaum, 2000). NRT's theoretical and conceptual base sits on

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have managed to generate consensus and some degree of measurable success, and try to base new institutions on their established, functioning mechanisms". The definition shows how the political spillovers from different activities will lead to new supranational functional mechanisms (new institutions).

<sup>24</sup> 'Brexit' is a colloquial term used to refer to the United Kingdom's process of disconnecting from the European Union Agreement following a national referendum held in 2016, which the 'Leave the EU' campaign won 52% of the vote. The negotiations are to be concluded by March 2019.

the political-historical aftermath of changes in the world order after the end of the Cold War. These can be summarised as:

- (i) the move from bipolarity towards a multipolar structure, with a new division of power and a new division of labour;
- (ii) the relative decline of American hegemony in combination with a more lenient attitude towards regionalism on the part of the USA;
- (iii) the erosion of the Westphalian nation-state system and the growth of interdependence and ‘globalisation’; and
- (iv) the changed attitudes towards (neoliberal) economic development and associated political system in the developing countries, as well as in the post-communist countries (Hettne & Söderbaum, 2000, p. 457).

This new World Order impacted the social, political and economic spheres around the globe by both enabling and thus increasing the flows of people, goods, data, labour, markets, capital (Held & McGrew, 2000). NRT became a popular theoretical construct in the study of region-making. The approach also argued regions were constructed by actors other than nation states, but also influences beyond the national-supranational relationship. It also questioned whether the EU’s regionalising experience could be replicated in other regions. Within the New Regionalism, the EU’s historical, contextual, spatial factors have attributed to it a unique (and high) degree of *regionness*; that is to say, the level of regional coordination and community in a given regional space (Hettne & Söderbaum, 2000)<sup>25</sup>.

More importantly, NRT opened for debate whether the EU regionalising process would be the only road possible (Van Langenhove, 2013), or the only one desired, even if the EU remains the most recognisable and analysed regional organisation in the world – or a ‘sophisticated laboratory for regional and interregional cooperation’ (Telò, Fawcett, & Ponjaert, 2015). Aware of this, a number of scholars have questioned the pertinence of the region-making theoretical debate in regions outside Europe. Two examples can be mentioned here, namely Pía Riggirozzi’s analysis of LA regionalisms (2012a) and Zajontz and Leysens

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<sup>25</sup> Regionness as an analytical category was conceived to explain regional coherence and community setting, which, in turn, decrease or increase influenced by historical, contextual, spatial factors. In other words, inasmuch as regional arrangements become more interdependent, they climb one step further towards an optimal level of integration. Although the concept of regionness as proposed by Hettne and Söderbaum (2000) can be questioned for its direction towards an ideal-type of integration based on the EU organisation, as cited in the article (p. 468), it has been loosely applied today to explain (any) regional coherence. Mário de Azevedo, for instance, understands regionalism from a Bourdieusian perspective, and defines regionness as an the organic composition of a spirit of belonging among the different actors of a regional social field (Leal, Leher, & Azevedo, 2018). Another criticism the concept received was for its inability to break with the region-state dichotomy: regions are seen as composed of states or wishing to be become state-like by reaching the level of ‘region-state’ (p. 467-468).

(2015)'s revisiting of Southern African regionalisms. Riggiozzi claims that the forms of regionalism emerged in LA are, in fact, a *hybrid* of the already known new regionalist theories, yet “built on the bases of a new consensus, and where cohesion and institution building defy the notions of defensive regionalism and US regional governance<sup>26</sup>” (2012b, p. 439). Riggiozzi names this defensive form of LA regionalism as post-hegemonic regionalism (to be further explored later in this Chapter). A different point of view emerges from South Africa. Zajonts and Leysens’s critique points to the role of civil society in region-building – one which they identify as being a blind spot in the literature. The authors also place emphasis in the role of hegemony and see civil society as “...the very arena from which social transformation and counter-hegemony emanate” (Zajontz & Leysens, 2015, p. 315).

Given the dramatic global transformation from the early 1990s onwards, it would be expected that the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ regionalisms presented significant differences but also some similarities. Differences between the approaches relate to the how regions are defined, and how their geometry is shaped and how they are steered. To start with, NRT added wider social implications and rationales than the political and economic (Dale & Robertson, 2012). That is not to say that social actors did not take part in the ‘old’ regionalism (Warleigh-Lack, 2006), but that their focus was on supranational institutions and states. Also, regions were neither seen as state-led closed entities whose aim it was to achieve a supranational institution, nor as rational institutions with their own power and interests. Instead, they were seen as ‘extroverted’ and open institutions whose actors can be different types of organizations and institutions, including non-governmental institutions, the market, in addition to states (Hettne & Söderbaum, 2000). Moreover, in NRT the idea of ‘interdependence’ is charged with a much broader spatial notion than in old regionalism: it extrapolated that the territory and authority of the Member States, subjected to conditions and actors (state and non-state) steered these global transformations in the new multilateral configuration of the world and its social relations (Sassen, 2013).

### 2.2.1.3 *New forms of new regionalisms*

Approaches that build on NRT, mostly via critique, have brought to the fore novel theoretical elements. Regional governance and statehood have been the point of contention for proponents of *regulatory regionalism* (Jayasuriya, 2003b). This approach builds particularly on the relationship between emergent regional markets and the growth of what

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<sup>26</sup> The role and impact of the United States in LA will be introduced in Chapter 5.

has been termed the regulatory state. Here, the state as a social relation adopts a different position – going from an interventionist state at the level of the national scale into a regulator and guardian of ‘market order’ (Jayasuriya, 2003b) whose boundaries now stretch out into the region. In other words, to exert their role, rather than establishing differentiated governance before regions, states have *incorporated regional practices into their (domestic) governance*. Regulatory regionalism also displaces the discussion based on institutions, by viewing regionalising arrangements as political projects, not as abstract entities, but projects of regional governance that “...embody particular constellations of power and interests – a framework that has the virtue of locating the dynamics of regional governance within the broader context of domestic political projects” (Jayasuriya, 2003b, p. 201).

Whereas new and regulatory regionalism focused on how regions are built *from the outside*, *social constructivists* were interested in how social practices (identities, ideas, norms and discourses) shape social reality – or, in this case, a regional space (Hurrell, 1995b; Robertson, 2014, 2018; Van Langenhove, 2013). The shape of a regional identity depends upon “how important interaction among states is for the constitution of their identities and interests” and “on how easily state identities and interests can change as a result of systemic interaction” (Wendt, 1992, p. 423). This is because identities and collective cognitions are mutually constitutive; they do not exist apart from each other (Wendt, 1992). In the process of creating intersubjective meanings, actors became aware of and developed role-specific understandings about how to engage in these collective understandings, such as regional awareness (Checkel, 2005; Hurrell, 1995b). Attention is also given to how discursive activities construct our understanding of reality (Jones and Smith, 2007). In this regard, David Jones and Michael Smith (2007) have shown how continuous re-imagining of the idea of the discourse of the ‘ASEAN Way’ has sustained the idea of an integrated East Asia in spite of its bilateral differences and disputes. For social constructivists, a shared regional identity is constructed *from within*. Depending on their degree of regionness, would allow a region to assume actorhood granted by its collective power – thus acting *for itself* (Dang, 2016; Robertson, 2018).

Scholars have also called for better methods to analyse regions by comparison – one that did not assume the EU as an ideal type, or based comparisons with other regions having the EU as the reference. This is the key proposal of *comparative regionalism*. According to Söderbaum (2016), comparative regionalism fills in the gaps between theories and

methodologies at the same time it gives chance to other regionalisms to be studied. Although receiving criticisms due to the (persistent) habit of analysing regionalism as an ‘N=1’ equation (meaning that the EU is the only ‘proper’ region), Lombaerde and colleagues (2010) dismissed the critiques as exaggerated. They argued that comparisons with the EU are still valid and will depend on the research question to define *what* aspects of region-making are to be compared and how. Comparative regionalisms are thought to be useful to manage region-making studies that are culturally bound or specific to one context only by providing a ‘cross-fertilisation’ of different debates and specialisations.

#### 2.2.1.4 *A one-size-fits-all approach?*

In reviewing some of the latest theories aiming to explain regionalism, one can get a sense that researchers have been looking for a one-size-fits-all answer to region-building. Cammack questions the overarching theories used to analyse regions, from Haas’s neo-functionalism to Hettne and Söderbaum’s concept of regionness, calling attention to the forms which regionalism happens, and how they depend on varying circumstances. Rather than looking into the nature or the structuring of regions, Paul Cammack suggests the study of regionalism as a project of change – not as a recipe:

I suggest that it is better to see regional projects as one means among others to achieving state or global transformation, and to focus analytical efforts primarily on the latter. Regionalism, old or new, has taken a wide variety of only loosely related forms, embracing both security and political economy, and is not sensibly squeezed into a single frame or encompassed in a single theory (Cammack, 2016, p. 174)

If thinking *with* Cammack like this, we can determine that the varied circumstances that, for instance, enabled Mercosur as a region to exist resulted in the type of outcomes, mechanisms and strategies it has deployed during the years. These are not only different from the other regions emergent in the early 1990s, but also during the lifetime of Mercosur itself. Therefore, the analysis of a process of change would call attention to the socio-political and historical circumstances unique to the regional context and the countries shaping the region.

#### 2.2.1.5 *Spatialising regionness: where regionalism happens*

In NRT and in other contributions, such as regulatory regionalism, there is an emphasis on the relationship between other scales of rule. If regions are to be shaped by global processes with the participation of states and other actors, such as international organisations, how to account for changes in the geometry of a region (its shape and arrangement) or even by changes in structure and agency of actors in different scales?

Concerned with these issues, Shahar Hameiri (2013) suggests the problem might be in the disconnection between studies of regionalism and the literatures on state theory and the politics of scale. Whereas the literature on state theory adds a vocabulary of regulation and governance (which, as explained above, is at the core of the regulatory regionalisms approach), the field of politics of scale brings to the table the necessary aspects of territory and space, which are fundamental to statehood. In sum, Hameiri (2013) argues that there is a lack of political geography in the analysis of regionalising projects.

Inasmuch as the territorial dimensions of the state are produced through social and political conflict, the same could be said for other scales – local, regional, etc. – and their interrelations. The construction and development of scaled forms of governance – whether in the shape of supranational institutions or regional regulatory spaces within the state – is in other words part of a political project to establish particular forms of political rule. (Hameiri, 2013, p. 325)

What is on the table here is an invitation to understand the spatiality of region-making and its power relations. Given that regions are no longer solely bound to their material territory (or the territories of its Member States), matters of the place, space, scale, territory of region-making become essential to understand where its region-making processes actually happen, and why<sup>27 28</sup>. The way I will approach the task is by grounding the analysis of Mercosur into what has been referred to as the ‘spatial’ turn.

First suggested by David Harvey in his book ‘Social Justice and the City’ (Crampton & Elden, 2007), the spatial turn privileges space and the social relations that shape it. Rumford explains how the spatial turn privileges “the way space is constitutive of social and political relations” (Rumford, 2006, p. 166); not as a geographical reference of ‘where’ life happens (place), but how it is constructed as a result of a multiplicity of social relations (Massey, 2005).

Ideas about what space is and what features it has have evolved for the past 40 years. The differences in approach can be seen across the generations of geographers, and I will use here the work of Milton Santos and Doreen Massey to illustrate the evolution of the ideas. Over 40 years ago, geographer Milton Santos (Santos, 1975, 1977, 1985) understood spaces

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<sup>27</sup> Such an approach is not new to students of regionalism, as shown by Muhr in the analysis of South-South cooperation in LA (Muhr, 2017). It has more recently been applied to the analysis of regional education policy (Dale & Robertson, 2002; Dang, 2018; Gomes, Robertson, Dale, & Alfredo M. Gomes, 2012; Robertson, 2009, 2011; Robertson, Olds, Dale, & Dang, 2016).

<sup>28</sup> Jonas (2012) offers an interesting debate on the difference between territorial and relational approaches to the study of regions.

as forms that ‘contained’ the geographical and the social – “the sum of the landscape and society” (Santos, 1985, p. 12). A citizen from Brazil who worked in four continents (Europe, Latin America, Africa and North America), Santos reflected about the many configurations of space – social, human, global, total – and the relationship between space and the capitalist societies. He was particularly concerned about issues of methods to analyse space (Davies, 2008), in view of the growing spaces of inclusion and exclusion inherited by economic capitalism (Santos, 2012).

Milton Santos also theorised about the temporal dimension of space. “Space, considered as a mosaic of elements from different eras, synthetises, on the one hand, the evolution of society, and explain, on the other, situations that happen in the present” (Santos, 1985, p. 36). Although Santos explored the role of structures and context, his writings of the ‘mosaic of different eras’ seemed to indicate that there were borders – geographical, political, economic, temporal – in which a certain space existed. From my point of view, this is a point of contention for the work of Doreen Massey – which I will address below. Santos devoted time to think about the implications of this ‘temporal mosaic’ in what we today understand as the Global South (during Santos’s time, it was known as “the Third World” given the bipolarity of the Cold War). For Santos, therefore, in addition to the roles of bringing together its past and the its present, the Third World’s space had an extra feature: to manage the ‘global matrix of modernising forces’ that conditioned the its framings, purposes and role of social relations. In sum, for Santos, the Third World had a different spatiality:

Space in underdeveloped countries is organized and constantly reorganized within a global matrix of modernizing forces. However, the impact of these impulses of change varies. New, or renewed variables are not evenly diffused over space and over time. Each time, new points and areas join the operational space. There are different time lags between the first impact of a variable and its renewal. Also, the variables whose combination characterises a point in space do not change synchronistically. As a result, in any portion of space, the frequent disequilibria and readjustments induce a shifting of forces which provokes great instability in spatial organization. (Santos, 1977, p. 49)

Doreen Massey will bring forward a relational conception of space as the product of social relations; an open, unfinished business. Although agreeing with Santos in that space and time must be analysed together, Massey claims that rather than ‘being’ a ‘mosaic’, space ‘happens’ as a social process. The boundaries are shapes in the encounter, rather than a determined time or place. In the words of Doreen Massey,

*First*, we recognise space as the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny. (...) *Second*, that we understand space as the spheres of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity. (...) If space is indeed the product of interrelations, then it must be predicated upon the existence of plurality. *Third*, that we recognise space as always under construction. (Massey, 2005, p. 9)

In terms of recognising the geographies of the – now – ‘Global South’, Massey thinks with post-colonial theories, such as Stuart Hall. Whereas Santos would discuss the territories and the ‘landscapes’ of the Cold War territorialities and alliances, Massey thinks about space embedded in global processes – she is, after all, thinking during the 1990s. She claimed that hegemonies, the centres of power and coercion, “legitimise an imperialist era of territorialisation that never was” as a way to “tame the spatial” (Massey, 2005, p. 65). Here I see a parallel between Massey’s idea of ‘taming the spatial’ with Santos’s idea of the ‘matrix of globalising forces’. Both are aware that modernisation imposes the idea that there is one only story to be told: one way to be a model of global development, and why not, one *model of region*. However, they show that there is more to the story. Spaces are mosaics in the making, and their stories depend on time and place and its interrelations.

Given the presuppositions about spaces in the developing world (or the Global South), what does this theoretical construct bring for the study of Mercosur HE? What I wish to take forward is the recognition that regions are spatialised political projects resulting from a multiplicity of social relations. The spatiality of Mercosur as a region – and as a space in the Global South – will have a specific temporality (Santos), but it does not mean to say its fate is determined (Massey). There is more than one way of “shaping” a region. How Mercosur HE will, or may, formulate its political identities and politics, Massey adds, depends on “the different placing of local struggles within the complex power-geometry of spatial relations” (Massey, 2005, p. 183).

### **2.3 Understanding LA regionalisms**

LA’s experience with regionalism is unique and dynamic. It is *unique* because its history is marked by early regionalism experiences of newly independent countries aimed to avoiding colonisation and further domination; in other words, to prevent new forms of hegemonic rule over the region. The notion of hegemony adopted here derives greatly from

Gramsci as elaborated by Jonathan Joseph (2000, 2001, 2017). It refers to the balance of ‘force and consent’. According to Joseph, hegemony “draws attention to the ways that social conditions of production, coercion, consent and leadership must combine in specific strategies that project themselves across a range of social institutions practices” (Joseph, 2017, p. 5). Hegemony is materialised in the ruling classes’ successful exercise of political and economic leadership to acquire consent from dominated groups (Chaudhuri, 1988; Jessop, 2016), and works by ensuring behaviour to most people most of the time (R. W. Cox, 1983). Evidence of hegemonic concern in LA can be traced back to the nineteenth century when an ‘American’ spirit in opposition to/as a response to European imperialism surfaced among the newly independent Spanish colonies (Hale, 1996). Nonetheless, it remained as a cloud over the region at the turn of the twentieth century when the hegemonic power was no longer the European colonisers but the United States (US) after the Post-War period<sup>29</sup>.

LA regionalism is also *dynamic* due to the large number of regionalising projects active today. As of January 2019, there exists no less than *eight* regional projects - each with different geometries, goals, conflicts and degrees of regionness (Tussie, 2009) (see Table 2.1, below). The reasoning for the number of regions spans from the need to improve economic performance, to the wish to better manage the hegemonic influence of other nations, in particular the United States (Briceño Ruiz & Hoffmann, 2015; Riggirozzi & Tussie, 2012). During the historical period this research is interested in (1991-2016), LA regions have been revamped (Andean Community), created (Pacific Alliance), launched and relaunched (Mercosur). Some of them even show signs of *disintegration* (i.e. Union of South American nations - UNASUR).<sup>30</sup>As a consequence, the LA regional development possesses ‘many faces’: different projects (regionalisms) and different types of regional activities (regionalisation processes). As I intend to argue in this Chapter, the wide range of theoretical constructs of regional integration, in particular those emanating from the review of European integration, are unable to explain. This is the reason why they are presented in the plural – *as regionalisms*.

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<sup>29</sup> In the XIX century, intellectuals from the newly independent countries used the term ‘American’ to address the countries in the American continent (Hale, 1996; Inman, 1923). I am unable to pinpoint in the literature when the term became attached to the United States only.

<sup>30</sup> Six UNASUR countries have suspended their membership in April 2018: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay and Peru. Section 1.3 – Understanding LA Regionalisms will offer more details.

Table 2.1 presents a summary of the main regional arrangements in LA in the past 70 years<sup>31</sup>. It is not the focus of the thesis to present a detailed account of each region, but the overview below can illustrate the region's diverse and complex regional spaces.

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<sup>31</sup> Azevedo (2009) cites the plans for the Argentina, Brazil and Chile agreement as early as 1915, yet the author reveals the bloc was never conformed due to political opposition in Argentina and Brazil.

Table 2.1 Summary of Latin American regionalisms

Year	Region (Acronym)	Full name in English	Member States	Overview
1948	CEPAL	Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean	All 33 countries in LAC.	UN Organism created to contribute to the development of LA Countries
1948	OAS	Organization of American States	All 21 states in LA and 14 states in the Caribbean.	IO built on the TIAR agreement <sup>32</sup> . Regarded as the keeper of US hegemony in LA during the cold war.
1951	ODECA	Organisation of Central American States	Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Honduras, Panama, Dominican Republic	Trade agreement to promote economic and social development. Relaunched as SICA in 1991.
1960	LAFTA	Latin American Free Trade Association	Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay.	Trade bloc suggested by ECLA/CEPAL. Became ALADI in 1980.
1969	CAN	Andean Community	Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia and Venezuela.	Common Market. Relaunched in the 1990's as a single market. Venezuela left CAN in 2006 to join Mercosur.
1973	CARICOM	Caribbean Community	Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Lucia, St Kitts and Nevis, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago.	Launched as the Caribbean Common Market (1973). Aimed to established institutions for economic, social and cultural development. Added element of political coordination later. Became single market and single economy in 2001.
1980	ALADI	Latin American Association of Integration	Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela	'Area of economic preferences', with the goal to create a LA common market. Roots on LAFTA. HQ in Montevideo.
1991	Mercosur	Common Market of the South	Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay. Venezuela joined in 2012; Bolivia in process.	Common Market which gained political mission in 2000 and opened for cultural integration from 2003.
1991	SICA	Central American Common Market	Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Honduras, Panama, Dominican Republic	Predecessor of ODECA, with added political dimension. Aims to promote economic and social development.
1994	NAFTA	North American Free Trade Area	Canada, Mexico, United States	Free trade area. Under review since 2017. All documents regarding the renegotiation are classified.
2004	CAFTA-DR	US, Dominican Republic – Central America Free Trade Agreement	United States, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua	Economy-oriented; hegemonic. 'Promotes stronger trade, prosperity and stability throughout the region and along Southern Border' – however Mexico is not a signatory.
2004	ALBA	Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our Americas	Cuba, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Dominica, Ecuador, Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Lucia, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Venezuela	Post-hegemonic region (Ruggirozzi). Its website lists Early regionalism texts as foundational. Has an economic component (Commercial Treaty)

<sup>32</sup> The Inter American Treaty for Mutual Assistance (TIAR, also known as Rio Pact or Rio Treaty) was a military treaty to ensure peace and security in the region signed in September 1947. It aimed to consolidate the US's hegemony over the Americas by avoiding the isolation of a LA-only treaty (Morgenfeld, 2010). Member States lost interest in TIAR after the Falklands/Malvinas War when the US supported the UK, instead of Argentina, a TIAR member.

2008	UNASUR	Union of South American Nations	Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guiana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay, Venezuela	Create a common market in South America by 2019. Brazil's initiative (Gardini) Crisis in December 2018, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru, Paraguay suspended membership.
2011	PA	Pacific Alliance	Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru	Trade bloc, market and economy oriented.
2011	CELAC	Community of Latin American States	All 33 LAC countries	Political international representation of the LAC region before multilateral negotiations
2011	MILA	LA Integrated market	Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru	Market-led integration of stock exchanges; involved in the framework of the Pacific Alliance.

Source: elaborated by the author based on the official websites<sup>33</sup>.

In addition to these regional processes, there are inter-regional cooperation schemes, of which the (now) EU-CELAC cooperation<sup>34</sup> and the Forum for East-Asia-Latin America Cooperation (FEALAC) are examples<sup>35</sup>. It should be noted that there is also a web of multilateral agreements between regions and states; these are not shown here for they are not the focus of this research. Their presence points to the complexity of the governing and political landscape at any one moment in time.

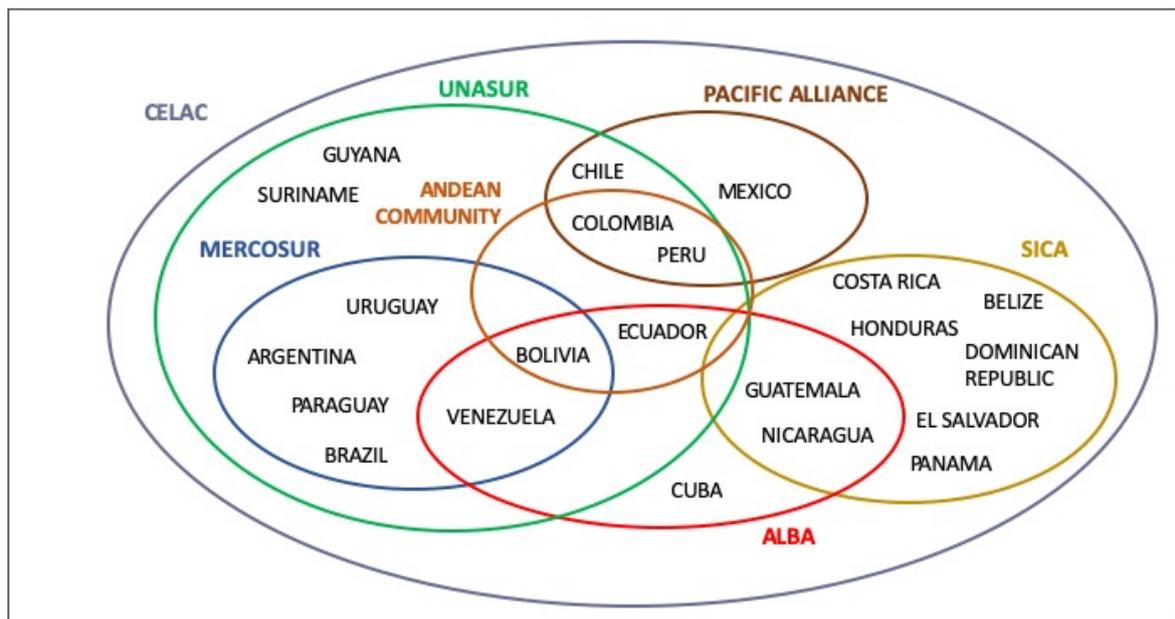
With such a diversity of projects comes fragmentation and contradiction. A number of states became members of regions with conflicting objectives. Nicaragua, for instance, is a member of SICA, DR-CAFTA and ALBA – the last two with clearly marked different perception of the relationship with the US. Moreover, not one LA country takes part of only one region. As a result, the dynamics of a “segmented (i.e. subregional) and overlapping (i.e. multilevel)” regionalism shapes a confusing, “disintegrated regional space” (Malamud & Gardini, 2012, p. 117). My attempt to visualise this complexity can be seen in Figure 2.1, below:

<sup>33</sup> Sources: OAS: <http://www.oas.org/en/>; LAFTA: Nattier (1966); ALADI: <http://www.aladi.org/sitioAladi/index.html>; Mercosur: <https://www.mercosur.int/pt-br/>; CARICOM: <https://www.caricom.org>; CAN <http://www.comunidadandina.org>.

<sup>34</sup> Inter-regional cooperation started in 1999 with the first EU-LAC heads of state meeting in Rio de Janeiro. Sixty Member States joined the dialogue.

<sup>35</sup> Launched in 1999, FEALAC has 36 Members: Mongolia, China, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Lao PRD, (South) Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Philippines, Japan, Indonesia, Brunei, Singapore, Malaysia, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Cuba, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Panama, Suriname, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay. Website: <http://www.fealac.org/new/index.do>.

Figure 2.1 The LA regional space in 2018



Source: Elaborated by the author.

A link with the approach of spatial regionalisms, as suggested above, opens doors for the explanation of the changing geometry and the construction of new spaces in LA regionalisms. This is because there are conditions that allow a specific country ‘x’ to be in a region. Similarly, there was a decision to welcome actors and states with certain ideas to enter one region, whereas these same ideas might mean some countries will be dropped. Such a dynamic indicates the existence of a power relationship, which – I will argue – is the result of the many scales at play in regionalism (local, national, regional, global). Scales, the “nested hierarchies of bonded spaces of differing sizes” (Delaney & Leitner, 1997, p. 93), have an added political connotation: they allow for the movement of power, or power dynamics. These are not only shaped by economic or political drives; the interfaces and interactions among the different scales mean that each of these scales can simultaneously define and be defined in their relationship. If thinking with Massey (2005) about space having multiple trajectories that constitute an open-ended process, it would lead us to conclude that it is in their political interaction that changes in regions happen.

### 2.3.1 Brief history of LA regionalisms – when an imaginary becomes action

Projects for region-building in LA have accompanied the historical maturing of nation-states and of the political-ideological ideas for almost two centuries. These are fundamentally different from other regions in the developing world, as Charles Hale explains:

First, the culture of Latin America's governing and intellectual elites is integrally Western, that is, it has emerged within the broader confines of the Western European culture, modified of course by the special characteristics Spain and Portugal imparted to their former colonies. Second, the nations of Latin America, with the exception of Cuba, gained their political independence at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Hale, 1996).

The expression 'political independence' in the quote above is not by chance. Although independent, LA states were still very much economically dependent on Europe, a phenomena authors have defined as a new form of colonialism. European industries were reliant on LA imports for its products and, as the independent nations did not have an industry of their own but survived out of the export of primary materials to Europe. This marked the first economic model in LA; that of the export economy. It stretched well into the Twentieth Century and "transformed the international capitalist economy, of which Latin America was already an integral part" (Cammack, Pool, & Tordoff, 1993, p. 37).

It must be noted that, even though the independent states were to a very large extent still 'dependent' on Europe for their economic development, it does not mean that their cultural development had the same fate.

On the contrary, the ideologies, political programmes and social theories of the nineteenth century (...) were nonetheless distinctive and authentically 'Latin American', in part because they emerged in politically independent nations. To dismiss or downgrade these political and social ideas as 'imitative' or 'derivative', or as mere rationalisations for the economic interests of a dependable governing class, is to make insignificant what was regarded then as of great significance, and to distort our understanding of Latin American history (Hale, 1996, p. 133).

Cultural elements become therefore key for LA to differentiate itself from the European thought. One of the main differences would be to favour a republican mode of ruling – with the exception of Brazil<sup>36</sup>. Inspired by French and U.S. values of democracy, the desire for a consensual, consultative, democratic ruling and independent institutions mad as sharp contrast with European values of the time. A new imaginary was seeded. As Sum and

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<sup>36</sup> Brazil kept a monarchy after its independence in 1822, to become a republic only in 1889.

Jessop (2013) described, within a cultural political economy framework, imaginaries are semiotic systems that frame the individual's lived experiences. "Without imaginaries, individuals cannot 'go on' in the world and collective actors ... could not relate to their environment, make decisions or engage in strategic action" (Sum & Jessop, 2013, p. 165).

This CPE framework is useful to understand the emergence of experiences of early regionalism in Latin America: Simon Bolívar's Gran Colombia region (1826)<sup>37</sup> and the American Congresses (1847-1889), later Pan-American Conferences, are of particular relevance here. A desire for Republicanism divided the new and the old world (Hale, 1996). It inspired the first American conferences in the region, to which the US were invited – becoming the Pan-American conferences<sup>38</sup>.

After prosperous years of stability as a result of exports, the First World War and the US depression in 1929 led to the collapse of the export economy model and of Latin American economies. Scholars argued it generated a period of instability comparable to the one felt after the independence from Spain, where new economic, political and social models were needed (Cammack et al., 1993; Munck, 2003). The consequences of 50 years of an outward-looking political economy of LA left a legacy that is still felt today. This paralleled the emergence of a new and more interventionist role for the state for the economy and of a national-statist political order (Munck, 2003). A new economic model emerged looking to substitute import of goods from outside the region by means of industrialisation. The launch of the OAS in 1948, together with the first European experiences in trade cooperation, inspired the region to seek for integration schemes. Importing from neighbours was also an option, and it could in fact give a competitive advantage before the most powerful economies in the world; mainly the (still imperial) European Countries.

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<sup>37</sup> Gran Colombia was a Republic created by Bolívar after the war on independence from Spain. It was formed by the space that today are large portions of the territory of Colombia, Panama, Ecuador and Venezuela, plus portions of Peru, Brazil and Guyana. Bolívar's ideals for regionalisation have been continuously recalled in LA until today.

<sup>38</sup> By 1847, an "American Congress" was set up by Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, New Granada (mostly present day Colombia and Panama) and Peru. Ten editions of the Congresses discussed, amongst other aspects, the territorial integrity and political independence from the European colonisers, such as the definition of borders of the new republics, abolition of slavery, alliance against aggression of foreign powers, unification of the rights of Americans, and 'an ideal fraternity' (Inman, 1923, p. 240). The United States were named 'friend from the north' and did not participate in the first American conferences. From 1881, US Secretary of State James G. Blaine showed interest in leading American unity. The first (now) *Pan-American Conference* took place in Washington in 1889 amidst Latin American countries' concerns about a likely US hegemony over the region (Inman, 1923). The Congresses' initial political function gave room to an economic one, for they became a platform for discussing commercial relations in the continent. The Conferences set the stage for the establishment of the OAS in 1948, one of the pillars of the United States' hegemony over the region (Segovia, 2013).

At the end of a crucial decade, a new institution arrived to promote LA-based reforms: the European Commission of Latin America (ECLA – later included the Caribbean and was renamed ECLAC; CEPAL in Spanish) in 1948. CEPAL was to have a key role in developing a ‘non-orthodox’ social and economic development strategy for LA (Munck, 2003). As Giardini and Malamud (2012) explained, CEPAL’s methodology aimed to ensure a regional integration process that would allow the enlargement of the national markets. It would be done by “...expand[in] industrial planning to the region-wide scale level, to remove barriers to mutual trade while keeping high levels of external protection to serve as an incentive to industrialisation, economic growth and investment” (Tussie, 2009, p. 173). The result would bring ‘productive / industrial transformation with equity’ – words which will echo also in the HE project, and the analysis will later review (Chapter 3).

Under the influence of CEPAL, the first regional arrangements in LA emerged in the 1960s as a consequence of the political and economic context of the post-war period – the ‘old regionalism’<sup>39</sup>. Equally important was the rise of the US as one of the world’s hegemonic powers. The US’s trade strategy of focusing on liberalization rather than on governmental regulations (Schirm, 2002) meant that the liberal agenda pushed the development of globalisation itself and the trade agendas across the globe. As the next section will show, this hegemonic position of the US over LA has had an important influence on the shape of its regional organisations.

Another element frequently discussed is how the region’s cultural history leaves a mark on the shaping of social relations today. Arjun Appadurai’s concept of a ‘community of sentiment’ is helpful to illuminate why this is so. Appadurai defines a community of sentiment as “a group that begins to imagine and fuel things together” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 8). Such a community is shaped when *collective* imagination is understood as a staging ground for action for social transformation, and not just for ‘escape’. In other words, a community of sentiment is one that is capable of moving from shared imagination to collective action in order to produce social change.

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<sup>39</sup> It is also important to note that regional integration in LA is not reduced to political economy only. It signed the first regional mechanism in terms of human rights, which pre-date the European Court of Human Rights (Sikkink, 2016). Moreover, LA was a model to the world when it negotiated and signed the first nuclear weapon free zone treaty with the Treaty of Tlateloco (Musto, 2018).

Although criticised as ‘utopia’<sup>40</sup>, the reference to the LA ideal of integration seems to be alive in the region – including in Mercosur - scholars have nonetheless challenged the assumption that the historical and cultural links that permeate Latin America would and should facilitate region-making processes. Malamud (2005) explains how the ‘myth of Latin American’s natural unity’ was cultivated by the leaders of the independence wars against Spain in the Nineteenth Century, most notably by Simón Bolívar, culminating in the current states from today<sup>41</sup>. Similarly, Kleinschidt and Gallego Pérez (2017) point out that such an assumption, although frequently evoked by authors, has been “disappointed regularly”, and yet it re-emerges just as regularly.

How much of this historical background can help us to understand the multiple regional context in Latin America today? In the following section I intend to explore possible explanations to this question.

### **2.3.2 Many explanations for many regions: theoretical debates on LA regionalisms**

A large effort has sought to explain the entangled picture of multiple and overlapping LA regionalisms by researchers from inside and outside the region (Briceño Ruiz & Hoffmann, 2015; Gardini, 2015; Kleinschmidt & Gallego Pérez, 2017; Malamud, 2010; Malamud & Gardini, 2012; Muhr, 2017; Munck, 2013; Riggirozzi, 2012a; Riggirozzi & Tussie, 2012; Saltalamacchia Ziccardi, 2015; Sanahuja, 2012; Tussie, 2009). The body of literature is extensive, and marked by interdisciplinarity, varied theoretical positionings, and the use of neologisms. What seems to be the agreement is that there is more than one form of regionalism in LA. As Diana Tussie argued,

...in Latin America the process has gone through phases of energetic expansion, of mere trend-following, controlled stalemate, disaggregation and reconfiguration as a result of the ups and downs of development strategies and the changing conditions in global markets. These factors have led to a variety of forms of regionalism not only in terms of goals but also of the policies included and geographical coverage. Different

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<sup>40</sup> A recent edition of the Bulletin of Latin American Research (Vol. 37, N. 2) reunited different studies on the many ways ‘utopias’ played a part in the history of Latin America. In one of the articles, Musto (2018) demonstrates the role of utopia in the emergence of the denuclearisation Treaty of Tlatelolco of 1969 (Musto, 2018).

<sup>41</sup> Simón Bolívar’s project is the most known project for a united Latin American region to which he called ‘Gran Colombia’ (1819-1823), which reunited territories of the (today) Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Panamá, Brazil, Peru, Nicaragua and Honduras.

forms of regionalism in the Americas have distinctive roots that have contributed to its evolution and current progress. (Tussie, 2009, p. 171)

To present the theoretical discussion on Latin American regionalisms, I will build upon the historical mapping laid out by Gardini (2015). Gardini identifies eight models of regionalism<sup>42</sup> in Latin America. He remarks that there is “not one prevailing model of regionalism” and the models available, although creative cannot attract “a large and unidirectional flow of followers” (Gardini, 2015, p. 211). For the purpose of this thesis, I will analyse five of these models: closed, open, post-liberal, post-hegemonic and modular regionalism<sup>43</sup>.

There is a pattern in the nature of the models: from economic led to politically and then culturally led. I will explain. ‘Closed’ and ‘open’ regionalisms move from an explicit economic connotation. On the one hand, the ‘closed’ model was able to shield the regional economy by establishing tariff barriers to protect the regional economy from competition (Gardini, 2015; Riggirozzi, 2012b). Given that the historical period when it was adopted (1960s - 1990s), it is easy to make the association with the military dictatorships that prevailed in the region during this time<sup>44</sup>. It is also easy to relate to the concept of ‘old regionalism’ as described earlier<sup>45</sup> – although not used as synonyms in LA, for closed regionalism does not seem to indicate the aim for a supranational institution, for instance.

On the other, ‘open’ regionalism embraces the liberalisation of the markets in the 1990s at the same time it expands regional agendas to manage political agendas with stronger normative and regulatory functions: foreign policy coordination, security, environment, and increase productivity and competitiveness (Sanahuja, 2012; Serbin, 2013) (where education

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<sup>42</sup> The eight models are: closed, open, post-liberal, post-hegemonic, third generation, spaghetti-bowl, rhetorical, peak of regionalism.

<sup>43</sup> These models account for inter-state integration, and yet inter-regionalism has also been active in the regional landscape. A recent report from CEPAL suggested that the convergence between the Pacific Alliance and Mercosur to be ‘necessary and urgent’ on the grounds it would provide endogenous growth, reduce dependence on the export of raw materials, and offer a more robust offer for extra-regional negotiations (CEPAL, 2018b). The extent to which these two regions could cooperate is questionable given their regional goals, and yet a new regional configuration can never be discarded (or doubted) given the track record of regionalism in LA.

<sup>44</sup> A number of Latin American countries had military governments during this period. Of interest to this study is the period of dictatorships in Mercosur countries and associates: Argentina (1976-1983), Bolivia (1964-1982), Brazil (1964 – 1985), Chile (1973-1990), Paraguay (1954-1989) and Uruguay (1973-1985).

<sup>45</sup> Whereas Gardini (2012) did not use old and closed regionalisms as synonyms, Sanahuja does, and he adds a heavy political connotation to it: “‘old regionalism’ has been used in the Cold war era to describe, by one hand, economic integration strategies having certain degrees of autonomy to pursue its own development policies. By the other hand, it refers to the US-led security regional organizations established to sustain the military alliances and the balances of power in the bipolar world” (Sanahuja, 2012, p. 2).

came in). A feature of neo-regionalism, the notion of ‘open’ meant welcoming reforms oriented to the market and to the liberalisation of the economy (Serbin, 2013). Mercosur was created under this model, in 1991. Nonetheless, by the end of the 1990s, it became clear that this approach was not offering the results that were expected. Their failure to “create sustainable levels of intra-trade and political commitment”, led to the emergence of “alternative processes, models and tools of regionalism that are grounding new regional consensus about policies and cooperation beyond what used to be the hub of ‘open’ regionalism, namely markets, trade and investment” (Riggirozzi, 2012b, p. 425). As a result, a stronger political nature emerges, as if naming the ‘governors’ of the global governance model that permeated the 2000s.

The new perspectives, post-liberal and post-hegemonic, took into consideration the relationship between LA and the hegemonic powers of global governance, in particular, the influence of the United States. Post-liberal regionalism suggests a reaction to neo-liberal policies and the influence of the US as the hegemonic power. To José Antonio Sanahuja, one of the lead authors on post-liberal regionalism, claims that

Latin America faces a permanent “trilemma” that entails three contradictory goals: first, the defence of the nation-state and national sovereignty; second, its traditional ambitions for unionism and regional integration; and third, the search for greater autonomy at the international level. Within this impossible “trilemma,” it is possible to achieve one, or at most two of these goals, but it is not possible to achieve all three (Sanahuja, 2012, p. 1)

Post-liberal regionalism brings together intergovernmentalism and social constructivism: it suggested a framework in which a stronger nation state could make audible and hence more visible the voices of the civil society which are, in turn, charged with cultural and historical meaning. This bottom-up approach would simultaneously attach democratic features to the region and confer states’ greater autonomy on the international stage and in development policies (Sanahuja, 2012). In a reflexive text, Andrés Serbin (2013) - a promoter of post-liberalism - ponders the model’s efficiency in managing with that he calls the ‘democratic deficit’ of the previous models (closed and open). Serbin explains that post-liberalism emerged out of the ‘victories’ in rejecting a Free Trade of the Americas (ALCA), plus the emergence of UNASUR and ALBA as regions, and the ‘Pink Tide’ that coloured the region from the early 2000s. Even if simply a sign of hope against neoliberalism, the author seems unsure whether this could be expanded into other regions, i.e. those aligned with neo-liberal practices.

Equally inspired by the emergence of UNASUR and ALBA, Pía Riggiozzi proposed an account of post-hegemonic regionalism as “long-standing projects of integration and cooperation cohabit with alternative models of regional organisation that exceed the ‘old’ and ‘new’ characterisations of neoliberal regionalism” (Riggiozzi, 2012, p. 440). The model emerged of the struggle for identity and autonomy in LA, where ‘LA is reasserting new rules of regional engagement and cooperation’. Post-hegemonic also presupposes that the US was no longer hegemonic – which is a claim that is largely questionable. Furthermore, similar to the previous model, whereas post-hegemonic regionalism was useful to explain the emergence of ALBA and UNASUR, it does not account for those regional projects that are, in fact, hegemonic, such as the Pacific Alliance (Gardini, 2015).

What both post-liberalism and post-hegemonic accounts seem to allude to is the political autonomy in the region. In this respect, and taking into account Malamud (2003, 2005b)’s argument that presidential diplomacy is at the core of regionalism in LA, I will agree with Briceño-Ruiz and Hoffmann (2015) in defining post-hegemonic regionalism as a new period in LA regionalism, not a new model. At the time those theoretical constructs emerged, the main actors in the regions belonged to Left-Wing governments with a progressive agenda (Briceño Ruiz, 2010). To illustrate, by March 2019, half of the members of UNASUR left or suspended their membership. Such a change can be considered as the outcome of a shift in the wider political economy of the region, in which conservative right-wing governments replaced the ‘Pink Tide’. As a consequence, the current agenda for regionalisms has a different positioning with regards to hegemony and autonomy than the previous governments did – once again, the work of presidential diplomacy.

Modular regionalism is Gardini’s own contribution to the analytical framework of LA regionalisms (2015, 2016, n.d.). He proposes a theoretical and applied framework for the analysis of regional cooperation that tackles two aspects missing in the previous models: a temporal perspective of both past (historical context) and future (predictability), and a policy-dimension (favouring modules/ projects as a way to alleviate complexity). It gives a greater role to its actors as ‘governors’ of the region-making process at the same time. This is indeed when the *modular* is defined – “the actors at the table at any one time will shift according to

the issue at hand” (p. 221). The goal is to combine a strong descriptive with a plausible and pluralist explanatory element<sup>46</sup>.

More importantly, in developing his approach, Gardini suggests that region-making in LA has, in fact, a double nature: the concepts of *cooperation* and *integration* have different meanings and purposes. Building on Hurrell’s work, Gardini explains that:

Cooperation comprises intergovernmental agreements or regimes that may entail the creation of formal institutions or may be based on much looser structures, involving a pattern of regular meetings with some rules attached. Integration is a sub-category of cooperation that involves specific policy decisions designed to reduce or remove barriers to the mutual exchange of goods, services, capital, and people (Gardini, 2015, pp. 225–226)

If accepting the distinction made by Gardini above and combining it with Hameiri’s idea of political geography plus state theory, it would be possible to view *regional cooperation* as region-building at the supranational scale, where little is perceived at the national scale. Alternatively, *regional integration* would imply both sectoral normative and regulatory changes that would also be embedded in the national level. If that is to be the case, what does this reveal about theorising and explaining LA? And, to what extent can we call both goals region-building? Apart from the elements already discussed – a community of sentiment and the region’s relationship with hegemony – having two natures might define which actors get engaged, and the complexity of the mechanisms to be established, as well as the level of authority and legitimacy a region will accept. Considering that a region, such as Mercosur, may not wish to integrate but to *cooperate*, could it mean that regional cooperation is fated to always having little legitimacy? Gardini does not provide an answer to this question but he does trigger my curiosity to explore this avenue of thinking further.

## 2.4 Mercosur: what you see is not always what you get

“What you see in Mercosur is not always, and not necessarily, what you actually get” warned Gian Luca Gardini (2011, p. 683). And yet, as one exemplary of LA Regionalisms built under the ‘new/open’ regionalism paradigm, “Mercosur is arguably the most successful

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<sup>46</sup> Modular regionalism is built in four dimensions. A *descriptive* one aims to capture the diversity of actors and modules (projects). The *analytical* will offer details of the structure of the regional relations in order to explain region-building. Gardini recognises this is the weakest dimension proposed in the text. A *predictive* dimension intends to project interactions between LA actors in issues-based discussion in order to manage complexity. Finally, a *prescriptive* dimension

and ambitious example of regional integration in Latin America” (Gardini, 2011, pp. 683–684; Malamud, 2010). Yes – there is confusion of how the region is perceived. In this contradiction (inconsistent x successful), what are Mercosur’s main features?

Mercosur is an intergovernmental regional organisation between five countries: Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela. Bolivia is in process of acquiring full membership. It also has Associate Members<sup>47</sup> - Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Guyana and Suriname - who join specific sectoral projects<sup>48</sup>. Sometimes defined as a ‘trade agreement’ (McGinn, 1993) or an economic integration agreement (Verger & Hermo, 2010), Mercosur was intended to be a common market – *Common Market of the South* - under the umbrella of open -sometimes referred to as strategic - regionalism<sup>49</sup> (Bizzozero Revelez, 2012; Briceño Ruiz, 2011; Riggirozzi, 2012a). The Treaty of Asunción (MERCOSUR, 1991) is the document that originated the region as a customs union with the expectation of a common market to be implemented within four years. In 1994, the Protocol of Ouro Preto (MERCOSUR, 1994) did more than establishing the region as a legal entity: it expanded its institutional basis and gave it a structure which is still accurate today<sup>50</sup>.

The emergence of Mercosur in 1991 was considered to be “the result of the structuring of the world which does not leave us any alternative” (Uruguay, 1992a, p. 5). The claim, although helpless in tone, offers an entry point into the historical context, in line with the literature review above. It is embedded in the context of the late eighties and early

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<sup>47</sup> To become an Associate Member, countries must be affiliated with the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI) and sign a trade agreement with Mercosur. Once the application to Mercosur is approved, associates are able to join the sectoral meetings, such as Education. ALADI was established in 1980 as a project to create a free trade area in LA. It succeeds the Latin America Free Trade Agreement (LAFTA).

<sup>48</sup> The fact that Guyana and Suriname have become Associate Members in 2013 raise important questions about Mercosur’s regional strategy in the continent. For all South American countries are somehow connected to Mercosur. All 12 countries are also members of the Union of South American countries (UNASUR), it is to be seen how will both regions negotiate, align or diversify their goals

<sup>49</sup> Although there is a difference to be made between open and strategic regionalism, I take that both models to assume that states have multiple interests to cooperate. Briceño Ruiz (2011) and Bizzozero Revelez (2012) offer a theoretical debate about the differences between the models.

<sup>50</sup> The two most important structures are the Council of the Common Market (CMC) and the Group of the Common Market (GMC). The CMC is the highest decision-making body in the region. Its role is to conduct the political project in line with the Treaty of Asunción, a role performed by the ministers of External Relations (or Foreign Affairs) and of Economy. The CMC meets once a semester with the participation of the heads of States. It relies on the Sectoral Meeting of Ministers (such as Education) for decision-making. As with every Mercosur instance, CMC’s ‘Decisions’ are made by consensus and are expected to become national law in the Member States. The Group of the Common Market (GMC) acts as the executive body of Mercosur. Its role is to ensure the implementation of the Council’s ‘Decisions’. Five representatives per Member State compose the Group, including the ministers of External Relations (Foreign Affairs), Economics and the heads of the National Banks. GMC meets twice a semester. Its decisions are published as ‘Resolutions’, which are also expected to be obligatory for the Member States. There are other sectors, yet they have less importance to what concern the social projects.

nineties when a new wave of regional projects emerged in hand with, and as a consequence of, the changes in the global world order (Börzel, Goltermann, Lohaus, & Striebinger, 2012).

A series of historical events contributed to the emergence of Mercosur. Created under the pillars of “economic development and social justice” (MERCOSUR, 1991, p. 1), Mercosur aimed to promote regional cooperation to manage external (global) competition on the global market for goods and services (Schirm, 2002). Different rationales explain this background. First, the political efforts to settle the long-term dispute between Brazil and Argentina over political and economic power in South America (Gomes, Robertson, Dale, & Alfredo M. Gomes, 2012; Gómez-Mera, 2013; Perrotta, 2013; Schirm, 2002)<sup>51</sup>. Second, the outcome of almost a century of failed attempts to set up an economic regional organisation in LA, dated from the early Twentieth century (Azevedo, 2014), which was inspired somewhat by Simon Bolivar’s cultural regional project from the Nineteenth Century (Barbiero & Chalout, 2001). The third rationale accounts for the flourishing of regional blocs in the early 1990s, propelled by the neoliberal reforms when several trade blocs started to proliferate around the globe as part of a new world order emerging- where new borders, states and identities were created or reshaped (Hettne, 2005; Hettne & Söderbaum, 2000; Thakur & Van Langenhove, 2008).

Understanding the region’s struggles with power asymmetries and hegemony can help understand Mercosur and its foundations. Uruguayan academics Rodrigo Arocena and Gerardo Caetano (2011) describe the Plata region, an informal region where Mercosur is located in South America, as having a *bipolar configuration*. On the one hand, the two largest countries in the region, Argentina and Brazil<sup>52</sup>, form a hegemonic pole (*‘polo hegemónico’*).

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<sup>51</sup> Friedrich and Guimarães (2015) contend that the process of integration in the Cono Sur area depended almost exclusively on the resolution of the political conflict between Brazil and Argentina. The positions of rivalry, competition over the hegemony on the La Plata River, and energy use of the water in the Plata River, problem has been one of hegemony, too. Therefore, Mercosur is both the Cono Sur’s most successful integration agreement, as well as the culmination of Argentina-Brazil historical relations. Schirm (2002, p.108) affirms that neither Uruguay nor Paraguay were relevant in the proposal of the agreement or in the writing of the document, as its text was entirely decided by Brazil and Argentina.

<sup>52</sup> It is important here to highlight that Brazil has shown historical intentions of positioning itself as a hegemon nation in LA since the turn of the Nineteenth century (Bueno, Ramanzini Júnior, & Vigevani, 2014). The first strategy adopted was a trilateral agreement with Argentina and Chile, called the ‘ABC’. Although the proposal has been refuted by Argentina, and the relationship later deteriorated, scholars have claimed that the Brazilian vouch for regional leadership continues (Kellogg, 2007). Nonetheless, it depends on a working relationship with Argentina. In the 1990s, the spark for the two countries to sit down and talk was less about economic integration and more about security and political dominance in the Cono Sur region. The countries’ persistent hegemonic and strategic military rivalry reached new levels over nuclear energy disputes (O. M. de Oliveira, 1998). The talks between Argentina’s Raul Alfonsín and Brazil’s José Sarney in Brazil led to the signature of the Programme for Integration and Economic Cooperation (*Programa de Integração e Cooperação Econômica*, PICE), in 1986, which aimed at ensuring pacific integration themes of nuclear technology, as well as a constitution of a market for the Cono Sur. As a result (or spillover, in neofunctionalist fashion), the renewed relationship between the two countries gave end to a ‘romantic’ period into action: the ideal of integration could actually materialise. It culminated with the inclusion of the goal for economic, political, social and cultural of Latin American peoples’ being added to the 1988 Brazilian Constitution

Their competition for regional leadership shaped much of the historical development in the region, culminating in the signature of Mercosur. On the other, Paraguay, Uruguay and Bolivia sit around, or at the border, of the large hegemonies, thus composing a border zone (*'zona de frontera'*). Furthermore, as polarising hegemonies, Argentina and Brazil maintain a disproportionate share of power, as the authors explain:

...in spite of the tenacious in some cases irreversible asymmetries between the *hegemonic pole* and the countries from the *border zone* in the territory of the Plata basin, to the latter it has corresponded, and it still corresponds, to a transcendent role in the direction of the region. Without them, or against them, although united, the historical perspective seems to indicate that the two large ones cannot settle their conflicts and even less give governability to the *Cono Sur* region, with the multiple implications that it involves. However, as Mercosur's 20 years of history show, to the two regional giants it has cost and still cost to apply this geopolitical logic. The difficulties and the tardiness for the recognition of the asymmetries as a decisive factor in the process of regional integration reveal Argentina and Brazil's long reluctance in considering their smaller neighbours and take on the costs – the *investments*, should be said – of leadership (Arocena & Caetano, 2011, p. 31).

For the Uruguayan experts, therefore, acknowledging the bipolarity of the Mercosur region is crucial to understand the geopolitical dynamic in the Plata region. The consequences of the historical tensions are reflected in its governance and economic performance.

In addition to its intergovernmental features – already discussed in this Chapter, Mercosur's governance is firmly based on consensus. The importance of giving all members the same power of vote or of veto has historical roots. As Miranda explains, "...negotiation and compromise are two important pillars in the democratic game, unknown in the domestic life of most Latin American states, accustomed to imposition and confrontation, to the detriment of dissent and diversity" (Miranda, 1999, p. 1). Consensus, therefore, has a bigger role than being a governance style for the region; it is a reaffirmation of democratic values within the Member States. That does not mean that there are no power imbalances in the region, as Arocena and Caetano have pointed out above, but the chance of veto as a possibility for the smaller partners, Paraguay and Uruguay, can be seen as a positive democratic practice in Mercosur.

As a trade agreement (economic project), Mercosur broadly envisaged to create economic interdependence in the internal markets, consolidate joint trade policies to stimulate

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(Herrera, 2016; Hurrell, 1995a). These events, apparently tangential, had a direct influence in the launch of Mercosur in 1991.

intra-bloc trade, promote GDP growth as well as a joint strategy to tackle external markets and take part in global trade (Gómez-Mera, 2009; Gräf & Azevedo, 2013, p. 136). The process of creating the economic project has not been linear. Renato Baumann (2011) analysed the economic development of the first 20 years of Mercosur. He concludes that, although the growth levels in all individual countries is relatively modest, Mercosur has allowed the increase in external trade over time. In Table 2.2 I update Baumann (2011, p. 176)'s analysis of average GDP growth in the Mercosur Member States to illustrate his first argument of the modest impact of Mercosur in the economic growth of its Member States.

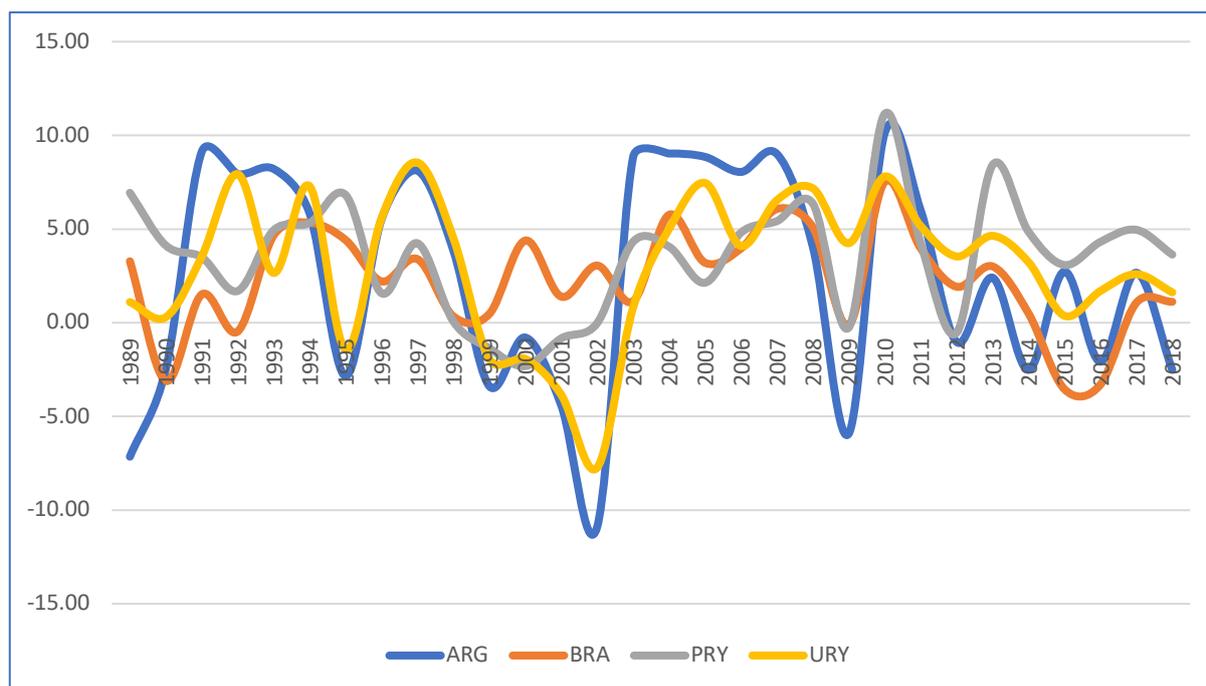
*Table 2.2 Mercosur Countries' GDP Growth (annual %)*

	1990-1995	1996-2000	2001-2005	2006-2010	2011-2015	2016-2018	1990-2018
<b>Argentina</b>	4.30	2.66	2.28	5.06	1.52	-0.64	2.81
<b>Brazil</b>	2.06	2.16	2.91	4.51	1.17	-0.37	2.24
<b>Paraguay</b>	4.40	0.44	1.93	5.49	4.01	4.30	3.4
<b>Uruguay</b>	3.38	2.96	0.34	5.97	3.39	1.97	3.08

Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators, 2019, Baumann (2011).

The information presented in Table 2.2 hides an important variation in the percentage growth of the Member States in each period. Using UN Comtrade data, Figure 2.2 offers a breakdown of the regional instability along the years. Such a variation, particularly in Argentina, becomes important for the analysis of the development of the Education Sector (Section II). As Chapters 6 and 7 will detail, both the highpoint of economic growth in 1997 and the sharp decline in 2001 respectively coincide with important changes in the course of the HE project.

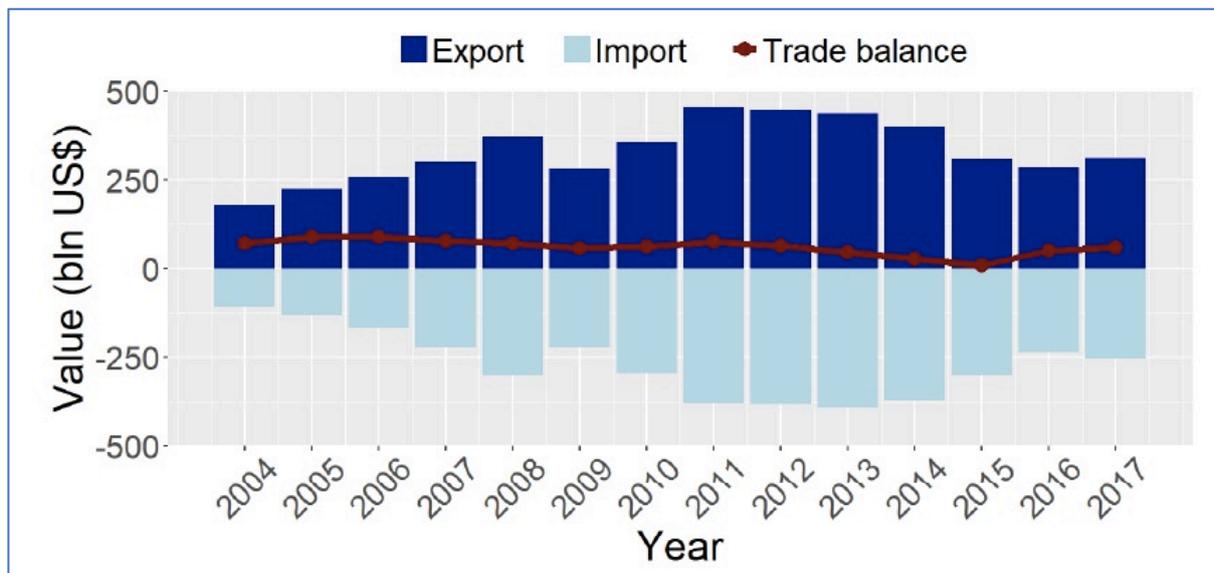
Figure 2.2 Mercosur countries' GDP variation per year (% , Constant 2010 US\$)



Source: UN Comtrade, 2019.

Baumann also posited that Mercosur enabled the region's external trade to increase over time. Gräf and Azevedo (2013) explain there was a significant growth in the bloc's exports in the mid-1990s, when intra-regional trade represented 25% of the total of the region's exports. After 1998, however, the growth of extra-regional exports caused a loss of representativeness in Mercosur's intra-bloc trade. This can be explained, for instance, by the growing reduction of protectionist trade barriers for non-members of the blocs (Carrère, 2006), a feature of the military regimes in LA in the second half of the last century. Recent analysis of Mercosur's trade in 2016-2017 indicates the expansion of external trade continues to be true in the development of Mercosur's economic project. Figure 2.3. shows the historical evolution of the trade balance of Mercosur exports and imports from 2004 until 2017 (UN Comtrade, 2019, p. 52). The fact that the trade balance is positive throughout the years indicates the author's claim that the external trade overpowered the internal market in Mercosur.

Figure 2.3 Mercosur Trade Balance (2004-2017)

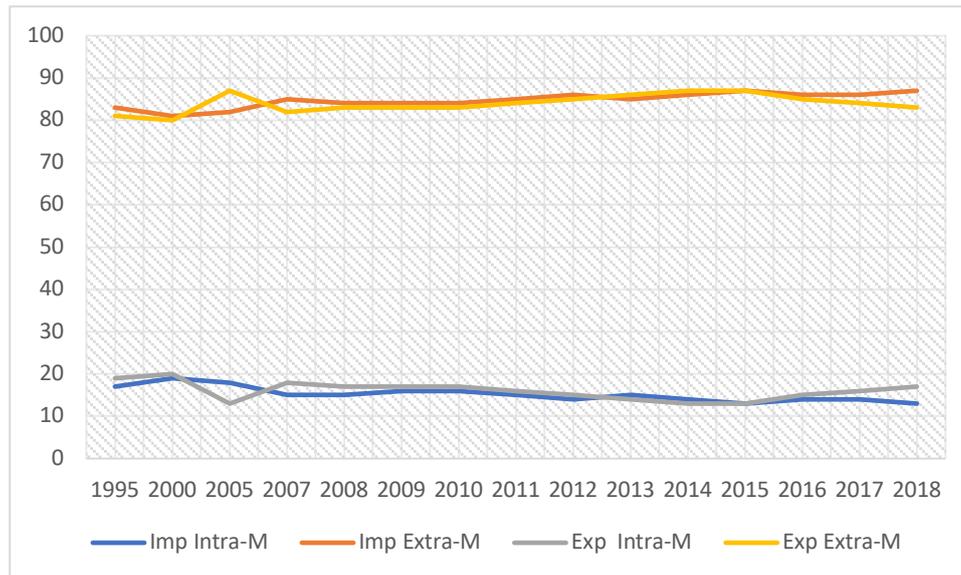


Source: UN Comtrade (2019, p. 52)

Given this active trade balance, it is appropriate to explore whether Mercosur was in fact a condition for this economic activity. In other words, I am looking to explore, even if lightly, the impact of Mercosur’s economic project for its Member States. Laura Gómez-Mera (2009) explains how a region’s level of economic interdependence can be measured in terms of the “value of intra-bloc trade as a percentage of the value total trade conducted by all members” (Gómez-Mera, 2009, p. 748), also known as trade encapsulation. Data from UN Comtrade and the official data from Mercosur<sup>53</sup> show that the level of interdependence remains stable under 20% of the total import and export trade operations amongst Mercosur countries for almost decades (Figure 2.4). A recent CEPAL (2018a) report on Mercosur trade indicates Paraguay has the largest interdependence of Mercosur for trade. In 2016-2017, 45% of the country’s exports were destined to Mercosur markets; it also imported 35% of its good from its neighbours. Brazil is the country that imports less from Mercosur countries (8%), whereas Venezuela is the member that find Mercosur’s markets to be less attractive – alternatively, other Mercosur members are less interested in Venezuela’s products – for it exports only 2% of its products to the region. The EU is the main market for Mercosur imports, whereas the ‘rest of Asia’ (Asian countries except China) are the main destination of the good produced in the region.

<sup>53</sup> The official Mercosur Website (<https://estadisticas.mercosur.int>) offers the data from 2007-2019. To create the data for the intervals 1995-2000 – 2005, I used data available at UN Comtrade. Data on Venezuela’s trade was not available for all the periods analysed in none of the data sources, therefore Figure 2.4 presented information only for Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay.

Figure 2.4 Mercosur: Level of economic interdependence (1995-2018)



Source: Data from UN Contrade (1995-2005) and Mercosur website (2007-2018)

Figure 2.4 also shows that, from 2000, Mercosur started to show signs of decline in its intra-bloc trade negotiations. According to Roberto Bouzas, key actors – whom I assume to be Argentina and Brazil – showed increased frustration with the evolution of the region due to the “...growing evidence of divergent interests and perceptions among the governments of the member countries, and the progressive ineffectiveness of politics as an instrument for managing emerging divergences” (Bouzas, 2002, p. 3). To Gerardo Caetano (2011), it was the inability of the Members States to keep up with the proposals of Mercosur which generated a discussion about the integration model and its main delineations. As I will further elaborate in Chapter 7, the hegemonic dispute between Brazil and Argentina, and a series of economic and social crises in all Mercosur countries led to the relaunch of Mercosur. The aim was to change the course of its regional development. The relaunch aimed to strengthen the Customs Union and to move towards accessibility to markets in the intra-regional exports, as well as to resolve conflicts arising from the external relationships of the bloc. As a consequence, a *political* dimension was introduced, triggering “a process of convergence between member countries designed to construct not only a tighter economic unit but also a political unit and a distinct subregional identity” (Phillips, 2001, p. 574).

As a consequence of the relaunch, in late 2000, several innovations were proposed in order to manage the national and regional difficulties, such as: unrestricted access to Member

States' internal markets (MERCOSUR/CMC, 2000b), a process for Member States to incorporate regional decision (MERCOSUR/CMC, 2000a), and a regional approach to foreign relations (MERCOSUR/CMC, 2000c). A key aspect was the approval of Decision 32/2000, which stipulated that all external relations (commercial or otherwise) involving Mercosur states must be carried out on behalf of the region, preventing individual Member States to establish bilateral agreements. It can be assumed that the results of trading as a bloc has not only opened markets for the participation of the region's smaller economies (Baumann, 2011), but also contributed to the positive trade balance since 2004, as shown in Figure 2.3 above.

In terms of its institutional design, Mercosur is often credited with being inspired by the EU experience. Even if not planning to have the same supranational institutions as the EU does, it did include sectors and policies similar to the EU. Examples are the Mercosur Residency Agreement, in which citizens can live in work other countries in the region (Baraldi, 2014; Presidência da República, 2009), and the student mobility project, which will be analysed in the following Chapter of this thesis. This type of mimicking is not without problems, and these are mostly due to the differences in institutional design which limit the implementation of EU-inspired ideas in Mercosur<sup>54</sup>. Kleinschmidt and Gallego Pere defined the practice as a 'Eurocentric ontology':

Mercosur has therefore demonstrated the limits of "institutional mimesis", as the process has been aptly called, stopping far short of the political and legal supranationalism that characterizes the EU and its parliamentary component, and does apparently not seek to replicate it despite repeated claims to the contrary (Dri 2010). Its institutional deepening is now often considered to have stalled (Kleinschmidt & Gallego Pérez, 2017, p. 4).

Although the region took off as an economic and political project, socially oriented projects were also introduced over the years that followed. Most projects started after 2001, when a new phase in the trade agreement was installed. This was due to the election of new governments with a 'Leftist' orientation, or the Pink tide (not too much towards the Left, as Bianculli (2018) argues) took power in most of the Member States: Lula da Silva in Brazil, the Kirchners (Néstor and Cristina) in Argentina, José Pepe Mujica in Uruguay, and Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. This political shift to the left has been understood as the main reason for the renewed mission of the regional organisation. In doing so, it moved Mercosur from a

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<sup>54</sup> Mercosur's student mobility project, inspired in the EU's Erasmus mobility scheme, took almost 20 years to be implemented. Details of why this happened are offered in Chapter 8.

focus on primarily trade liberalisation, to more socially-oriented projects (Perrotta, 2013, 2014).

Neither the 2001 relaunch nor the insertion of a broader political and social agenda were able to ease the frustrations generated by Mercosur. By its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2006, Mercosur was deemed a ‘failure’: a case for *magical realism combined with presidential diplomacy* (Malamud, 2004)<sup>55</sup>. As the region celebrated 25 years in 2016, its institutional developments continued to be problematic (Verger & Hermo, 2010). Institutionally, when compared to the European Union (who signed the Treaty of Maastricht in the same period, 1992), the aforementioned lack of regional coordinating institutions could potentially be responsible for the slow process of region-building. It could be argued that the lack of coordinating institutions results in a low level of sectoral autonomy, and a diffuse capacity building to ensure the continuity of the projects across time – in other words, a lack of legitimacy (Gornitzka, 2006). How this governance model impacts Mercosur’s Education Sector is a key question addressed in the empirical phase of this thesis.

If accepting that Mercosur has so many issues, what would be the perceived role of education in shaping the region? Alluding to neo-functional arguments, Malamud cites education and justice as being a ‘spillover’ in the integration process (Malamud, 2005a). José Briceño Ruiz (2011, p. 142) cites SEM as the initiative that introduced the social dimension into Mercosur – even if happening “on the margins or parallel” to Mercosur’s political economic project. Other authors hardly mention education as a sectoral mechanism in the shaping of Mercosur at all. Such positioning reflects what has been raised in the Introduction of this thesis: there is very little knowledge of the role of educational processes in the shaping of this region. This remark is to be contested, for, as I will argue, different regionalising projects have different understandings of and expectations for the role of the Education Sector as a tool for region-making.

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<sup>55</sup> As with this example, other authors have criticised the region. Criticisms come from the groups of ‘sceptics’ and the ‘supporters’ (Gardini, 2015). Malamud has been a sceptic, with adjectives that includes ‘inertia and cognitive dissonance’; “conventional political discourse reflects the expectations of its speakers rather than the real world” (Malamud, 2005a, p. 422). To many of its “supporters”, Mercosur is not simply an economic association or a strategic instrument, but rather a supranational identity that provides its member countries with the only way to survive in a globalising world (Gardini, 2015)

## 2.5 Conclusion

This Chapter aimed to introduce the theoretical devices to establish the first part of the argument of the thesis – that HE projects are constructed and shaped by their relationship with the broader region-making processes they are a part of, as suggested by Robertson and colleagues (Robertson et al., 2016). I have sketched out an overview of region-making processes as they have been analysed more widely, and in relation to LA.

Looking at regions as expressions of global governance processes, I sought to lay out what will become important theoretical considerations for this thesis. Following Paul Cammack's proposition that regions cannot be 'sensibly squeezed' into a unique model, I conclude that there can be no 'one size fits all' approach to analyse region-building. At its most general, regions are defined as territorially based dynamic social organisations that shape and are shaped by the historical context within which they are inserted in. Accepting Haimeiri's invitation to consider the spatiality of region-making as part of its political project to establish specific forms of political rule, we might then conclude that regionalism expressions depend on their spatial, cultural, economic and political dimensions at any point in time, and will be necessarily variegated given that different processes can have different outcomes. What it means for my analysis here is to assume that Mercosur must be examined with regards to the type of outcomes, mechanisms and strategies emerged along its almost three decades of existence.

Benefiting from Gian Carlo Gardini's efforts to explain LA regionalisms, a key conclusion of this Chapter is that the conceptual and theoretical grounds for the analysis of LAn regionalisms is a complex arena to explore. Nonetheless, I will argue that there are a few common elements which appear in one way or another in most LA regions. The first is a *history of power struggles in relation to hegemonic rule*, in particular in relation to European colonisers and the United States. This is made visible by the use of terminology such as 'post'- and 'counter-hegemonic' accounts of regionalism. Second, the *historical collective imaginary for regional integration* from Bolívar's time remains an argument for understanding LA region-building until today. Arjun Appadurai's concept of 'community of sentiment' (Appadurai, 1996) is useful to think of the effects of how societies are capable of moving from shared imagination to collective action. A third and final insight refers to the dynamic feature of LA regions. It is not unusual for LA countries to join and leave regions or take part in regions with conflicting, and the examples of Mercosur and Unasur. This feature

of '*shifting geometries*' *shapes new spaces* and therefore redefines the social relations within regions.

The chapter also explored the features of the Mercosur as a regional organisation. With the aid of descriptive economics, the chapter concluded with a review of the trade agreement's main features in terms of its political and economic project. It laid out a few historical events which will be revisited in Section II's discussion of the education project. The question remains then as to how researchers have understood the role of HE in the process of region building more generally, and in Mercosur more specifically. The following Chapter picks up this issue.

## 3 REGIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION

### 3.1 Introduction

This Chapter presents another step towards sculpting the argument for the *relational* nature of the dynamics shaping Mercosur higher education (HE) Sector and Mercosur as a region. It presupposes HE and HE regionalisms to be the expression of global education policy movements (Olssen, Codd, & O'Neill, 2004; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). As maintained in this thesis's Introduction, Mercosur and its HE project can only exist when in relationship to each other (D. Harvey, 2006; Robertson et al., 2016). As a consequence, the social dynamics that shape them depend upon external and internal influences and the spatial and temporal context in which they happen. un

The aim of these pages is to offer a concise picture of Mercosur HE sector's state of affairs as of February 2019. Although the goal seems rather straight-forward, the path to reach it is sinuous. I start by constructing a conceptual grammar to assist me to find my own understanding of the shape of HE regionalisms. To 'slice open' HE in Mercosur, I will borrow a set of analytical lenses from critical education policy analysis (Dale & Robertson, 2012; Olssen et al., 2004; M. Simons, Olssen, & Peters, 2009). Apart from accommodating the spatial notions into the analysis of HE projects, such a framework will prompt me to move from looking at HE as a 'system' to looking at HE as 'ensembles' (Robertson & Dale, 2015). This is a step in the direction of abstraction guided by a set of philosophical presuppositions (critical realism) intended to show what is concrete in the system and what is invisible (to be further detailed in Chapter 4). I depart from posing descriptive-analytical questions to Mercosur HE such as: what is the nature of Mercosur HE? What activities does it currently develop? Who engages with it and in what capacity? and so on. The outcomes of this initial analysis will establish a material stepping stone from which I will be able to consider the historical evolution of the HE project: by knowing its current features, I can make use of historical and textual analysis to fulfil this thesis's objective to understand the nature and purpose of Mercosur HE, and the explanations of how its HE project became what it is over time (see Introduction, p. 28).

Before diving into the HE Sector, it is important to establish that LA is not new to experiences of regionalising HE. Although timid in their reach and unpopular as an object of study (hence understudied), regional projects have existed since the 1950.

### 3.2 Experiences of HE sectoral regionalism in Latin America

Regional co-operation at University level is essentially a form of planning the development of higher education with a view to avoiding dispersion and duplication of effort by pooling the educational resources of several countries, usually bound together by geography, language, history and civilization. (Tünnermann, 1965, p. 82)

This text emerges in 1965 when the only HE region existing in LA (and possibly in the world) is the Central American University Council<sup>56</sup>. The CSUCA emerged in September 1948 as a result of the First Congress for Central American Universities (Arriaza, 1996; CSUCA, 1987). At that time, it included all universities in Central America<sup>57</sup>. It was both a nation-building and an economic project: on the one hand, it claimed university autonomy as a reaction to the wave of military dictatorships in Central America in the 1930s<sup>58</sup>; on the other, it urged for universities to have a role in the regional development.

Carlos Tünnermann, CSUCA's Executive Secretary (1959-1964), was the young Rector of the Autonomous National University of Nicaragua. He laid out two ways 'to do' regionalism, or, to 'co-operate' in HE. One way was to forge alliances for research by having no structural changes at the national level - to which Tünnermann names 'external' cooperation. The second – and 'hardest' – was to promote internal changes, where the “the same group of institutions may wish to create an integrated system of higher education for the region as a whole; this gives rise to internal co-operation which naturally involves changes in curricula, study plans, administration, and in the very structure of academic institutions”, a “more effective means of pooling resources and introducing new educational concepts” (Tünnermann, 1965, p. 82). Academic networks and structural changes, the two paths into regional cooperation Tünnermann listed in 1965, are today key words in the vocabulary of regional cooperation and internationalisation of HE.

Note again that Tünnermann writes from 1965. There was not a conceptual grammar in place to describe this project as a form of internationalisation of HE, neither one to link the

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<sup>56</sup> The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) emerges in 1967 (SEAMEO RIHED, 2012).

<sup>57</sup> University of San Carlos de Guatemala (1676); National Autonomous University of Nicaragua (1811); University of El Salvador (1841); Autonomous University of Honduras (1847); University of Costa Rica (1940); University of Panamá (1935). The Zamorano Agriculture School was founded in 1942 in Honduras. Although called a 'university', it functions like a specialised HE institution.

<sup>58</sup> There were four dictatorships in the region: Tiburcio Carías in Honduras (1933-1946); Maximiliano Hernández in El Salvador (1931-1944), Anastasio Somoza García (1936-1956) and Jorge Ubico ruled Nicaragua and Guatemala (1931-1944) respectively.

nature of CSUCA as a case of a HE regional organisation. And yet, Tünnemann moves on in his attempt to make sense of his experience:

regional cooperation can also lead to establishment of special schools or courses which could not be justified on a purely national basis, and to a kind of “academic common market” in which teachers, research workers and students move freely between the universities” (Tünnemann, 1965, p. 82).

This early reference to an ‘academic market’ in the mid-1960’s is unique and fascinating; particularly after knowing what we know about market-making in HE today (Azevedo, 2015a; Komljenovic & Robertson, 2016; Olssen & Peters, 2005b; Slaughter & Leslie, 2001)<sup>59</sup>. Yet, it is possible to see such a terminology referring to regional HE again in the early 1993, a bit further South in Brazil. The place and year of this example offers a good transition into the history of Mercosur HE, and the absences in the SEM.

In November 1993, the Federal University of Porto Alegre (UFRGS) hosted an international academic seminar about the role of universities in Mercosur. A group of UFRGS academics started to articulate events and research groups as early as 1989 to understand the upcoming changes (Morosini & Leite, 1992). As a result of the 1993 Seminar, a “Letter of Porto Alegre” was proposed (Morosini, Neves, & Franco, 1994). This Communiqué listed the ‘possible and wishful’ conditions for an ‘academic common market’ in Mercosur to emerge as a consequence of the new region launched in 1991<sup>60</sup>.

The text of the 1994 Letter, in as much as the papers published in the 1992 book with contributions from Argentinean, Uruguayan and Paraguayan scholars (Morosini & Leite, 1992), offers an insight into the expectations for regionalism at the time. The texts depict the political economy of the participating states, the possibilities for regional (academic) integration and the risk of meeting inequalities along the way, due to the authors’ awareness of the discrepancies of the HE systems of the time. It demonstrates a mix of musing about the future with a strong account of the political economy of the region. What is more, it reveals concerns that are became part of SEM’s concerns along the years: academic mobility, quality

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<sup>59</sup> I am aware that there is so much to be said about the politics of knowledge and the invisibility knowledge production in the Global South (Bhambra, 2014; Connell, 2007, 2014; Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2005). And yet I made the decision to reserve the development of my ideas on these aspects to a different place, for matters of space only. By bringing to light experiences of LA in this work, in their own difficulties, complexity and partialities, I hope to open a new research avenue for future work.

<sup>60</sup> This text is no explored as part of the analysis (next section) for it is believed to have had no influence in the shaping of SEM because it is not mentioned in the SEM official documentation.

assurance, awareness of the differentiation and diversity of Mercosur, and a culture of integration (p. 304). The Letter concludes with the advice for the “participation, at the level of decision-making, of the group of researchers that have been reflecting systematically about the constitution of the Academic Common Market” (p. 306). Nonetheless, as Section II in this thesis will show, the academics’ concerns raised then did not make it to SEM and remained transparent in the official Mercosur documentation. There is no reference to the 1993 seminar or the Letter of Porto Alegre in any of the SEM official documentation and meeting minutes. Could SEM have been different had these theoretical debates been considered in the region’s development and its decision-making? It is impossible to know whether it could be a matter of the academics connecting to the Sector’s governing structures – or being heard. As I will argue in Chapter 5, the involvement of the academics is one of the absences in the shaping of SEM.

As the historical review has shown, LA experiences with HE regionalisms pre-date, or are parallel to the development of regional projects in Asia and Europe. To think about what do these experiences mean implies looking into theoretical and conceptual frameworks of international HE regional arrangements, i.e. HE regions or even HE regionalisms.

### **3.2.1 Conceptual grammar: analysing higher education regionalisms**

In this work I define HE to be a social institution concerned primarily with knowledge creation, circulation and use (Clark, 1983; Gumport, 2007). Borrowing from critical realist, sociological and institutionalist lenses, I see institutions as relational sets of social practices<sup>61</sup> (Harré, 1993, pp. 51–53) which exist and operate in different scales, and yet maintain endogenous features influenced by their historical – path-dependent – development (Barlete, 2008; March & Olsen, 2006, 2009). The historical aspect becomes relevant in efforts to explain some organisational features of institutions; for instance, how they are said to operate guided by certain logics of appropriateness – one in which people justify what they think they should (Chappell, 2006; March & Olsen, 2009). In this line of thinking, HE ‘happens’ within a relational social world, where its external relations shape its project as much as the path-dependent traditions of its endogenous practices and relations.

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<sup>61</sup> To Rom Harré, institutions are ‘an interlocking double structure of person-as-role posers’ and ‘the social practices involving both expressive and practical aims and outcomes’ (p. 52). However, he notices that “any social entity exists not just as daily manifestations but as the habits, prejudices, beliefs, knowledge and expectations of its constituent members, and of the general public who know of it, and of the officials and functions that are related to it”(p. 53). In a way, institutions are built ‘from within’ as well as ‘from outside’.

Accepting that HE deals mostly with knowledge does not imply it is the only place where knowledge is produced, or that knowledge is understood in the same way in different places (Gumport, 2007). It also does not mean that HE's three roles mentioned above – knowledge creation, circulation and use – happen in the same way across the globe. To illustrate, in LA, the nature of HE is summarised for drawing attention to three aspects: teaching, research and 'extension' activities – the latter meaning the engagement with society, in particular the community where the university is inserted in. Such is the recognition of these three roles that countries like Paraguay, Peru and Brazil list a 'university' must assume all three roles. That means that in LA, it is the role of universities to 'circulate' knowledge by engaging with their local communities – a factor to keep in mind when looking into SEM and the national systems that compose it (to be further explored in Section II).

There is an ongoing debate about what HE is *for*: its purpose<sup>62</sup>. To summarise the debate, I have established what I understand to be the three strands. In general, HE is first seen as having a *citizenship* project, for two reasons. On the one hand, HE aims to provide a source of intellectual individual development, hence a source of freedom from an eternal present (Alfonso & Esquijarosa, 2009; Bergmark & Westman, 2016; Elexpuru Albizuri, Villardón Gallego, & de Eulate, 2013; McCabe, 2000; Oakeshott, 2004; Pritchard, 2004). On the other, it is expected to offer conditions for citizen life to happen. As such, the outcome of training (good) citizens is to build nations, as observed in the Humboldtian tradition of HE (Serrano & Capdevila, 2013; 'University Reform in Germany', 1970).

Second, the understanding of contemporary HE is as a *social justice project* focused on the analyses of HE's role in reducing or promoting social equity, i.e. in terms of ensuring access to different social groups, as well as social mobility (Balbachevsky, Sampaio, & Andrade, 2019; Brooks, McCormack, & Bhopal, 2013; Carvalho, 2015; Corbucci, 2004; Schendel & McCowan, 2016; E. Smith, 2012). This is tied to the idea that equality in education is considered to be the equivalent of achieving equality in society (Moore, 2004). Of particular academic interest is its alternative: it has been acknowledged that HE has had an important role in the selection and perpetuation of dominant elites (Castells, 2002; Santos,

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<sup>62</sup> Given my interest in the cultural, political and economic features of HE and in coherence with the ontological approach of critical realism (see next Chapter), I focus on the purpose and governance of HE. There is a large body of academic research in all areas of functioning in HE: student experience, management, economics, teaching and learning, which are not going to be developed in this work.

2008)<sup>63</sup>. More than a risk to the promotion of social justice, maintaining inequalities is also tied to the idea of promoting political and economic development, which I will address next.

Finally, as a *political economy project*, HE is connected to society in different relationships that go beyond the educational side of qualifying citizens to have an active social role. It has been argued, and expected, that HE's relationship with the political economy in different scales opens room for economic development, competition and the impact of neo-liberal policies. As a result, a competitive HE system is needed to maintain a certain level of robustness in face of external markets. Vocabularies of innovation, development, quality assurance, market-making, competitiveness, knowledge society are all common in this project and widely analysed across the world (Arim, 2011; Azevedo, 2015a; Barrow, Didou-Aupetit, & Mallea, 2003; Chandran, 2011; Komljenovic & Robertson, 2016; Olssen & Peters, 2005b; Ordorika & Lloyd, 2015).

Nowadays, what has changed refers to HE's prominent role attached to the shape of the so-called 'knowledge economy' (KE) (Dale, 2005; Olssen & Peters, 2005b; Powell & Snellman, 2004; Robertson, 2005; Temple, 2012). Knowledge economies refer to those "products and services based on knowledge-intensive activities that contribute to an accelerated pace of technological and scientific advance as well as equally rapid obsolescence" (Powell & Snellman, 2004, p. 201). Robertson (2005) explained how the KE discourse indicates a change from traditional economic models, where education and training were 'exogenous factors' to economic growth, to a new model where human capital, knowledge and technologies were essential for economic development. As such, KE depends highly on the generation and management of new knowledges and technologies, and the training of capacities able to handle this new knowledge, to promote economic development. Both functions - knowledge generation and capacity building – fall highly under the realm of the HE Sector.

It is important to note that the discourse of KE is also present in the discourse of region-building. Regional HE projects can also be seen as an expression of the knowledge economy (Dale, 2005). In many ways, what the KE is after is a robust economy, and this is in

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<sup>63</sup> French economist Thomas Piketty caused havoc by sharing some of his own ideas in 'Capital in the Twenty-First Century' (Piketty, 2013). Although placing inequality at the centre of the agenda, Piketty alluded that education has not been able to solve matters of inequality. He showed how attendance to education resulted in little social mobility. Such was the influence of Piketty's work that the *British Journal of Sociology of Education* had a special issue on the case (Moeller & Tarlau, 2016).

line with the discourse of many regions. In the making of cultural, political and economic regions, education as a Sector gains a prominent role for its ability to create shared identities and meanings, also for its part in capacity building and the flow of workers.

These three projects cross different levels of education and sectors. Examples of HE's multiple roles can be seen in the Mercosur countries. In Uruguay, Cristina Contera explains how its University of the Republic (Udelar) had an essential role in redefining the political structure of the country in the redemocratisation period after the end of the Dictatorship in 1985 (Contera, 2008). In the transition to democracy, Udelar expanded into new courses, departments, and forged relationships with the industry to support the development of the new country's new political economy. In contrast, in Paraguay, although HE was understood to have a similar nation-building goal in the form of the National University of Asunción (UNA), its role followed a different course than the one in Uruguay. Rather than filling the needs of the nation, HE, and broader educational, reforms resulted from the pressure exerted by international organisations at the local, regional and global levels (Britez, 2012)<sup>64</sup>. Paraguayan educator Martín Almada<sup>65</sup> named the persistent international intervention on Paraguay's education reforms as 'perpetuating dependency' (Almada, 1974).

### **3.2.2 Regional HE as a form of internationalisation of HE**

Regional HE can also be considered as a form of internationalisation of HE. HE internationalisation has been used to denote the expression of cross-border academic activities, such as mobility, credit transfers, joint international research, international quality assurance schemes, managed either at the national or institutional level<sup>66</sup>. In face of the increased market-making practices in HE, from the early 2000s, scholars developed concepts of internationalisation of HE as having two purposes: cooperation and competition (see the collection of texts edited by Huisman and van der Wende, 2004). This binary has been incorporated in the definitions of regional HE, too. Authors named as a 'solidary or cooperative' model versus a competition one – sometimes named transnational. The differences suggest that a 'solidary' model does not imply any market-making activities

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<sup>64</sup> I will introduce the evolution of Paraguayan HE in Chapter 7.

<sup>65</sup> Don Martín Almada is a well-known figure in the activism during Strossner's dictatorship in Paraguay. Almada was arrested and tortured many times after 1974. His wife died of a heart attack after receiving some of his bleeding nails in a handkerchief as a false proof that Almada was dead. Almada's persecution was triggered because of the critical contents of his PhD thesis. Defended in the National University of La Plata, Argentina, the thesis was sent to Asunción as part of the Military 'Condor Operation' exchange between the dictatorships in Argentina and Paraguay (Almada, 1974).

<sup>66</sup> The alternative for internationalisation would be (economic) globalisation, then believed to carry only economic and market-making connotation and purpose.

whereas the competition model does exactly that (Azevedo, 2015a; Botto, 2015b; Huisman & van der Wende, 2004).

Such a dichotomy inspired models for the analysis of regional higher education arrangements<sup>67</sup>. For instance, Jane Knight has developed a model for the analysis of solidary HE regionalisms. The ‘FOPA’ model stands for the Functional, Organisation and Political Approaches (Knight, 2013a). Knight defines regionalisation of HE as a “process of building closer collaboration and alignment among HE actors and systems within a defined area or framework called a region” (2013, p. 113). Based on neo-functionalist theory, FOPA establishes a conceptual mapping of HE regionalisation based on ‘cooperation, collaboration and partnership’ one end of the spectrum, and ‘integration and community’ on the other end. To Knight, these are not “phases of the regionalization process”, although the “continuum represents the degree of intended ‘togetherness’ or what is often labelled ‘regionalness’” (Knight, 2013a, p. 144). Inspired in Hettne’s model of regionness (see Chapter 2), the FOPA model falls on the same path as the ‘regionness’ model did: it takes the region as a rational process, where the analysis of its output and outcomes reveals its level of integration. The analytical categories cannot account nor explain for how those outcomes were produced, by whom and why. It induces to equate the ‘highest level of integration’ (‘community’) with the EU. How to account for those regions who do not want to replicate the EU model?

What I want to argue for in the analysis of Mercosur HE is that this binary of cooperation-competition is no longer helpful in understanding international activities in HE. Although a useful tool to think of the early transformations in the internationalisation of HE, the global policy movements of today require analytical tools that dislocate the state as the central unit of analysis. Frameworks such as FOPA are insufficient to deal with the number of actors and conditions HE is exposed to, and the motivations of those actors involved in making internationalisation happen. Moreover, they provide a rather ‘flat’ assessment of its denoted value: cooperation is ‘good’, competition is ‘bad’. Because I am interested in explaining Regional HE, and because I also accept that HE is the product of historical events taking place in spaces both shaped and reshaped by a series of cultural, political and economic factors, I find these two rigid categories problematic to explain regional HE (or any

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<sup>67</sup> There are other forms of analysis of regional HE arrangements. Chou and Ravinet (2016) propose a comparative model for analysis of HE governance. This model is not reviewed here for it emphasises the comparative relationship between regions, in particular with the EU. As discussed in the Introduction, this thesis does not propose a comparative analysis of Mercosur HE in light of the European experience.

other international activity in HE, for that matter). The complexities surrounding governance and decision-making are not always this clear cut. This is particularly relevant when HE finds itself, on the one hand, embedded in different spaces and scales, shaping new global knowledge hubs, nurturing multi-skilled mobile professionals, providing massive training, exposed to global rankings and, on the other, rooted in a particular political and social system that is looking to establish connections and legitimate itself within its local community - a new 'pact' (Gornitzka, Maassen, Olsen, & Stensaker, 2007; Jessop, 2005; Jessop, Brenner, & Jones, 2008; Olds & Thrift, 2008; Robertson, 2009; Sheppard, 2002).

What is more, I question whether both classifications offer a critique of the instruments of internationalisation, and its concepts. For instance, rather than claiming that 'competition is a risk' (Knight, 2013b), it would be more useful to ask *who is competing*, and *what are they competing for*, and even, *is it a risk for whom*. Value judgements over the outcomes of international activities in HE are unhelpful to explain basic premises of what makes internationalisation/ regional HE possible, such as who is benefitting, where did the ideas come from, and why. This 'flat' categorisation does not allow for analytic deepness to unveil the hidden premises of either 'competitive' or 'solidary' perceptions of regional HE. As such, I intend to move beyond this binary by suggesting a look into regional HE as a form of global education policy.

### **3.2.3 Regional HE as a reflection of global education policies**

To look at regional HE as an expression of global policies requires establishing two steppingstones. First, it means looking at changes in HE as a result of the enactment of policies. Policy is a "politically, socially, and historically contextualized practice or set of practices" (Olssen et al., 2004, p. 3). In this perspective, HE activities happen as a result of the travelling of policy ideas, in which the nation-states continue to be important, yet their role is less of *governant*, and more of a *governor* of education. Second, it means to undertake (and accept, even) that education policies are global processes of change (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Policymakers are no longer there to come up with plans, texts and regulations designed to solve burning problems; they also set the agenda, implement and influence their own arena of debate, as well as others. This is done as a result of the influences of other actors, such as international organisations (Finnemore, 1993; Mundy, 2006; Ordóñez Díaz & Rodríguez Mendoza, 2018; Rodríguez-Gómez & Alcántara, 2001; Symons, 2011), agencies, such as PISA (Grek, 2009; Grey & Morris, 2018; Robertson, 2005; Sørensen, 2017), or

corporate and other actors, such as we see with independent rankings (Amsler & Bolsmann, 2012; Lynch, 2015; Ordorika & Lloyd, 2015). Such is the interconnection at the global level that ideas travel in multiple directions (upward, outward and down). It goes without saying that HE does not escape from this complexity.

A direct consequence of the impact of globalisation in policy making in (higher) education is the changing role of the national state in education policy-making (Dale & Robertson, 2014; Olssen et al., 2004). A shift from the national government to transnational governance (Jessop, 1999) reflects the current context of education policy, in which national reforms depend on a wider context which is indeed conditioned by economic interests led by actors whose projects are advanced in different ‘scales of rule’, i.e. the supranational (EU, ASEM), or the global level (OECD’s PISA<sup>68</sup>). Scales of rule are defined as the (spatial) qualifiers for the scale division of politics (Cox, 1989, p. 1-3). Thinking about the concept of scales allows an understanding of global education processes as a problem of engagement at the level of geo-politics: if the decisions over (higher) education no longer take place at the national system level as a nodal scale, where and when are they taking place?

A multiplicity of scales dislocates the centre of decision-making from the national level (nation-state) to *somewhere else* – i.e. upwards, in the regional level, or downwards, to local levels. For Jessop, a multi-scalar governance to be effective must consider the “specific spatio-temporalities of its objects and mechanisms as well as the spatio-temporal location and horizons of action the subjects involved in its exercise” (Jessop, 2004, p.225). In thinking of the education sector, even if coordinated at the national level, it “does not necessarily imply that this is where the power of those decisions lies” (Dale and Robertson, 2014, p. 202). That is to say, that the influence of different scales may exert power on the decision-making processes within national governments which must be reflected upon in the analysis of education policymaking and governance. Rizvi and Lingard (2005) remind us, “that spatial thinking is now essential in the understanding of education policy texts as well on their processes of their production and implementation” (p. 15).

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<sup>68</sup> PISA stands for Programme for International Student Assessment, test for 15 years old to measure and compare their competencies in languages, maths and sciences. PISA is run by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD). In 2018, 79 countries and territories are set to run PISA. Website: <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/>.

### 3.2.4 Translating multi-spatial into HE

Equally pushed by the global governance project and neoliberal reforms (P. Anderson, 1999; D. Harvey, 2005), the rescaling of decision-making in the HE Sector is a key aspect in helping us understand regionalising processes. To understand decision-making entails looking at the relationship between the different scales of power and ideas, and how it affects HE practices and policymaking at different scales. In this regards, Robertson and colleagues affirm that the region

...is not only dependent on, but has ongoing effects upon, the socio-political and spatial relations between domestic economies, the (supra-national) region, and the 'extra-regional', or global. In sum, these are novel, spatial strategies deployed by the state, the region, and overlapping higher education sectoral projects (Robertson et al, 2016, p. 25).

Other dynamics are central to understanding these shifts: they include changes as a result of globalisation and the global governance of education. Both have influenced the new role of HE in the development of the knowledge economy, and the shaping of regional organisations, including trade blocs and customs unions.

Apart from being an arena for governance strategies to build a KE, education is also 'an epistemic resource for brokering regional social identities' (Robertson, 2017, p. 3). As such, we can expand the previous idea of HE as a citizenship project into considering it also as *cultural project*. A cultural project is engaged in meaning-making practices that generate common understandings within its own world (Sum & Jessop, 2013). That implies in understanding regions as being built from contextual, linguistic, and semiotic relationships to produce regional senses and meanings as outcomes; which are then produced, communicated and then reproduced by the actors in the region. Now, if looked at as a *cultural, political and economic* project, the study of (higher) education can offer many insights into regions and region building around the world.

## 3.3 Governing regional HE: from system to ensemble

In the majority of countries, HE is organised and governed largely at the national (ministries of education) and sub-national (provinces or states) levels. They are represented by HE institutions traditionally operating by offering qualifications at the post-secondary level, and by advancing science and innovation in all areas of scientific research. The idea of

a ‘system’ of education is based on the centrality of governing – national, state, municipal etc. What the system shows are the materialities of the governing, such as HE institutions, a network of institutions, academics, students, curriculum, regulations, laws and policies.

In the critical realist ontological approach, this is the empirical level; that is, the visible manifestations and outcomes of a determined system. Nonetheless, we are interested in looking at *what is not there* too: the invisible structures at work, or acting to create these changes, events and outcomes as a result of its causal structuring mechanisms (Archer et al., 2016; Sayer, 2000). Hence, the concept of a ‘system’ in this view will always offer a partial picture of the governance of HE because it does not allow for the analysis of intrinsic elements, such as power, legitimacy, culture and even ideas. To cover this gap, I draw upon the concept of ‘education ensembles’ (Robertson & Dale, 2015): as a collective construction of the social world, in which its constituent elements, or determinants – from ideas to institutions, are placed in internal relationships with one another.

In line with a critical realist approach, the framework also takes into consideration the idea of a stratified structure of reality<sup>69</sup>. An ensemble is composed of mechanisms, properties or structures which cannot all be detected at the level of experience (the empirical) (Bhaskar, 2008). To look at an ensemble means looking beyond the pieces that compose a system. i.e., going beyond description of its outcomes. It can be done, according to Robertson and Dale (2015, p. 155-156), in the course of two analytical ‘moves’. The first move aims to lay out the conditions under which (in our case) HE in Mercosur exists in four dimensions:

- cultural-historical: The cultural scripts upon which the ensemble has been constructed and mediated;
- scalar: the relationship between education and the national, or global, or regional levels where it operates;
- governing: the forms of organisation of the ensemble and its parts; and
- a political-economy: the relationship between education and the economy.

The second move is methodological: how to approach the system and explain its outcomes. Here another four analytical dimensions are presented as ‘moments’<sup>70</sup>:

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<sup>69</sup> Chapter 4, below, will explain the critical realist levels of stratification of society – real, actual, and empirical - according to critical realism.

<sup>70</sup> According to the authors, this move is largely framed by the ‘education questions’ (Dale, 2005, 2006).

- moment of education practice: details the education experiences, such as how the education works, who are the key actors, what activities are happening, when and how;
- moment of education politics: explores the relationship between policy and practice; informs how decisions are made, by whom, under what circumstances. It recognises that what happened in the education politics determines what happens in the moment of education practice;
- moment of the politics of education: analysis the relationship between policy and the wider cultural, political and economic structures, which can define the limits of the direction of education policy (and practice, as a consequence); and
- moment of educational outcomes: looks at the consequences of the dynamics of the moments above, and how they impact society. It questions what is gained, what is lost, and who the winners and losers in an ensemble are.

In sum, the analysis of an ensemble looks at eight elements:

Table 3.1 Analysis of ensembles

Conceptual move: conceptual dimensions	Methodological move: education moments
cultural-historical dimension	Moment of educational practice
political-economy dimension	Moment of education politics
scalar dimension	Moment of the politics of education
governing dimension	Moment of outcomes

Source adapter from Robertson and Dale, 2015.

These dimensions will be observed when introducing SEM below:

### 3.3.1 Education as a tool for region-making in Mercosur

Mercosur HE is part of the Mercosur Education Sector (SEM). To understand Mercosur HE it is necessary to explore not only how the Sector came about, but also the features of the national ensembles that compose the Sector.

The emergence of SEM in 1991 is due to a convergence of factors. First, as suggested in the Introduction, a group of actors in the national ministries perceived Education to have a *role in creating shared values and identities for shaping Mercosur*. Creating new meanings that reflect Mercosur would require reconnecting to common LA historical values (Argentina,

1993b; González Rissotto, 1992; Piñon, 1993; Piñon & Pulfer, 1993; Uruguay, 1992a). It also implies revisiting aspects such as LA history of integration, nation-building, shared sovereignty, disputes against hegemonies and citizenship; all of which form a cultural-historical dimension of analysis. In this, the concept of ‘citizens’ consciousness’ has permeated the official plans of SEM, even if not properly defined, as it will be shown in Chapter 5.

Second, HE brings (or was believed to bring) *in economic progress with social justice*. Increasingly in the contemporary world, HE is considered vital in providing tools to political and economic development through the shaping of knowledge economies (KE). In the making of cultural, political and economic regions, HE not only gains a prominent role for its ability to create shared identities and meanings, but also for its part in capacity building and the flow of workers, both key aspects in the so-called knowledge economy (Dale, 2005; Howells, Ramlogan, & Cheng, 2012; Robertson, 2005). This was believed to be the case with Mercosur, too. SEM was created as a tool to implement the integrationist purposes of Mercosur, but also to support in the evening of inequalities in the region. As the mission states:

SEM faces the challenge of supporting the consolidation of the bloc, promoting conditions that favour genuine economic, social and cultural integration, based on horizontality, reciprocity and solidarity.

Integration will be valid to the extent it allows countries to reverse existing inequalities in the region and in the bloc. Education is an essential tool for building the conditions favourable to realising this aspiration and to developing capacities that allow for a significant reduction the existing marginalisation and exclusion. (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 2001, p. 6).

How this integrationist mission developed over time will be addressed as emerging from the data analysis in Section II.

Third, SEM has always existed as a multi-spatial project, which inherits the dynamics of the hegemonic dispute between Argentina and Brazil (Arocena & Caetano, 2011). The weight of the two ‘hegemonic poles’ in the region adds a complex layer of negotiation at the regional level. Also, as I will discuss later on in Chapter 9, the impact of a portion of the university Sector (public universities in urban areas) creates symbolic borders that challenge the engagement of SEM with society (B. B. Bernstein, 2000; Robertson, 2011). Here, the institutional, national and regional levels co-exist in space and in spatial relation to one

another. The inter-scalar relationship between what happens at the local, national or global policy arenas may well, though it does not have to, conflict with regional goals.

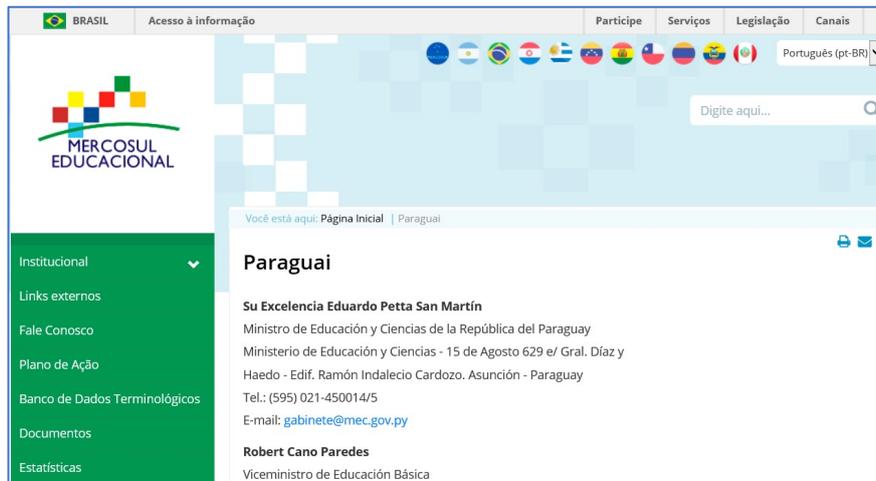
Fourth and last, SEM has a specific mode of governance. Intergovernmentalism and consensus instruments mean that decisions are taken when all of nation states' interest are at the table, and that a decision is unanimous (Lockwood Payton, 2010). It did not mean to create a supranational institution, such as the European case with the EHEA. Moreover, in this complex multi-scalar plan, it was not the intention to create a supranational institution, therefore a Sector specific technical secretariat was never created. This is fundamentally different to the decision-making experiences of other regions, such as the ASEAN, the EU, or ASEM (Dang, 2018). It neither had the goal of appropriating from other regions, such as the Bologna Process, nor did it not exist at the time (we are talking about 1991).

#### 3.3.1.1 *Education practice: what SEM is*

Mercosur's Education Sector (SEM) is the organism that coordinates and implements educational policies at the regional level. SEM was established within months of the launch of Mercosur as a region in 1991. As such, its development as the sectoral region followed the one of the region, even if education did not feature anywhere in the Treaty of Asunción. Whereas in 1992 education was seen as a *contribution* for the development of Mercosur policies, since 2006 SEM portrays itself as 'an *essential* instrument for building of an integrated education space by coordinating education policies' (Argentina, 2006, 2012, my italics).

SEM has slowly flourished from having two distinct forms and moments of governing - namely, a Meeting of Ministers supported by a Regional Committee – into a complex structure of 28 instances which mobilises 10 countries (Annex 1). From the four initial Mercosur countries, SEM now includes 6 other members: Chile, Bolivia, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. The nominal list of SEM representatives and their contact details figure in SEM's website (see Figure 3.1, below):

Figure 3.1 SEM members in the website in September 2019



Source: SEM website accessed on 02 September 2019.

The changes in the HE region's geometry with the adherence of new countries occurred in different stages along the history of SEM. Table 3.2 details the start date and the role of all participants in SEM.

Table 3.2 Participation in SEM: Member States and Associates (1991-2016)

Date	Member Country	Status within Mercosur	Participation in Educational Sector
1991	Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay	Founding Members. Paraguay was suspended in 2012-2013 <sup>71</sup> .	Founding members. Their consensus shape the course of SEM (with Venezuela).
1995	Chile	Associate Member since 1996.	Joined SEM meetings from late 1995 (CCR 04/95).
1995	Bolivia	Associate Member from 1996. In process of acquiring full membership since July 2015.	Joined SEM meetings from late 1995 (REM 08/95 and 09/96).
2003	Peru	Associate Member from late 2003.	Joined RME meetings from late 2004 (RME 02/04 and 02/05).
2004	Venezuela	Associate Member from 2004. Full member in 2012. Suspended in 2016.	Joined SEM meetings from late 2005 (RME 02/05, CCR 01/06). As full member, has power to vote and veto.
2004	Ecuador	Associate Member since 2004.	Attended first SEM in late 2005 (RME 02/05, CCR 01/06).
2004	Colombia	Associate Member since 2004.	Joined Attended first CCR meeting in mid-2006 (CCR 01/06 - RME 01/06).
2013	Guiana	Associate Member since July 2013.	Have not joined SEM's projects nor attended any meetings. Education is foreseen in the agreement (CMC 20/15).
2013	Suriname	Associate Member since July 2013.	Have not joined SEM's projects nor attended any meetings. Education is foreseen in the agreement (CMC 18/15).

Source: Elaborated by author based on official SEM meeting minutes.

Taking part in SEM meeting does not mean implementing projects. To do so, each Associate needs to sign up to each project separately to take part in activities, i.e. by signing the Memorandum that created it. As a consequence, each country is in a different stage in adhering to HE projects. SEM sees this as part of the process, rather than a problem:

We in the education Sector – it's like a train with a first-generation electric locomotive, like the AVE train, and a tail wagon that would be the steam train. So, according to the needs, the times - it doesn't happen just by itself! - sometimes the educational area of a country wants to be in the first car but doesn't have the resources, the national policy doesn't agree with this [project], the population can't make that quantitative and qualitative leap, so it's like going through different stages. And we have been able, and I say 'we have' because it is a discussion that we always have, to get everyone to join in and join in the car that corresponds to them <sup>72</sup> (Senior Manager 27, personal communication, April 12, 2017).

<sup>71</sup> Paraguay was suspended in 2012 for a year, so the country was not allowed to attend Mercosur meetings during this time.

<sup>72</sup> In the original: "Nosotros en el Sector Educativo - es como un tren con una locomotora eléctrica de primera generación, tipo el tren AVE, y un vagón de cola que sería el tren a vapor. Entonces, de acuerdo a las necesidades, los tiempos... - no pasa solo eh! - a veces el área educativa de un país quiere estar en el primer vagón pero no tiene los recursos, la política nacional no está de acuerdo a esto, la población no puede dar ese salto cuantitativo y cualitativo, entonces es como que va

Putting metaphors aside, the careful reader will notice in Table 3.2 that Mercosur has established partnerships with all countries in South America. When taking part in the region, Associate Members commit to four projects: the (mandatory) democratic clause (Ushuaia Agreement), the residency agreement, the waiver of travel documentation, and regional security. Interestingly, *the fifth most popular project the Associate Members wish to take part in is the HE accreditation project*. What does it say about what Mercosur has to offer as a region, and about the role of education? The limits of this thesis do not allow us to elaborate, but it seems that *mobility* is a point of concern for the South American countries; be it by endorsing mobility (residency, travel and academic certification), or by securing borders (security agreement).

It is not possible to understand a regional HE project without having a look at the national components that make up the region. Table 3.3 offers an overview of the SEM members.

Table 3.3 Overview of HE ensembles in SEM

Country	Argentina	Bolivia	Brazil	Chile	Colombia	Paraguay	Uruguay	Venezuela
Public HEIs	66	15	295	18	31	7	4	61
Private HEIs	64	34	2.069	42	51	47	13	93
<b>Total</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>2.364</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>154</b>
UG enrolments, public HEIs	1,491.452	440.918	1,953.145	182.727	1,194.697	70.668	145.069	1.503,344
UG enrolments, private HEIs	411.483	128.871	6,075.152	490.416	1,199.737	151.474	25.485	654,564
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,902.935</b>	<b>569.789</b>	<b>8,028.297</b>	<b>673.143</b>	<b>2,394.434</b>	<b>222.142</b>	<b>170.554</b>	<b>2.157,908</b>

Sources: Argentina: DNPU (Argentina, 2019; INDEC, 2018) - data from 2016 and 2017; Bolivia: CNUB(2018) - data from 2017; Brazil: INEP (2018) – data from 2015; Chile: CNED (2016), CRUCH and CRUCH, SUA (2019). Data from 2017. Colombia: SNIES/Min. Education (2017). Universities only: 1.513.208 students, no disclose of private/public. Data from 2017. Paraguay: CONACYT (2016); data from 2015.; Uruguay: INE (2018), MEC/DE (2019, p. 172); Venezuela: (Parra-Sandoval & Torres-Núñez, 2016).

Due to limits of space and data (see next Chapter), I will expand the analysis to the national ensembles of the four founding SEM members: Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. A profile of each HE ensemble will be introduced in Section II's Chapters.

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por distintas etapas. Y hemos podido, y digo 'hemos' porque es una discusión que siempre tenemos, lograr que cada uno se sume y se pueda incorporar en el vagón que le va correspondiendo".

### 3.3.1.2 What SEM does: HE projects

The accreditation project is one of the instruments, and a structuring mechanism, of Mercosur HE. The first regional HE projects appeared as early as 1993, with a focus on diploma recognition, accreditation and mobility (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 1993d; Uruguay, 1992b). Over the years, their shape and layers of complexity have varied as a result of the influence of the Member States' normative and regulatory restrictions (E. Larrechea & Ciancone, 2013), as well as limitations arising as a result of funding. This inching forward, or 'little advance', in SEM HE project (Azevedo, 2009) has led researchers to define it as 'inconclusive' (Botto, 2015b).

The slow pace of HE projects does not mean the lack of work. As Table 3.2 below reveals, a number of ideas has flown across almost three decades.

Table 3.4 Summary of Mercosur HE projects (1991-2017)

Date of creation	Title	Acronym	Nature of project	Theme
1993	Diploma Recognition		Working Group	Mobility
1993	Seminars, debates and conferences about courses		National projects	Knowledge-building
1993	Postgraduate issues		Working Group	Mobility and research
1997	Experimental Programme for Accreditation	MEXA	Working Group	Accreditation
2008	National Accreditation Agencies Network	ARCU-SUR		Accreditation
2010	Mobility of undergraduate students enrolled in accredited programmes	MARCA	Programme/ Working Group	Mobility
2012	Research about Higher Education in the Mercosur	NEIES	Working Group	Knowledge-building
2012	Network of Accreditation Agencies	RANA	Network	Accreditation
2012	Mercosur Integrated Mobility System	SIMercosur	Working Group	Mobility

Source: Elaborated by the author.

Here I will limit to summarise the goals of each project, given that they will be picked up later in Section II, where I will be exploring the exploring mechanisms in changing contexts over time.

I will start with the *mobility project*, which appears from the early stages of SEM, too. It aimed to developed aimed a 'citizen's consciousness' that could be favourable for the process of region-making by promote the knowledge of the ways of living of Mercosur Member States (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 1993d). The project kicked off after the

accreditation project was implemented (see Chapters 6 and 8). Nowadays there are many categories of mobility: students, staff, technical staff, researchers, and language teachers<sup>73</sup>. Further in the thesis I will detail the different categories, and highlight two mobility projects which had EU funding: the Support Programme for SEM (PASEM) and the Mercosur Mobility Programme (PMM) – one for capacity building and the second for undergraduate student mobility outside the realm of the accreditation project (see below). The need to better manage the different types of mobility schemes led SEM to establish a Technical Unit (UTE), the first SEM regional office in 2013. It will be sitting in the Mercosur headquarters in Montevideo.

A *knowledge building* project emerged with the goal to train human resources<sup>74</sup>. It focused on joint research and academic seminars that could support Mercosur's decision-making (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 1993d). There is evidence of debates of seminars, joint programmes, conferences, meeting with HE actors. Today, Later, from 2010, the preoccupation was another – of establishing common knowledge bases in the shape of academic journals and joint research and outputs. The project sits under the HE Research Nucleus, or NEIES/NEPES. NEIES coordinates one peer-reviewed journal, *Integração e Conhecimento* (Integration and Knowledge). It is still active in its 10<sup>th</sup> edition. A second journal, *Horizontes Latino-Americanos* (Latin American Horizons<sup>75</sup>), was published between 2013 and 2014. With a focus on Humanities, it had only three numbers, one of them a special edition about education policy in LA (see Figure 3.2).

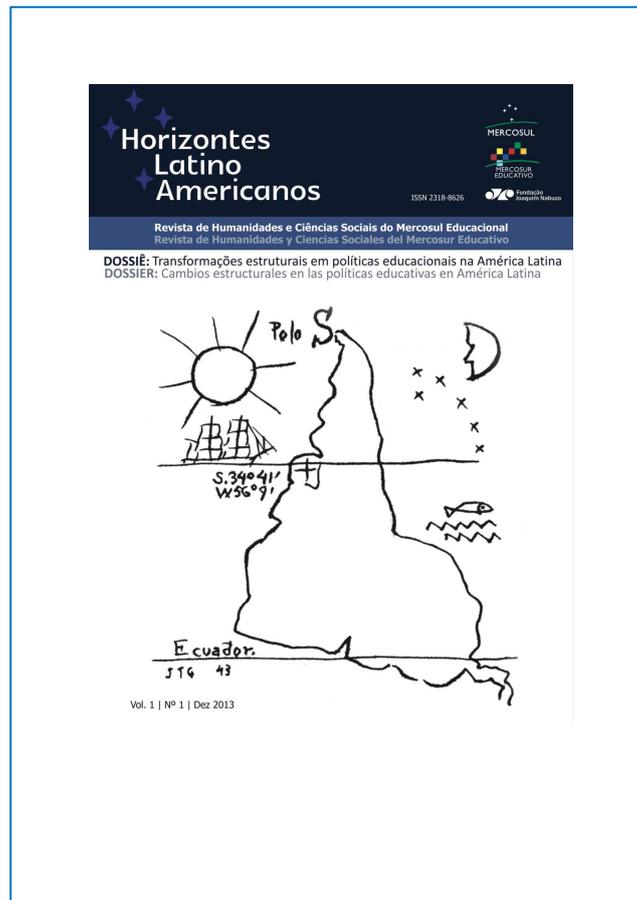
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<sup>73</sup> In all Mercosur countries, language teacher training takes place in HE institutions.

<sup>74</sup> My position will diverge slightly from Perrotta (2016) when she establishes that what I am naming here 'knowledge production' she called institutional cooperation. I find all SEM projects to be of institutional cooperation. What I will focus on is *what emerges when they cooperate*: an effort, or project, for accreditation, for mobility for knowledge production etc.

<sup>75</sup> The complete editions of Horizontes is available at: <https://periodicos.fundaj.gov.br/HLA/issue/archive>.

Figure 3.2 SEM journal: Horizontes Latino-Americanos (2013)



Source: Horizontes' Homepage.

The *accreditation project* aims to establish a standard of quality for selected undergraduate degrees developed in SEM members. It has been widely researched during the past 15 years (see Introduction, p. 24). At the most basic level, the accreditation project intends to foster trust among the members (Azevedo, 2009). After 10 years in the making, the project is now implemented through a network of national accreditation agencies (RANA), that is linked to the CHE.

### 3.3.1.3 How SEM operates: governance

Ideally, to manage a regional sector it is expected an organisational structure and a stable budget. In the case of SEM, this is partly the reality. In 1991, the Sector created a two-stage governance structure, with the meeting of Ministers of Education (RME), and the Regional Committee (CCR) that advises the Ministers in their decision-making<sup>76</sup>. It now has

<sup>76</sup> In 1992, CCR had a total of 12 members, three per Member State.

a longer network that includes all levels of education, but also working groups (WG) that occupy with transversal matters such as Linguistic Policies (CAPL), the Education Fund (CAFEM), and the SEM Information Systems (CGSI)<sup>77</sup>. These are presented in Annex 2. Each of the instances meets at least once a semester, hosted by the Mercosur's Pro-Tempore Presidencies (PPTs). The coordination of all meetings rests on the Ministry of Education that has the PPT, under the responsibility of the CCR representative. This means that when Uruguay holds Mercosur's PPTU<sup>78</sup>, the Uruguayan Ministry of Education has a very busy semester. Given that SEM has 28 instances, a minimum of 28 meetings are expected to happen per semester – the CCR meets twice a semester (MERCOSUR/CMC, 2017). These can happen either face to face (at the country that has the PPT) or via videoconference. While most meetings are still face to face, there is an increase call for holding videoconferences as a way to cut costs.

Who attends SEM meetings and make decisions about the region? Each participating Ministry of Education designates officials to lead on different Commissions and projects. At last one representative per country is expected to attend the meetings (MERCOSUR/CMC, 2017). This means to say that SEM engages at least 28 delegates at any given time per country. The name and positions of the representatives of each SEM Sector is openly available in the SEM webpage. The group engaged in SEM varies. Whether their relationship with the Ministry of Education they represent is of a career bureaucrat, or an adviser invited for the job, there is variation on their longevity in carrying out SEM activities. The interviews I conducted revealed that some countries, such as Argentina and Uruguay, managed to have a more stable representation, whereas Brazil and Paraguay have period of intense rotation of staff. As a consequence, the SEM team ends up retracting in speed in order to 'induct' the new colleague to the workings of the Education Sector. As a consequence, the rotation of staff in the Member States' ministries of Education that are engages with SEM, therefore, contributes to the weakening of institutionalisation of the Sector.

Table 3.4 presents the number of participants in different SEM meetings in different levels of governance. The aim of this exercise is to understand the relationship between the investment on the meetings and the degree of institutionalisation of SEM – in other words, the quality of the institutionalisation of the HE region. Based on the number of participants

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<sup>77</sup> The role and impact of the WGs will be discussed in Section II if having any relation to HE.

<sup>78</sup> In Mercosur's lingo, Argentina holds the PPTA, Brazil has the PPTB, Paraguay the PPTP and Venezuela holds a PPTV.

and on the place where the meeting is held, I offer an estimate of the costs of running such a meeting. I searched for the Member State’s legislations on allowances for travel abroad to find out the values stipulated per person per destination (as of August 2019). The costs also include US\$ 100 for the host country to cover the costs of preparing the event. From the start, I assume that the decision to send sending a national representative to a SEM meeting indicates commitment to SEM.

Table 3.5 SEM: Meeting participants and estimated costs

SEM level of governance	Meeting date and place (meeting minutes)	Number of participants (meeting minutes)	Estimated total costs (travel and allowance per person, in US\$) <sup>79</sup>
<b>RME</b>	RME 01/2001: Asunción, 28 June 2001 (1-day meeting)	6 (ARG, BRA, PAR, URU, CHI, BOL)	3.200
<b>CCR</b>	CCR 02/2008: Buenos Aires, 9-12 June 2008 (4-day meeting)	34 (14 ARG, 5 BRA, 6 Par, 4 URU, 1 BOL, 1 COL, 2 VEN, 1 PER)	27.468
<b>CHE</b>	CHE 03/2005 (Montevideo, 4-5 October 2005(2-day meeting)	6 (ARG, BRA, PAR, URU, CHI, BOL)	4.394

Source: Elaborated by the author.

It is also necessary to understand that all these regional ‘events’ happen *without a centralised regional budget*. A consequence of Mercosur’s governance model (intergovernmentalism), the costs of running the structure that coordinates Educational activities comes from the budget of the national Ministries of Education. What does it say about the institutionality of the region? As a showcase of the interplay between the scales of rule in the governance of SEM, the decision to send national representatives for SEM meetings and activities depends entirely on the National Ministries of Education. As I will discuss in Chapter 9, the existing Education Fund (FEM) plans to cover the costs of activities, not of capacity building and the costs of the staff shaping and planning for the region. As such, the evolution of Mercosur’s regional activities in any Sector is firmly dependent on the engagement of the national level.

<sup>79</sup> Argentina: Allowance/day (Law 997/2016; 1067/16): ranges between 434 (RME) to 268 (CCR/CHE)(LA countries). Brazil: Allowance/day (Law 6.576/2008): 300-270 (Arg/Uru); 220-190 (Par). Paraguay: Allowance/day (Law 4774/16; 8452/2018/ Annex B): 344-275 (Arg), 291-233 (Bra), 324-259 (Uru). Uruguay: Allowance/day (Law 279/2012, 2019 values): 266 (Arg); 141 (Bra); 194 (Par). Associate members will be estimated 300/day in allowance. Average return flight costs: 300. Values for travel to capitals. All costs in US\$.

In view of the challenging dynamic between the national and the regional scales of rule, there is a lot to be learned from looking at the dynamics of SEM's governance. Meetings are planned in preparation for the RME, at the end of the semester. The areas and WG present ideas for discussion, which get pushed up to the higher, or more senior, levels. It is when the initial evidence of the internal power dynamics comes to surface. It is also when the mechanisms for change emerge. CCR collects ideas from all other sectors and prepares the discussions to be had during the Ministerial meetings – pushing ideas 'up'. Therefore, first the WGs meet, then the Area Commissions (such as the HE Commission), and then the CCR, followed by the RME. This 'bottom-up' strategy is then reversed after the RME, when the decisions, if approved, are pushed 'down' for implementation. As the next Chapters show, sometimes plans change, depending on the higher level. If the projects imply broader normative changes affecting the countries, the Ministers will present the projects (resolutions, agreements, or programmes) to the Group of the Common Market (GMC), and later to the higher stances of Mercosur (the Council, CMC) for approval at the presidential level. As such, some of SEM decisions become 'law-binding' whereas some do not.

### **3.4 Conclusions**

This Chapter has compiled the theoretical arguments for explaining regional HE. I made use of the current views of regional HE to reach a conceptual framework to analyse regional HE projects as expressions of global education policies. In this framework, decision-making entails looking at the relationship between the different scales of power and ideas, and how it affects HE practices and policymaking at different scales.

I have also determined how HE activities happen as a result of the travelling of policy ideas across space. Nation states, as the national level, remain important, yet they take on a new role of *governor*, rather than the *governant*.

Furthermore, the Chapter showed how HE is a cultural project that act as a broker of social identities (Robertson, 2018). As such, we can expand the previous idea of HE as a citizenship project into considering it also as *cultural project*. A cultural project is engaged in meaning-making practices that generate common understandings within its own world (Sum & Jessop, 2013). In this new role, they accommodate the influences of other scales of rule,

from the global and even from other regions. This leads to the conclusion that that education policies are, indeed, global processes of change (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

That implies in understanding regions as being built from contextual, linguistic, and semiotic relationships to produce regional senses and meanings as outcomes; which are then produced, communicated and then reproduced by the actors in the region. Now, if looked at as a *cultural, political and economic* project, the study of (higher) education can offer many insights into regions and region building around the world.

Furthermore, it introduced the concept of ‘ensembles’. An education ensemble is more than the expression of its many constitutive elements, i.e. teachers, students, curricula, and modes of governance, but also the result of the travelling of ideas, power relations, scalar relations, in a given historical context, which are unseen. Using the eight analytical categories of education ensembles, I introduced the main features of SEM. The Chapter concluded with the descriptive analysis of the main features of SEM in light of the framework of educational ensembles.

## 4 METHODS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

### 4.1 Introduction

To develop this research, I employed a coherent system of scientific methods for a *critical explanation of historical processes of change*. The search for explanations permeated the work's ontological, epistemological, theoretical and methodological instances. The study adopted a broad critical perspective, using a *Critical Realist* (CR) ontological stance (Bhaskar, 2008; Sayer, 1992, 2000), and a *Critical Theory* epistemology<sup>80</sup> (R. W. Cox, 1996; Held, 1980) to explain moments of change in the Mercosur HE project. Throughout the process, I was ultimately interested in the role of structuring mechanisms in context to provide explanations of the social world (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Empirically, I adopted methodological techniques that combined, on the one hand, the relational theoretical perspectives explored in Chapters 2 and 3 about the shaping of Mercosur HE and, on the other, a robust exploration of the contextual elements of diachronic research. The use of *process tracing* and *relational critical discourse analysis* proved to be valuable tools to approach the *case study of Mercosur as a case of sectoral regionalism*.

The following pages explain the details of the summary above into many pieces. To guide the reader into my decision-making process, I open the Chapter with a broad critical theory approach to social enquiry that underpinned this research. Second, I present the thesis's research design and strategy, followed by the techniques employed to collect and analyse data. The Chapter concludes with a discussion about the ethical dilemmas encountered during the research process and highlights the importance of researcher reflexivity.

### 4.2 A Critical Theory Approach

This study broadly adopts a critical theory approach to understanding social worlds, including social change. As a starting point this thesis draws on the work of Robert Cox

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<sup>80</sup> Ontology is concerned about the nature of reality and how things are to exist. Epistemology refers to the presuppositions about the nature of knowledge and the knowledge claims that can be made to inform scientific inquiry (L. Harvey, 1990; Usher, 1996). Simply put, it is the theory of knowledge and how it can be accessed (Sayer, 1992). Both concepts "are related since claims about what exists in the world imply claims about how what exists may be known" (Usher, 1996, p. 11). They crucially position a researcher's set of beliefs, such as her value systems, into the inquiry process.

(1996) who offers a useful distinction between what he describes as ‘problem solving theory’ versus ‘critical theory’. Problem solving theory tends to take the world as it sees it without questioning the origins, context, rationales that made the world what it is. By limiting the scope of the research question to the immediate scope of the problem, it restricts the theory’s ability to address the very issues it aims to solve (Dale, 1994). Critical theory, by way of contrast,

...is critical in the sense that it stands apart from the prevailing order of the world and asks how that order came about. (...) [It] does not take institutions and social power relations for granted but calls them into question by concerning itself with their origins and how and whether they might be in the process of changing. It is directed toward an appraisal of the very framework for action, or problematic, which problem-solving theory accepts as its parameters. Critical theory is directed to the social and political complex as a whole rather than to the separate parts – leads to the construction of a large picture of the whole of which the initially contemplated part is just one component, and seeks to understand the process of change in which both parts and the whole are involved (R. W. Cox, 1996, pp. 88–89).

For critical theorists, the empirical approach to reality depends upon the theoretical perspectives used to observe a determined historical and temporal dimension; in other words, its context. These dimensions influence the positioning of the researcher as a subject looking at a certain social or societal phenomenon, whilst, at the same time, forming part of the reality studied. As such, “theory is not a storehouse of hypotheses on the course of particular events in society. It constructs a developing picture of society as a whole, an existential judgment with a historical dimension” (Horkheimer, 1982, p. 239). Critical theory puts the world in perspective: it questions historical constructs, brings forward the relational aspect of social life as both object and subject for research, and puts forward an urgent call for increased awareness of all that is ‘hidden under the carpet’ of the experiential dimension of social reality<sup>81</sup>.

Critical realism (CR) broadly sits within a critical theory frame. As an ontological positioning, it is explicitly interested in making visible the presupposition that we make about our social worlds, and for some it is a philosophical approach used to inform empirical observations (Archer et al., 2016). Unlike critical theory, CR has developed a complex grammar to explain our social worlds. It was first proposed by British philosopher Roy Bhaskar as a challenge to positivist claims that reality can be grasped by universal causal laws developed

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<sup>81</sup> A detailed analysis of the development of critical theory is not the main focus on this thesis. I have relied, for instance, on the work of Held (1980) and Harvey (1990) to learn about its theoretical foundations and methodological applications.

via experimentation in closed natural systems (Bhaskar, 2008; Bygstad & Munkvold, 2011; Cruickshank, 2011; K. Jones, 2011; W. Olsen, 2007; Sayer, 1992, 2000)<sup>82</sup>. Bhaskar posited that social systems were, in fact, open ongoing transformative processes in which *reality exists independently of whether it can be known or observed*. This claim sets out a basic CR premise: events occur independently of the experiences in which they are apprehended, not only what can be measured and observed in a closed system (Bhaskar, 2008).

The reason for which we are unable to apprehend – or experience – all events that happen around us is because reality is *stratified*: the relationship between an object's mechanisms, and the structures that compose and frame them, influence the outcome of a certain event. There is no guarantee that the same event can be replicated or that everyone experiences an event in the same way because they are “real and distinct from the patterns of events that they generate; just as events are real and distinct from the experiences in which they are apprehended” (Bhaskar, 2008, p. 46). These elements – mechanisms, events and experiences – compose three levels of stratification of reality:

- **Mechanisms** constitute the domain of the *real*. Mechanisms have a central role in the CR ontological positioning because they hold the causal powers or properties that enable transformations or changes – they are a “the pathway or process by which an effect is produced or a purpose is accomplished” (Gerring, 2008a, p. 178)<sup>83</sup>. As a consequence, events can only be explained by the analysis of its causal mechanisms. As Fletcher explained, CR's primary goal is to “explain social events through reference to these causal mechanisms and the effects they can have” (Fletcher, 2017, p. 183).
- **Events** are an expression of the domain of the *actual*. The outcome or emergence of events results from the activation of an object's causal mechanisms. Events can be observed by the surface.
- **Experiences** indicate the domain of the *empirical*, in which what is subjectively observed and experienced allows the world to be explained. Events are perceived and can be measured. Fletcher (2017) explains that empirical level also indicates a *transitive* level of reality, where different social ideas, meanings, decisions and actions occur because events are always mediated through the filter of human experience and interpretation. Events can also be structuring mechanisms which, in turn, instigate other events to happen.

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<sup>82</sup> Bhaskar also questioned the post-modernist view of reality being relatively constructed deepening of the discourse of the beholder. Science, for Bhaskar, was an ongoing transformative process in which reality exists independently of whether it can be known or observed.

<sup>83</sup> Gerring (2008, p. 177) lays out the many uses for mechanisms: “(1) the pathway or process by which an effect is produced; (2) a difficult-to-observe causal factor; (3) an easy-to-observe causal factor; (4) a context-dependent (tightly bounded) explanation; (5) a universal (i.e., highly general) explanation; (6) an explanation that presumes highly contingent phenomena; (7) an explanation built on phenomena that exhibit law-like regularities; (8) a distinct technique of analysis (based on qualitative, case study or process-tracing evidence); or (9) a micro-level explanation for a causal phenomenon”.

A CR model for explanations of events derives from the stratification of reality. An outcome, or an event (at the domain of the actual), can only be explained (level of empirical) by the analysis of the mechanisms that generated them (domain of the real) in a certain (historical) context. Pawson and Tilley explained that causal outcomes (events at the level of empirical) are a function of the action of mechanisms in a certain context (Pawson & Tilley, 1997, p. 58)<sup>84</sup>. It can be represented in the equation: ‘ $O = f(M + C)$ ’

Pawson and Tilley’s claim that the emergence of events can be explained by identifying how mechanisms get activated opens an avenue of inquiry into the case of Mercosur HE. In this case, I define the elements that shape SEM as mechanisms: its organisational structure, levels of authority, inherited or hegemonic power, and the experiences brought by both SEM national actors or other scales of rule. Their combination produces an effect that triggers actions that result in SEM instruments and events – such as HE policies and programmes<sup>85</sup>. Assuming that regional policies (events) happen on a multiplicity of scales, the realist explanation framework (‘ $O = f(M + C)$ ’) further enables explorations of the extent to which national policies intervene or dialogue with the regional ones. One example often cited in the interviews is how elections (event) in any Mercosur Member State has typically resulted in changes in the actors that took part in SEM activities (outcomes). As such, events themselves can become mechanisms (the elections) in the sense they induce possibilities for other events to happen (change in SEM actors).

Pawson and Tilley’s emphasis in events happening in context is relevant for the explanatory purposes of CR and particularly for this thesis, too. Exploring the context may account for the right conditions for the mechanisms to be activated:

Programmes work (have successful ‘outcomes’) only in so far as they introduce the appropriate ideas and opportunities (‘mechanisms’) to groups in the appropriate social and cultural conditions (‘contexts’) (Pawson & Tilley, 1997, p. 57).

The variance of the context might explain why projects that propose the same mechanisms and objectives end up having different results: their mechanisms are triggered

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<sup>84</sup> Although acknowledging the elements as described by Pawson and Tilley, Byrne reinterprets the principle into a new equation: *Mechanism & Context => outcome*: “in words, generative mechanism in interaction with context (hence the & rather than + sign as the latter implies simple additivity) generates directionality (hence => rather than = because = always implies reversibility and complex causality is directional) outcome.” (Byrne, 2011, p. 132). The reason for adopting Pawson and Tilley’s representation is because it represents better the ‘retroduction’ process of mode of enquiry, as in abstracting the empirical observation backwards in a series of abstractions (see subchapter 4.5.2).

<sup>85</sup> These effects can be in terms of creating new structures, i.e. a new working group, or broadly political, such as the negotiations for new Action plans.

differently, therefore their outcomes differ. In the case of SEM, it can help us to explain why the same HE programmes produce very different outcomes in the Member States. The fact that “...our knowledge about reality is always historically, socially and culturally situated” indicates epistemic relativism, another key concept in critical realism (Archer et al., 2016, para. 9).

CR also addresses the impact of the actors’ belief system and subjectivities in the shape of events. When considering causality in the analysis of social life, scholars have called attention to the fallible and changing nature of knowledge (Bhaskar, 2008; Elder-Vass, 2012; Sayer, 1992, 2000). Because individuals are influenced by the material circumstances surrounding social life, their actions are conditioned to ways of seeing the world which is available to them. Consequently,

...any explanation, be it of natural or social phenomena, is incomplete for the epistemological reason that all knowledge is revisable, but explanations of social phenomena are also incomplete for the ontological reasons given above that the objects of study are undergoing continuous historical, and not merely evolutionary change (Sayer, 1992, p. 234).

This is also true for the work of the researcher in exploring those events. As a result of accessing the world empirically, the subjectivity of the observer (be it the researcher or the participant) shows that the knowledge of the world is in fact ‘fallible’, because different observers might have their own subjective explanation for the same phenomena. If accepting that all knowledge is fallible, and that reality is much more than what one can see, how is it possible to make sense of reality and understand it? Once again, it entails identifying a phenomenon’s *causal mechanisms*, how they work, how they are activated, under what conditions and with what consequences (Sayer, 2000).

This thesis approaches Mercosur HE as a unique phenomenon with its own causal mechanisms and emergent properties, and dependent on the materiality and structures of the Member States and the regional organisation. As the following Chapter will reveal, SEM is itself an emergent property of the historical context of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Identifying and searching for causal mechanisms has an implicit methodological connotation - it cannot be defined (minimally) as employing a particular method or set of methods, for one same structure can be both a mechanism in itself as well as a platform for other mechanisms. Viewed in this light, the meetings of the different SEM sectors (such as the committee for HE), for instance, can be seen as more than a mechanism to promote a space

for decision-making in the Sector because they *also* function as a platform for developing other mechanisms. In the search for causal mechanisms, therefore, the complex exercise of abstraction helps to make more visible the limits and possibilities of particular conditions (such as funding, personnel or regulations) over time, and their changing relationship with and thus transformations of the region's HE project since the establishment of SEM in 1991.

### 4.3 Research design

To explore the relationship between Mercosur and its HE project I made use of an *intensive research design* (Sayer, 1992; Danermark et al., 2002; Harré, 1993). In line with a CR framework, Andrew Sayer (1992) elaborates on the differences between two research designs for the analysis of change in the social world: *intensive* and *extensive*. He details how the choice for one or the other enables the researcher to make different causal claims. To illustrate, an *intensive* research design seeks substantial causal explanations of the production of certain events. It does so by analysing their relationships and meanings in context, such as the connections among events, mechanisms, structures and people. In connection with the ideas of causality presented earlier, Sayer explains that

On the realist view, causality concerns not a relationship between discreet events ('Cause and Effect'), but the '*causal powers*' or '*liabilities*' of objects or relations, or more generally their ways of acting or 'mechanisms'. A causal claim is not about a regularity between separate things or events but about what an object is like and what it can do and only derivatively what it will do in any particular situation" (Sayer, 1992, pp. 104–105)(italics in the original).

In contrast, an *extensive* research design is concerned with the search for regularities, similarities and differences, and representative generalisations to find significant relationships. Even if these relationships do not necessarily imply causal relationships, they may indicate patterns and regularities which may indicate causality (Kedzierski, 2016; Sayer, 1992; Sørensen, 2017)<sup>86</sup>.

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<sup>86</sup> In terms of the approach to the study object and of the management of research data, both designs allow for the use of qualitative and quantitative methods, as long as these techniques conduct the research to make claims as a result of answering the study's research questions. It must be noted that qualitative research methods are usually used within intensive research designs for they offer more tools for the analysis and clarification of complex relationships and processes (Parr, 2015).

### 4.3.1 Research strategy: a case study of Mercosur HE as sectoral regionalism

Mercosur HE is regarded as a case study of sectoral regionalism<sup>87</sup> in LA. Simons defines case studies as an “...in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a ‘real life’ context”, with the primary purpose to “generate in-depth understanding of a specific topic” (H. Simons, 2009, p. 11). Case studies enable researchers to delve into complex relationships within a specific social setting, while using a number of research techniques for data collection and analysis (Easton, 2010; Gerring, 2004, 2008; Yin, 2012). Moreover, they are adequate for approaching a multi-disciplinary analysis, such as the one presented in this thesis, because they offer multiple points of entry to understand a specific social reality. The downsides of case studies are the impossibilities of generalisations when analysing either one or simply few cases, and the feasibility of one case study to be used as a robust argument to inform other debates, in particular policymaking (Simons, 2009).

Also pertinent to this work is Cohen and colleagues’ suggestion that a ‘good’ case study depends upon the ability of the researcher to gather and synthesise data from different sources to make inferences and interpretations based on evidence (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 296). These skills bring with them another shortcoming - a risk, perhaps – in using the case study approach: the subjectivity of the researcher in defining the boundaries of the case (Simon, 2009). Thus, in the next section I explain the borders of this case.

#### 4.3.1.1 *Defining the boundaries of the case*

Delimitating the boundaries for this case study was key to ensuring the project’s focus, as well as its viability and feasibility in terms of time and resources (Gerring, 2007). I defined three boundaries for the case: the study object, a geopolitical boundary and a temporal cut.

As a starting point, the *study object* is the HE Sector of Mercosur. It is considered as a form of sectoral regionalism that is governed through multi-scalar and multi-spatial relations charged with material and symbolic representations. The multi-scalar relations account for the influence of the other scales (national, local, global) in the shape of the Mercosur HE project. The multi-spatial relations refer to the outcomes of multiple social relations. As Doreen Massey (2005) has argued, space is the product of social relations; an open, multiple,

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<sup>87</sup> Sectoral regionalism can be defined as the particular mechanisms and outcomes emerging from a certain Sector within a region. For instance, the activities in the field of HE in Mercosur would radically differ from those in the Mercosur Sector of security, or of transport.

relational and unfinished process influenced by time and history (Chapter 2). Their material and symbolic representations are the emergence of cultural, political and economic mechanisms in context, and how these are perceived by the actors that interact with Mercosur HE.

Even though the *geo-political* scope of the object includes the 10 members associated with SEM<sup>88</sup>, due to limitations of time and funding, a decision was made to set the boundaries of the case so as to only include the four founding Mercosur States: Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay<sup>89</sup>.

A *temporal* boundary focuses our attention on 25 years of the Mercosur HE: from its inception in late 1991 until late 2016. Its starting point is the establishment of SEM with the signature of the Ministerial Protocol of Intentions in December 1991 in Brasília (Uruguay, 1992a, pp. 17–21). I looked into documents in early 2017 to see the conclusion of negotiations from 2016. The meeting minutes from 2016 were published in 2017 due to a (new) internal political crisis in Mercosur.<sup>90</sup>

#### **4.3.2 Approaching the case: Process Tracing**

Process Tracing (PT) provided epistemological and analytical tools for the research. It is a case-study methodology that employs the analysis of a sequence of steps, or variables, that link causes and effects (Beach, 2016; Checkel, 2006; D. Collier, 2011; Falleti, 2016; Mayntz, 2016; Trampusch & Palier, 2016). In simple terms, PT relies on sequencing to approach causation. Its role was twofold: I used it as a framework to approach the case and collect data as well as an analytical tool to establish relationships between the data collected. Its analytical significance lays in providing researchers with analytical tools to establish the mechanisms and events at play and their relationships diachronically, which in turn offer an

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<sup>88</sup> As pointed out in the previous Chapter, SEM members are: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela.

<sup>89</sup> There was an initial goal to consider Chile as one of the countries studied given its participation in the HE projects since 1995 as an Associate Member. This turned out to be impossible due to various unsuccessful attempts on my part to recruit participants for the interview when visiting Santiago in May 2017. Only one interview was recorded in Chile.

<sup>90</sup> The 2016 Mercosur crises revolves around Venezuela. In August 2017 the four Mercosur countries deciding on the suspension of Venezuela on the bases of a violation of Mercosur's Democratic principles defined in the Protocol of Ushuaia {Citation}. The country has been facing an unseen social and economic crisis, deepened by the crash of oil prices in 2015. It is not possible to know the extent of the crisis for the data available is considered to be unreliable given the political regime. To illustrate, figures from the IMF indicated inflation rates as high as 480% and a negative growth rate of 8% (Al Jazeera, 2017). Due to the crises, Venezuela held Mercosur's PPT in late 2016, but hardly any activity took place. While this thesis is written (January 2019), Venezuela is still suspended. Mercosur's Democratic clause was applied once before: to Paraguay in 2012 (see Chapter 7).

empirical base to explain why a certain outcome happened (Hay, 2016, p. 503). Moreover, PT prevents researchers from mistaking *correlations* with *causal processes* (Panke, 2012).

I opted for an inductive and theory-guided variant of PT. An *inductive* type “forms a theoretically informed analysis (decomposition) of processes that looks for causal chains between the observed events” (Trampusch & Palier, 2016, p. 445). It differs from a deductive form of PT, which tests theoretical assumptions and the power of the predictions of theoretical accounts<sup>91</sup>. As Tullia Faletti explains, if assuming that the order of the events is causally sequential, a theory-guided variant “allows to inductively generate theory by carefully uncovering the causal mechanisms that connect causes and effects” (2016, p. 458). In sum, the inductive decomposition of the events is expected to reveal the causal chains of a process, whereas their sequencing will allow to identify their mechanisms and outcomes.

Tracing processes also relies on sequencing and detailed descriptions. *Sequencing* was employed with two aims: to identify the main events in HE in the region and to shed light on the relational and multi-scalar features of the case study. In practice, it means that HE events (new working groups, projects, calls for mobility) were analysed *in relation to the other scales of decision-making within Mercosur*, as well as *in relation to events on scales external to the region* (national, inter-regional and global).

Table 4.1 Sequential analysis of scales of rule

Scales of decision-making within Mercosur	Scales of decision-making outside Mercosur
Meeting of the Ministers of Education (RME) (political level at SEM)	National (Member States)
Regional Coordinating Committee (CCR) (political level at SEM)	Inter-regional (other regions, EU, UNASUR)
Broader region (political level outside SEM)	Global (global policies)

Source: Elaborated by the author.

<sup>91</sup> Trampusch and Palier explain that ‘Deductive process tracers compare the evidence and historical record with theoretical accounts of specific hypotheses about causal mechanisms’ (2016, p. 445).

As the sequencing was under way, the use of detailed *descriptions* allowed me to analyse the causal ideas embedded in the texts and consider the kinds of evidence that confirmed those ideas or not (D. Collier, 2011). They were particularly relevant when approaching the interviews, given the variety of perceptions they reflected.

The use of these two strategies, sequencing and description, however, cannot alone reveal the causal mechanisms in any given event. Researchers using PT must go beyond the “convenient simplicity of the idea that to trace processes one only needs to track social practices over time as they unfold (through the exhaustive gathering of sequential descriptive data over time)” (Hay, 2016, p. 502). The data collected must still be put through interpretation and pushes the researcher into looking for other methods to complement the causal analysis. In line with Hay’s reflection, and acknowledging this limitation of PT, the analytical framework relied on discourse analysis, through CDA (see 2.5 – Data Analysis).

As the data collection went on, I became concerned about the study’s feasibility within the framework of a PhD (3-4 years). Tracing Mercosur HE within a 25-years temporal boundary would not be an easy (or quick) task. Aspects such as the duration of fieldwork trips, the number of interviews, the selection of documents and – more importantly – when to stop gathering data were challenging and resulted in an ongoing learning curve throughout the development of this thesis. To tackle this challenge, a second temporal border revealed a number of *key historical moments* that resulted in lasting change in Mercosur HE: *critical junctures*.

### **4.3.3 Critical junctures as moments of legacy**

The framework of critical junctures (CJ) is a conceptual and methodological tool to analyse moments of change resulting in a legacy (Boas, 2014; Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007; R. B. Collier & Collier, 1991; Mahoney, 2004). Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier (1991) introduced the framework in comparative political research (Boas, 2014), but the CJ framework has been also applied in comparative-historical analysis (Mahoney, 2004) and historical institutionalism (Capoccia and Keleman, 2007). Junctures are crucial because they place institutional arrangements on path trajectories which could be very difficult to change (Capoccia and Keleman, 2007). What makes a juncture ‘critical’ is the causal argument that the event’s outcomes are reinforced over time, thus producing a legacy. Therefore, “a critical juncture is only ‘critical’ because of its legacy, and a causal argument of this sort requires linking cross-national variation in the legacy back to variation at the critical juncture itself”

(Boas, 2014, p. 3). Giovanni Capoccia argues for the usefulness of the CJ framework for the analysis of historical change in a variety of organisations:

the concept of critical juncture, and the underpinning logic of distal historical causation, is often applied in the analysis of the historical development of *institutions*, broadly defined as including organizations, formal rules, public policies, as well as larger configurations of connected institutional arrangements such as political regimes and political economies. (Capoccia, 2016, para. 1, italics in the original).

To operationalise the framework, Collier and Collier (1991) define three key CJ features. First, a claim that a significant change occurred within each analysed case. Second, a claim that this significant change took place in distinct ways in different cases. Finally, the explanatory hypothesis of the change's consequences produced a legacy, in other words, an outcome that is reinforced over time. The authors define other elements to enable the recognition of an event's social context and its outcomes as a CJ. A CJ's *antecedent conditions* create a base line to assess the CJ and its consequent legacy because they introduce the situation (or context) prior to the crisis. A *cleavage* or *crisis* show the consequences of the antecedent condition(s), triggering the event which becomes the CJ. A *legacy* defines the lasting or sustainable change emerging after the crisis. Finally, a CJ's *rival explanation*, or counter-factual assumption (Mahoney, 2004), explores if "an alternative event had been selected ... the sequence would have unfolded in a radically different matter" (Mahoney, 2004, p. 92).

Critics of the CJ framework have pointed out its lack of methodological rigour as an analytical framework to explain causation (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007). As students of CJ and interested in advancing its rigour, Capoccia and Keleman (2007) recognise that the concept of CJ has been used freely to indicate stories of institutional development. They advance that James Mahoney's work in the CJ framework expanded the concept by highlighting the power of agency in CJ analysis, not fully developed in Collier and Collier's proposal from 1991. The introduction of the analysis of the agents of change, therefore, allowed to explore how change gets initiated, by whom and where, in addition to the question of which likely circumstances allowed those changes to happen, and what alternatives to those choices were available. In explaining how some of the events leading to the EU, Capoccia and Keleman (2007, p. 365-368) indicate how the CJ framework can be useful to analyse regional development.

As advanced in this thesis's Introduction, CJ was applied in this work as a way to observe changes with a pragmatic objective. Given the large temporal frame, and the even larger amount of data collected, I found CJs to be an interesting tool to help me identify long-lasting changes in the history of Mercosur HE during its timeframe of 26 years. Apart from complementing the research design of process tracing – both are historical methods – it could help me define which period of Mercosur HE development were more relevant to focus on. As such, CJs worked like *analytical temporal markers* in my thesis. This is keeping in mind that emergence of Mercosur and its sectors represented a CJ for each of the countries separately and for the enterprise collectively.

To implement the CJ framework in Mercosur HE, I established defined two main criteria, based on the elements Collier and Collier defined (antecedent conditions, crisis, and rival explanation). First, I looked for significant changes occurred within the case analysed, and these can be a change in structure, mandate or mode of governance of the HE project. Second, I explored whether the explanatory hypothesis of the consequences produced by that change resulted in a legacy which persisted over time. As a result of this exercise, I identified five key moments of change in the development of Mercosur HE<sup>92</sup>:

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<sup>92</sup> The changes in other levels of education (basic, secondary, technological etc) were not considered for the definition of the critical junctures. Although not directly related to HE policies, those may be used as a contextual reference in the analysis.

Table 4.2 Critical junctures in Mercosur HE

Critical juncture	Title	Period	Legacy
<b>CJ 1</b>	Discovery and self-discovery: the emergence of a regional education project	1991-1993	SEM and HE sector
<b>CJ 2</b>	From a politics of homogenisation to harmonisation through the recognition of differences.	1996-1998	HE Accreditation project; new members, Chile and Bolivia; acceptance of the region's diversity
<b>CJ 3</b>	New structures, new meanings: institutionalising the region and the production of a new common sense	2001-2002	SEM structure New Mandate for HE
<b>CJ 4</b>	Actorness in the HE Sector: positioning and autonomy	2006-2007	HE as actor in negotiations
<b>CJ 5</b>	Changing place, space and actors: asymmetrical power relations and internal variegation	2011-2012	A new place for HE Sector outside the realm of SEM Meetings

The process to arrive to these five CJs was laborious, and it happened in two stages. The first step involved reading, coding and making notes of SEM's official documents in three levels of decision-making about HE: first the Meeting of the Ministers of Education (RME), then the Regional Coordinating Committee (CCR) and finally the Commission for Higher Education (CHE). I respected the hierarchical order for perceiving that HE projects could only be established if approved by RME and CCR as SEM's highest level of decision-making. This step started early in the research, prior to the data collection phases. The initial notes allowed me to define the participants I would interview. Second, now with the interviews in hand, I considered the changes in HE across the different levels, whether a new programme, a new actor, or a new action plan. I looked at the patterns of repetition, inclusion, or exclusion, of the debates across time and the three levels of decision-making. My notes were added to a spreadsheet resulting in a cluster of activities around a persistent subject that conformed a CJ. These notes were combined as CJs and their elements revised constantly. Finally, each CJ became an analytical chapter in the thesis's Section II.

The decision to establish CJs was a turning point in the research. CJs offered a perspective on the mechanisms at play in negotiations and decisions. Moreover, they were crucial for data collection, such as narrowing down the pool of interviewees.

## **4.4 Data collection**

The relevance of research data revolves around “the legitimacy of the processes of making the invisible visible” (Jasanoff, 2017, p. 2)<sup>93</sup>. The next pages aim to detail the process of collecting the two typed of data, primary and secondary, that compose the empirical part of the research. They were compiled in three stages of data collection: desk research, a pilot study during June-August 2016, and the main fieldwork during March-May 2017.

### **4.4.1 Primary data: Semi-structured interviews and an unplanned observation**

I conducted semi-structured interviews (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; C. Smith & Elger, 2014) to collect primary data. Interviews provide narrative accounts as well as “...insights into substantive events and experiences and thus form the basis for analysing the interplay of social contexts and generative mechanisms” (Smith & Elger, 2012, p. 26). The choice of semi-structured interviews, in opposition to closed questions or open-ended questions, allowed for different themes to be explored in conversation via questions that were flexible for adaptation.

I selected participants using a combination of purposive sampling and snowballing (Punch & Oancea, 2014). As mentioned earlier, the purposive sampling relied on the framework of CJs. Within each CJ (Table 4.2.), I identified likely participants per country. Their contact details were openly available because it is a norm for all Mercosur meeting to include a list of participants attached to each meeting minute. Therefore, I used the official documents to collect their contact details. Figure 4.2 shows examples of how contact details appeared in two meeting minutes (1997 and 2009).

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<sup>93</sup> Although in her paper Jasanoff develop her analysis with a focus on the collection of large data sets (‘big data’), I take her argument to be applied to smaller scale research as well.

Figure 4.1 SEM: Contact details in two meeting minutes

<p><b>IX REUNION DE LA COMISION TECNICA REGIONAL AD-HOC DE EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR</b></p> <p>Montevideo, 25 de noviembre de 1997</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>LISTA DE PARTICIPANTES</b></p> <p><b>ARGENTINA</b></p> <p><b>Nombre:</b> Juan Carlos Busnelli  <b>Institución:</b> Ministerio de Cultura y Educación-Secretaría Políticas Universitarias.  <b>Cargo:</b> Asesor  <b>Domicilio Laboral:</b> Pizzurno 936 - 2o. Piso Oficina 224  <b>Teléfono:</b> 54-1-813 6161 / 812 4809  <b>Fax:</b> 54-1-812 4809 / 813 1239  <b>Domicilio Particular:</b> Milre 870 - Luján CP 6700- Pcia. de Buenos Aires  <b>Teléfono:</b> 54-323- 21438  <b>Fax:</b>  <b>E mail:</b> postmaster @ busnel.ba.ar.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>MERCOSUR/RME/CCR/ ACTA N° 01/09</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>REUNION LXVIII DEL COMITÉ COORDINADOR REGIONAL DEL SECTOR EDUCATIVO DEL MERCOSUR</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Asunción – Paraguay – 16, 16 Y 17 de abril del 2009</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Lista de Participantes.</u></p> <p><b>Argentina</b></p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td><b>Nombre :</b></td> <td>Pablo, URQUIZA</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Institución:</b></td> <td>Ministerio de Educación</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Cargo:</b></td> <td>Coordinador General Dirección Nacional de Coop. Internacional</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Dirección:</b></td> <td>Pizzurno 735 Oficina 20</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Teléfono:</b></td> <td>(5411) 41291152/56</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Fax:</b></td> <td>(5411) 41291157</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Email :</b></td> <td>Purquizz</td> </tr> </table>	<b>Nombre :</b>	Pablo, URQUIZA	<b>Institución:</b>	Ministerio de Educación	<b>Cargo:</b>	Coordinador General Dirección Nacional de Coop. Internacional	<b>Dirección:</b>	Pizzurno 735 Oficina 20	<b>Teléfono:</b>	(5411) 41291152/56	<b>Fax:</b>	(5411) 41291157	<b>Email :</b>	Purquizz
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<b>Teléfono:</b>	(5411) 41291152/56														
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Source: SEM minutes CHE IX meeting, and CCR LXVIII meeting.

I contacted them individually by email, using my official University address. In the first contact, I introduced myself as a doctoral student originally from Mercosur, explained about the research, and justified why I thought they were relevant to the study.

I interviewed two different groups of participants. One group, named ‘Senior Managers’, held different positions within the region in various capacities (executive and senior managers from different levels and projects). The denomination ‘senior managers’ indicates their role in decision-making with SEM, in particular in the CCR or in the CHE<sup>94</sup>. The second group were the ‘Experts’. They were researchers interested in themes of HE, regional integration, and Mercosur in Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil<sup>95</sup>. I relied on their expertise to achieve a deeper understanding of the recent empirical work on Mercosur HE. In practice, the ‘Experts’ group provided robustness to the assumptions and claims made here. Because the interviews with the experts were not subjected to CDA, they were not transcribed. The list of interviews is presented as Annex 1.

Interviews were conducted in Portuguese or in Spanish. As a Portuguese speaker with an advanced level of Spanish, I felt confident in using Spanish for data collection. Meetings happened mostly at the participants’ workplace, i.e. Ministries of Education or universities. On a few occasions they were conducted at cafés. Interviews lasted between 29 minutes and 1h 27 minutes and were digitally recorded. All participants received a ‘package’ containing an

<sup>94</sup> During the outings in 2016 and 2017 I was unable to interview ministers of education, although former Ministers in Brazil and Paraguay had shown interest in the research when contacted.

<sup>95</sup> There are of course many experts in Mercosur HE in Uruguay. They appear in the main corpus of research because they were also engaged in a SEM in a Senior Manager capacity.

Information Sheet, Informed Consent Sheet and my university business card<sup>96</sup>. After the interview was over, participants were invited to sign the Consent – all did. Interviews were kept in the secure University of Cambridge server and transcribed in their original language.<sup>97</sup>

#### **4.4.2 Many (many) documents: collecting secondary data**

A laborious documentary research provided the largest quantity of empirical data in this study. A total of 320 documents were analysed. They included official SEM documentation, such as official meeting minutes, programmes, mechanisms, action plans, regulations, discussions and publications. Most of these were openly available via official channels, the ‘Mercosur Document manager’ webpage<sup>98</sup>. I also analysed key HE policy documents, publications and legislation from each of the four Mercosur Member States that are the focus of this study.

Access to documents from the 1990’s relied on archival work in Argentina in 2017 (see item 4.4.5.2). Some of the missing documents were also requested by email to the SEM national representatives and to the Mercosur Secretariat. No response was given.

##### *4.4.2.1 Preparing documents for analysis*

Given the large number of documents collected, the lack of an orderly procedure could bring risks to the timely completion of the project. A systematic procedure for the analysis of the documents ensured a consistent look into their content. Table 4.3 presents the process for documentary analysis, from gathering until the early stages of analysis:

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<sup>96</sup> In preparation for both the 2016 pilot study and the 2017 fieldwork, two different types of documents were prepared in three languages. First, the Information Sheet, which presented a description of the study (see Annexes 8 and 14) and an Informed Consent which contained the signature spaces (available as Annexes 9 and 15). An institutional business card was also given to all participants. All documents had institutional headings, used to ensure the veracity and legitimacy of the research, and somehow my credentials as a reliable researcher.

<sup>97</sup> Transcriptions of the Portuguese language were done by the researcher, and the ones in Spanish language were outsourced to professionals, who worked under the signature of Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDAs).

<sup>98</sup> The Mercosur’s Document Manager webpage (<https://gestorweb.mercosur.int>) hosted declarations, action plans, policy documents, regulations, laws from all Mercosur sectors.

Table 4.3 Documentary analysis: Analytical process

Step	Action
<b>Collection</b>	Gathering documentation from official sources, mostly through the SEM and Mercosur websites.
<b>Storing</b>	Keeping electronic versions of RME, CCR and CHE documents at the University's Google Drive cloud space. Hard copies are stored in filing folders in chronological order.
<b>Preparing</b>	Reading and coding for HE events. Identified CJs.
<b>Organising</b>	A spreadsheet contained the treatment of the data. date, place, document reference, document title, main decisions in the area of HE. The list of Mercosur official documents analysed are available as Annexes 4, 5 and 6.
<b>Coding</b>	Documents were initially hand-coded for changes in governance, new actors, presence of IOs, and updates on HE projects.
<b>Analysis</b>	Critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the documents in each critical juncture.

The list of documents I analysed is presented in Table 4.4 below:

Table 4.4 Documentary analysis: List of documents

Type of document		Number of documents
<b>Regional Meeting Minutes</b>	RME (Annex 3)	52
	CCR (Annex 4)	86
	CHE (Annex 5)	84
<b>Regional Official Documents</b>	Declarations, agreements and protocols	24
	Action Plans and planning meetings	11
<b>Other Regional Publications</b>	Booklets, project outputs	9
<b>Inter-regional (UNASUR/CSE)</b>	Meeting minutes	11
<b>OEI – Ibero-American space</b>	Meeting minutes, plans, and publications related to SEM	7
<b>National policies</b>	Argentina	10
	Brazil	8
	Chile	2
	Paraguay	9
	Uruguay	7
<b>Total</b>		<b>320</b>

The list of the official meeting minutes analysed is available in Annexes 3, 4 and 5.

#### 4.4.3 Reflection on what the documents ‘say’ and what they ‘mean’

Table 4.4, above, listed all the documents analysed. Inspired by the ‘critical’ nature of this study, it is important to pause and reflect on the type of data SEM produced. How did the type of data impact my analysis and enable claims to be made? I draw attention to this by reflecting on the case of one specific genre<sup>99</sup>: meeting minutes.

Meeting minutes were the largest bulk of secondary data analysed. Minutes are an organisational genre meant to communicate its actions to members (McEachern, 1998); they create institutional memory and attach responsibility to those cited in the text. At the most abstract level, this genre reports a story by using a narrative tone. Meeting minutes’ value in providing a historical account can be tricky; they are an official record of the meeting, yet the contents typically need to be *agreed upon and approved* before they are shared with those who were not present at the event. It therefore makes one wonder how and who defines and authorises the content in the documents, given these were an open source in the Mercosur webpages.

In the case of SEM, meeting minutes have been produced since the first meetings in 1992. Nevertheless, their shape and format have changed over time. I noticed that the earlier versions were more narrative, and raised this as a point to discuss during an interview in Montevideo:

SM 17: When all of these [norms to harmonise Mercosur documentation] started to be implemented, [named a member of staff from Uruguay’s Foreign Relations Ministry] once met with us. We had the PPT and she met with us to help to prepare the final part of the minute. And then I remembered she stayed in the meeting until 4 in the morning.

A: *What?*

SM 30: We often finished between 2 and 3 in the morning.

A: *And why?*

SM 17: She taught us [how] to do the minute, and this is when we stopped doing a *report* [and started to] to do a *minute*. [acting as if receiving instructions] “Now it is a minute: it is concise, there... there... and [it’s] in the past tense... and then...”. And that [new format] stayed with us<sup>100</sup>(SM 17, SM 30, personal communication, May 23, 2017, my italics).

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<sup>99</sup> Fairclough has defined that genres as “realized in actional meanings and forms of a text” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 67). That is to say, genres have a textual format that expresses a certain purpose, which is recognisable by practice and by social norms.

<sup>100</sup> In the original: “SM 17: Cuando se empezó a implementar todo esto ... una vez se quedó con nosotros. Hicimos PPT, y se quedó con nosotros a ayudarnos a preparar la parte final del acta. Entonces me acuerdo de que estuvo en la reunión y como que hasta las 4 de la mañana... AB: ¿Qué? SM 17: Sí.. AB: ¿Y porqué? SM 17: Casi siempre terminábamos a las 2-3

The passage above reveals how producing meeting minutes changed from a description of what happened in the meeting to a selection of stories. (The dialogue also reviews that producing the minutes was a demanding task.) When I asked about how the content of the minutes:

SM 17: It's the themes... and the *moments*, because also the problem is that the corrections were made during the meeting, and it makes the meeting very long. Correcting the minute? It took hours. And then this: "No, Uruguay didn't say this, it was something else", and then one had to write. You would ask Uruguay to *write the paragraph...*

SM 30: ... *exactly the way [Uruguay] wanted it to appear*<sup>101</sup> (SM 17, personal communication, May 23, 2017, my italics).

As a result, I was concerned with the level of reliability meeting minutes offered in making causal claims. How to construct a robust analysis if the data provides me with a particular version of the reality? I then opted for constructing the analysis in the *relationship between the secondary and primary* data. The limitations of the secondary data did not imply attaching less value on the documents in comparison with the interviews. To the contrary: the meeting minutes were invaluable resources to inform process tracing. They allowed me to explore the mechanisms and events across different scales at the same time as they revealed the existing intertextualities in the discourse that influenced the shaping of HE ideas.

#### 4.4.4 Out in the field, part one: 2016 Pilot study

From June 2016 to August 2016 I conducted a pilot study to explore the feasibility of my research questions and design. Given my affiliation with the University of Bristol at the time, the pilot was conducted with the approval of its School of Education's Ethical Committee (Annex 6)<sup>102</sup>.

I collected primary and secondary data in the four original Mercosur countries, in order: Uruguay, Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay. The summary of the data collected in 2016 is:

- Primary data: 11 semi-structured interviews (two in Argentina; three in Paraguay; two in Uruguay, and four in Brazil), as well as one interview by email (Paraguay).

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de la mañana. SM 17: Ella nos enseñó a hacer el acta y ahí eso cuando dejamos de hacer relatorio para hacer acta, ahora es un acta, se pone conciso, así, así... y se pone en pasado... Y se pone... y se quedó con nosotros, nos asesoraba en todo. Pero nos ayudó mucho".

<sup>101</sup> In the original: "SM 17: Son los temas... según los momentos, porque también el tema es que las correcciones se hacían durante la reunión y se hace muy largo. ¿La corrección del acta? Era casi horas. Y entonces está, no porque Uruguay lo que dijo 'no fue eso, fue tal y tal otra cosa', entonces había que redactar. Le pedía a Uruguay que redactara el párrafo... SM 30: el párrafo de que como quería que apareciera."

<sup>102</sup> A Santander Travel Grant covered the costs of the pilot study, for which I am grateful.

- Secondary data: documents, lists, books, research reports, master’s thesis. Most of these documents were gifts from the participants interviewed.

The pilot study provided three learning points, which were decisive in the progress of the study:

1. *Redefinition of the project’s objectives.* Prior to the pilot study, I planned to explore the impact of SEM policies on the institutions and academics participating in HE projects. By prioritising the national and institutional levels, the study would have a theoretical-methodological emphasis on policy dynamics and policy implementation<sup>103</sup>. However, from the very first interview, new and unexpected themes emerged and took precedence. One theme was the influence of other regions in Mercosur – in particular the European Union – on the shaping of the regional HE projects. The changing geometry of the region became of special interest, too<sup>104</sup>. Both themes received more attention in the analysis and contributed to confirming the importance of a spatial approach to understanding region-building (Chapter 2).
2. *Sampling technique – The use of snowballing as a technique for selecting and contacting participants* resulted in unforeseen ethical issues related to the anonymity of the participants (see section 4.6., below). As a result, I made the decision to use targeted sampling as preferred technique based on the framework of CJs.
3. *Access to participants: In all four countries visited, senior managers demonstrated interest* in the study topic. All participants contacted accepted to take part in the study. They had no objections to the proposed ethical procedures – which was different to the fieldwork experience a year later. Moreover, they seemed keen to refer to indicate other colleagues or acquaintances who ‘could help me’ when they had limited knowledge about the topic. Nonetheless, a major setback in the pilot study was the

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<sup>103</sup> With this in mind, I interviewed representatives from HEIs involved in different Mercosur projects. With the change of objectives some of the interviews in the pilot study were not considered for analysis. The participants were informed of this decision.

<sup>104</sup> I became aware of the engagement of Mercosur Associate Members (Chile, Colombia and Ecuador) in the development of the region’s HE project. Senior Manager 8 explained in the interview that: “The Arcusur [accreditation] System has gone much beyond the Mercosur. It already includes all countries in South America, with the exception of Peru, Suriname and Guiana” (Senior Manager 8, personal communication, June 21, 2016).

impossibility to attend a CHE meeting in June 2016 Montevideo, as I described in the Prologue.

Fortunately, the experience of the data collection proven to be different, and I was able to observe a CCR meeting in April 2017.

#### **4.4.5 Out in the field, part two: 2017 Fieldwork**

The largest proportion of primary data was collected in a second trip to LA, from March to June 2017. The itinerary started in Brazil and followed another route: Paraguay, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay. During the fieldwork I observed the procedures for Ethics and Risk Assessment by the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge<sup>105</sup> (Annexes 10, 11 and 12). The University of Cambridge's Faculty of Education's Fieldwork Funding covered the costs of the 2017 Fieldwork.

Three activities characterised the fieldwork: conducting semi-structured interviews (primary data), visiting the archives of the Argentinean Ministry of Education, and observing a CCR meeting as a guest academic. They will be presented in the sequence.

##### *4.4.5.1 Interviews*

Building upon the experience from the pilot study, I conducted 33 semi-structured interviews during my fieldwork. The interviews followed similar procedures to the pilot study: participants were selected depending on the historical moment they contribute to SEM (CJs). In terms of procedural ethics (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004), I followed the procedures as described in 4.4.1. Primary Data. I approached selected participants by email and sent attached to the message a package containing the research documents and my business card<sup>106</sup>. The change from the 2016 Pilot was to include *two* copies of the Informed Consent. The change resulted from realising that I would leave the field with full hands: information, data, contacts and the signed Informed Consent. I decided then that the participants should also be granted a copy of the Informed Consent because if there was supposed to be an exchange (information in exchange for anonymity and confidentiality they needed to receive

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<sup>105</sup> In October 2016 I transferred my PhD research from the University of Bristol to the University of Cambridge. The procedures of ethics have been redone. The University of Cambridge had additional requirements for fieldwork which involved a risk assessment. Permission to 'Leave to Work Away' was granted in January 2017.

<sup>106</sup> The three documents (Information Sheet, Informed Consent and my university business card) formed what I ended up calling the 'thesis package'. The 'package' was many times used as a light-hearted joke to notify my participants that 'they could find me anywhere' if they changed their minds over their participation or had a question about the research.

a token of my commitment as a researcher. I decided to include an extra signature line in the Informed Consent to demonstrate my commitment as a researcher.

Whilst collecting data, I was mindful of keeping a balanced number of interviews in the three levels of SEM governance (RME, CCR and CHE), as well as in the number of participants per country. In the context of CJs, both efforts proved to be a challenge. The most important reason was the rotation of actors taking part in SEM, and preferably HE activities. This was directly linked to the political situation of the Member States, a topic already discussed in this work. Another reason was the nation states' political engagement with the region, which shaped their interest in speaking about Mercosur.<sup>107</sup> This was illustrated more specifically with the case of Paraguay. As one expert informed, there was broad scepticism towards Mercosur after Paraguay's suspension of the region from June 2012 until July 2013, when the country was not allowed to attend any Mercosur meetings during this time (Mercosur, 2013).

Finally, and similar to the pilot study, interviews were conducted in Portuguese or Spanish and transcribed in their original language. Except for one interview<sup>108</sup>, all meetings were recorded, and the digital files stored in the University of Cambridge server.

#### 4.4.5.2 Archival work

A visit to the National Archives at the Ministry of Education in Argentina in April 2017 was invaluable for understanding the early history of SEM (CJ1). During the period of a week, I accessed a range of documents dates from the early 1990's that were missing from the SEM website. The Ministry's Documentation Centre (*Centro de Documentación*) maintained a physical and an online Institutional Archive (*Repositorio Institucional*<sup>109</sup>). The collection of meeting minutes (physical copies) was mostly complete and kept in cardboard boxes. The scanned files were open for consultation on the online Institutional Archive. A collage of a few photos (Figure 4.2) offer a picture of the how physical documents were stored. In it I also portray the warm welcome I received from the staff at the Documentation Centre, who welcomed me into their *mate* round as we worked together for a week.

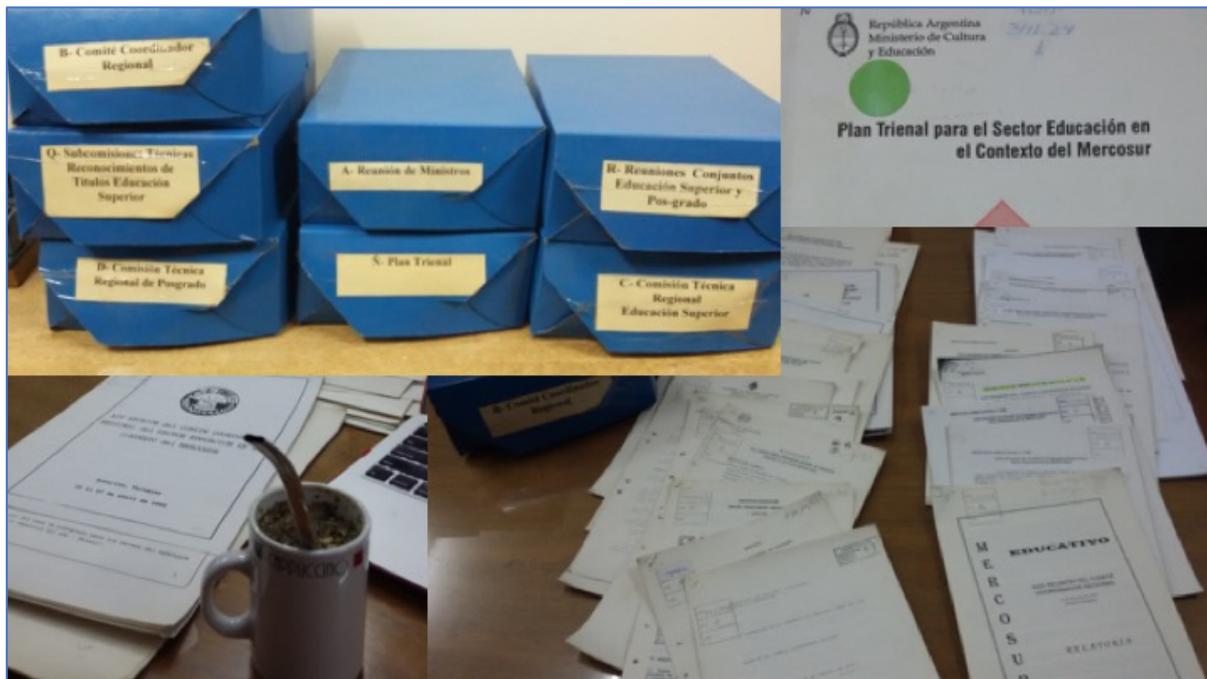
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<sup>107</sup> Most Mercosur Member States pull actors from other sectors to take part in SEM activities, usually their Ministry of Education's international cooperation sector. Argentina is a notable exception for it has a department committed to regional integration activities.

<sup>108</sup> One interview with a Paraguayan SM was not recorded because it was an unplanned meeting, and I did not have means to record it.

<sup>109</sup> Website: <http://repositorio.educacion.gov.ar:8080/dspace>.

Figure 4.2 Photos of the Archives in Argentina's Ministry of Education.



Source: Photos taken by the author.

Some of the publications I consulted in Buenos Aires provided a rich source of contextual information that has been very useful for the composition of Chapter 5. A similar pattern of publications and ‘translation’ texts were found to be produced by the Ministry of Education in Uruguay. I was unable to find evidence in Paraguay and Brazil.

#### 4.4.5.3 *Unstructured observation*

The discovery of the material in the archives would not be the only revealing moment in my second visit to Buenos Aires during the 2017 fieldwork. One of the participants invited me during an interview<sup>110</sup> to attend a CCR meeting. It led to an unexpected unstructured observation of a SEM meeting allowing me to grasp a distinct sense of the feel’ of a meeting in action.

Observation entails making a record of a situation as a witness. As presented by (Somekh & Lewin, 2011), the primary research instrument in an observation is the self, gathering sensory impressions and instruments to be analysed after. Data collected during

<sup>110</sup> Although in doubt, I took the risk to accept the invitation, given it would be a unique opportunity to understand the making of the regional education project from the inside. More importantly, I was also preoccupied in returning with gratitude the trust I received when invited to attend the meeting. Recusing the invitation was unimaginable: not only because I wanted to do it, but also because I did not want to show ingratitude. Now that I look back, it was one of the happiest moments in my PhD.

observations reflect a set of choices made by the researcher, which range from what to record, to the actions from the participants observed, to the researcher's impressions in the present moment of the event. Because I had not anticipated such an opportunity, it was not part of my protocol request for Ethical assessment, and I was unsure of its risks for the participants. I decided not to request to record the meeting. During the experience I wished I had multiple extras; arms to type, eyes to watch the room, and ears to capture everyone's voices fairly.

Observing the CCR meeting was an enriching experience and a highlight in my research. On the first day of the meeting, I was introduced by the hosts (Argentina) and warmly welcomed with comments such as "glad to have academics here". At this point my anxiety levels decreased considerably. I approached each participant<sup>111</sup> to introduce myself and explain the objectives of my thesis. Unsure whether the participants were consulted about my presence, I decided not to formalise the observation with an Informed Consent. My intention was to be as less disruptive as possible. I reasoned that formalising my participation could break with the natural trust I had received and raise a 'risk' sign. As such, I accepted that the information collected during the observation would be used as background information for the research.

All in all, the challenges of data collection resulted in an exceptional learning curve for the project. From the previous misconceptions during the pilot and culminating with being able to observe the making of the region in the CCR meeting, I felt confident to look at the data with a deeper understanding of the region. The next section details how data was managed and analysed.

## 4.5 Data analysis

I built an analytical framework to make sense of the large amount of data collected using two types of analysis: diachronic and textual analysis. On the one hand, the diachronic analysis relied on historical strategies, such as process tracing and critical junctures. On the other hand, I looked at texts as elements of social events (Fairclough, 2003) and applied critical discourse analysis (CDA) as proposed by Norman Fairclough (2001, 2003, 2013). CDA problematises the relationship between social structures and language, meanwhile considering how meanings are made, and by whom. The combination of both analytical

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<sup>111</sup> It important to note that I had interviewed two of the attendees of the meeting previous to my invitation to observe. As a result of the observation, I managed to interview another one. All interviews followed the already mentioned ethical procedures.

frameworks was key to help elucidate the relationship between the causal powers of the interactions between the social structures, mechanisms and human agency that together have enabled changes in the region's higher education (HE) project (Archer, Sharp, Stones, & Woodiwiss, 1999).

#### 4.5.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA emerged as an analytical framework from Norman Fairclough's proposal of a social theory of discourse in the book "Language and Power" (Fairclough, 1989). His postulation of applying a critical analysis to discourse analysis was an effort to investigate and problematise the relationship between social structure and language (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). Now a recognised analytical strategy, CDA brings the critical tradition in social analysis into language studies. It gives critical social analysis "a particular focus on discourse, and on relations between discourse and other social elements (power, ideologies, institutions, social identities etc.)" (Fairclough, 2013, p. 178), even if the narratives are concealed, silenced, repressed or suppressed (Jessop, 2004). CDA has a theoretical and methodological impact. It assumes that texts are parts of social events which are shaped by the causal powers of social structures and social practices.

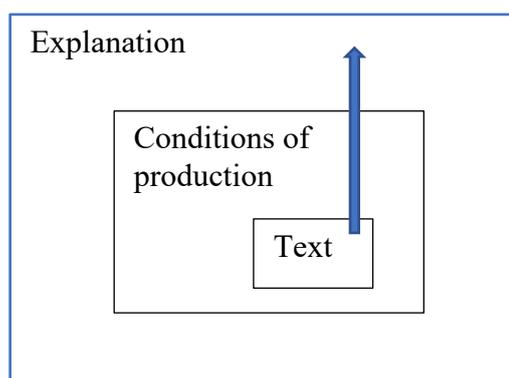
The analytical framework to explore Mercosur HE discourses focuses on a *moment or set of moments when a text or discourse is produced*. It depends on, and constitutes, the context and spatiality of when and where, and through which persons and instruments, the discursive action took place. In practice, it focuses on the analysis of 'when' and 'where' a discourse is created by particular actors to represent the social across the different genres. Genres are the different ways the actors (inter)act discursively (Fairclough et al, 2002; Fairclough, 2003). As explained in the previous section, the genres analysed in this study were: reports, meeting minutes, website texts, published research, work plans and strategies, declarations, interviews. Each genre or discourse was shaped by a network of social practices, known as orders of discourse, "the semiotic moment of (networks of) social practices" resulting from the "articulations of genres, of discourses, and of styles, i.e. semiotic ways of interacting, of construing, and of being (identity)" (Fairclough, 2007, p. 134).

Texts are more than the effects of linguistics structures and orders of discourse. "They are also effects of other social structures, and of social practices in all their aspects, so that it becomes difficult to separate out the factors shaping texts" (Fairclough, 2003b, p.25). Texts' social effects will depend on their process of *meaning making*, or *semiosis* (Fairclough et al,

2004). Finally, I employed the textual analysis to understand more how social practices emerge out of the semiotic process present in Mercosur HE discourses.

In practice, the textual analysis follows a model of ‘getting meanings out of the box’:

Figure 4.3 Analytical framework for textual analysis



Source: Elaborated by the author based on Fairclough (1989, 2003).

The analysis followed what Fairclough defines as the *external relations* of the text<sup>112</sup>. Three aspects were considered:

- Social structures: what is possible – reveals the mechanism in action (what is real).
- Social events: reveals the actual outcomes, or the realised events after the actions of the mechanisms in context. Social events include the actions and their social relations, the identification of persons and the representations of the world presented in the text.
- Intertextuality is a final aspect of the analysis of external relations and refers to how other voices are incorporated into the discourse.

These strategies allowed for understanding the changes in semiosis (meaning-making), and the role of the social agents in the text. Table 4.5 presents how the analysis was operationalised:

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<sup>112</sup> Fairclough defines seven aspects in discourses: Internal and external. Internal aspects are semiotics, grammar.

Table 4.5 Textual analysis of external relations

Aspects analysed	What the outcomes might indicate	Questions for data analysis
<b>Social structures</b> (level of the real)	The abstract entities allow a set of possibilities for events to happen	What are the mechanisms in place?
<b>Social practices</b> (level of the actual)	Mediate between the possibility of an event to happen and its actual happening. How one possibility is controlled	What conditions allowed the mechanisms to be activated?
<b>Social events</b> (level of the empirical)	Actions and their social relations (interpersonal function)	How were SEM activities framed? What negotiations had to be in place for the decision to happen?
	People involved in social events (identification of persons)	Who are the actors involved in the decision-making? Which actors took part? How often do they appear? Who is not there? How are the voices that are present and absent represented?
	Representation of the world (ideational)	How is the information ordered? What details get in and out? How are differences accounted for?
<b>Intertextuality</b>	How voices are incorporated, how meanings get recontextualised?	Which texts and voices are included and excluded? How are they reported? What elements from other discourses appear? What other texts are alluded to?

Source: Adapted from Fairclough (2003)

Other questions that supported the analysis aim to identify causal mechanisms within the events. Example of questions are:

- Who is it written for?
- Who wrote it?
- What are the main themes represented in the text?
- In terms of the research questions and the concern with the external world which the texts are inserted in, it will also ask:
- What inter-discursive relations can be found?
- How are the historical events represented?

#### 4.5.2 Getting from here to there: Retroduction as a mode of inference

Modes of inference clarify how the conclusions about one particular phenomenon or object led to inferences about something else (Danermark et al, 2002, p. 75-76). Ultimately, they indicate what was the thought process that led to certain conclusions about Mercosur HE using the research design proposed. Berth Danermark and colleagues (2002) highlight four

modes of inference: induction, deduction, abduction and retroduction<sup>113</sup>. Each one of them has a philosophical and theoretical ancestry and foundation and includes ontological assumptions about the nature of reality and epistemological assumptions about how that reality can be known (Blaikie, 2003; Sayer, 1992). For this thesis, I focused on retroduction as a mode of inference.

Retroduction demands the researcher the ability to abstract in order to make clear the causal mechanisms and the basic conditions for social relationships, people's actions, reasoning and knowledge, moving from empirical observation of phenomena to a conceptualisation of transfactual conditions. It is in the inference mode where events are explained by postulating (and identifying) causes. As Sayer explains,

...events are causally explained by retroducting and confirming the existence of mechanisms, and in turn the existence of mechanisms is explained by reference to the structure and constitution of the objects which possess them. Where the same events are co-determined by several distinct causes, they may also be explained by calculating the relative contributions of each mechanism (Sayer, 1992, p. 235).

Retroduction as a mode of inference is highly dependent on abstraction, a “theoretical description of mechanisms and structures, in order to hypothesise how the observed events can be explained” (Bygstad & Munkvold, 2011, p. 3). However, abstraction is *not* enough to provide an analysis of causal mechanisms (Sayer, 2000), because it misses the essential element of thought processing and drawing conclusions from the reality observed – a mode of inference. As will become clear in the Conclusion of Section II, retroduction is a critical step that will enable the presentation of conclusions about Mercosur HE.

## 4.6 Ethical considerations and reflexivity

This project has been conducted observing an *ethics of respect* in accordance to British Education Research Association (BERA)'s ethical guidelines (BERA, 2018). I was –

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<sup>113</sup> Deduction and induction, the first known scientific modes of inference, have been historically based on logical inference by the test of hypotheses and on empirical generalizations, respectively. The power of their conclusion is based on assumptions of data that are not based on explanations, but on the logical development of actions. Abduction has a rational operation that suggests the interpretation of an event or phenomenon from a collection of different frameworks and methods of analysis and conceptual explanation, in order to develop a new understanding of the phenomenon studied (Danermark et al., 2002, p. 88-95). The use of abductive inference to interpret a phenomenon in the light of an analytical framework (rule) creates several possible frames of analysis. The interpretation of the phenomenon would be one of several possible interpretations, without use the generalization of the phenomenon or as logical inference strategy.

sometimes perhaps too much – aware of my role and responsibilities as a researcher. As a consequence, I paid careful attention to any ethical dilemmas that appeared along the research process that could affect my participants, any other stakeholders I met or discussed the study with, my colleagues who study Mercosur HE, my own subjectivities and perceptions and the quality of my claims.

It is known that tackling ethical dilemmas is a fundamental part of doing research in any area (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Elements, such as balancing the requirements of the academic practice for scientific discovery with the impact of the research on participant's values and rights (Blaikie, 2000; Cohen et al., 2007), ensuring that the study brings no harm to anyone involved in the work, and managing any risks for legal liability (J. A. Singh, 2009), are important to consider.

Given the temporality of ethical dilemmas that arise during fieldwork (Dillabough, 2008), it is often the case that researchers encounter dilemmas which were unforeseen during the ethical preparations, particularly when conducting fieldwork abroad. However, in the field of social sciences in LA, the institutionalisation of ethical procedures is still a practice in development (Barbosa, Corrales, & Silbermann, 2014; Meo, 2010). As a consequence of the crossing of academic contexts, in this case, the UK and LA, the differences in 'ethics in practice' influenced the development of my rapport with the LA participants, who (in some cases) reacted with surprise to my insistence on ethical procedures. Furthermore, the cultural differences in interpersonal relationships also played their part. The most common question coming from participants, especially the gatekeepers, was: 'who did you speak to in (country)?' – now, how to respond to that, juggling at the same time rapport- and trust-building, the anonymity of the other participants, and, of course, avoiding deception? It was therefore necessary to provide appropriate information about the research's goals and outcomes, what is expected of the participants in the study, how the research procedures may affect them, how to guarantee their anonymity, how they could withdraw from the study, and finally how they could voice any concerns or questions (Blaikie, 2000; Mertens, 1988).

Along the research process there were two formal moments, or procedural ethics, as Guillemin & Gillam (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004) would define them. They involved preparing ethical applications for the two institutions the research was developed in. As aforementioned, this research ran past two Ethical reviews: the first one in May 2016 at the University of Bristol, and the second one in December 2016 at the University of Cambridge.

The main issues encountered during the development of this research were: anonymity and confidentiality and my positioning and membership as an insider or outsider in the research, and finally the use of three languages in the study.

#### **4.6.1 Anonymity and confidentiality**

This aspect was one that brought me considerable headaches. Following the Data Protection Act, BERA suggests that the law for the confidential and anonymous treatment of participants' data is seen as the norm for conducting research (BERA, 2018).

Crow and Wiles's (2008) highlight three issues in confidentiality and anonymity that researchers tend to encounter during practice. The first is how far it is possible to assume the possibilities of complete anonymisation, considering the audience of the research. It could be tackled by discussing with the informants their preferences and giving them a clear indication of when a request cannot be achieved before the interview starts. Nonetheless, considering that the informants were invited out of a pool of actors listed in official and public documents from the Mercosur and the Ministries of Education, plus the added factor that they are a small group of experts who know one another, it would be unlikely full anonymity could be guaranteed.

The second relates to the informants' different views and desirability of anonymisation. Despite my previous assumptions that participants working at Mercosur offices, or at the Ministry of Education in the Member States, would be more concerned with anonymity, it was not the case. Some of them found it particularly amusing that there was so much concern with confidentiality and ethics.

A final issue relates to the anonymisation of location. It was important for the analysis of agency and multi-scalar governance to identify the Member States' HE mechanisms and structures. Knowing the position of each Member State given the informants were collected from official and public documents, and anonymising their location, was unfeasible. When I explained this to the participants they showed a good deal of understanding with this requirement. No participant argued for the contrary or requested full anonymity.

As hinted in Section 4.4.1., the use of snowballing configured an ethical dilemma. In the pilot, apart from collecting names from documents in the public domain, I relied on snowballing for identifying and contacting informants. It was an appropriate method to access participants. The problem was when snowballing indirectly created issues of anonymity: how to maintain the anonymity of the interviewee when he or she was identified by another participant? In the face of this, I stopped requesting for suggestions of informants during the

interviews. If a name was suggested during the interview, I would approach that person without a direct recommendation.

#### **4.6.2 Where to stand? On the membership as insider or outsider in Mercosur**

Memberships in research can be broadly defined as categories of affiliation with the research object or population. The classifications of ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ are a traditional way to discuss membership. In short, an ‘insider’ researcher is one who shares a language, an identity and/or an experiential base that can provide him or her with faster acceptance with the study participants (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). An outsider lacks familiarity with the internal workings of a given population and must access members first in order to acquire such knowledge.

As a national of one of the Mercosur countries, it would appear to be a forthright conclusion to classify myself as an insider in the context of this study: a ‘local’ from South Brazil who was born in a town close to both the Argentinean and Uruguayan borders, not to mention, a speaker of Portuguese and Spanish. Nevertheless, this was not how it felt. I never envisioned as feasible the idea(l) of LA integration. I do not recall ever hearing about Mercosur actions in education even though I attended primary and secondary education during the 1990s. My last personal experience of HE in the region was in 2006. Yes, I spoke the language and understood general cultural meanings, but Mercosur (and SEM) was never a part of my experience. Therefore, it felt somewhat uncomfortable to be classified as an insider. Nevertheless, how appropriate was it to be classified as an outsider? Could there be a balance or shifting between the two classifications?

My membership shifted as the research progressed. This phenomena is understood as ‘positional spaces’, a transitory state in which researcher and participant engender a level of cooperation during their encounter (Mullings, 1999). During the first negotiations for access I was aware of the participants’ empowered position to decide over my invitations to the study. From the UK, I felt ‘disconnected’ to the participants (Berry, 2011). However, once in LA to meet with them face to face, I noticed how my membership changed once we connected and established a new space. I experienced a welcoming reception where they showed genuine interest in my background during the building of the rapport-building phase for the interviews. Despite being aware of the dynamic politics at play during the interview (Limerick, Burgess-Limerick, & Grace, 1996), especially in Argentina and Uruguay, the

connection established contributed to a new membership as an insider: I became a *gaúcha* who enjoys ‘*mate*’ instead of a researcher coming from the UK. I became one of them.

#### **4.6.3 The use of languages: meaning and power at play**

The use of languages proved to be a challenge throughout; from the preparation for data collection starting from the discussions for the ethics review to the analysis of documentation. During fieldwork, first the documents had to be written in English, soon to be translated into Portuguese, being the easiest for me as it is my mother tongue, and then into Spanish. During the 2016 Pilot Study, when I tested the feasibility of the research methods, it appeared that the questions were different in every interview – despite the fact that they had the same meaning (or I thought they did!) – in English.

I was also aware of the impact of translation in the data analysis (Birbili, 2000). Aspects such as the skills of the translator and his or her knowledge of the culture of the local where the research takes place can impact the quality of the representation into English either by manipulating or losing meanings from the original language from the interviews or documents<sup>114</sup>. Moreover, it is not only the translation from one language to the other that matters, but also the cultural differences in the same language – which would be the case of Argentina, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay. Even though an advanced speaker of Spanish, I wondered whether I would do justice to the variances of Spanish in the region. What could these linguistic differences in Spanish reveal of my participants and in my reading of the educational project of Mercosur?

When approaching the data analysis stage, the main obstacles were related to the time it took to process the data. In this sense, the option to work collaboratively with the participants for the translation of interviews, although interesting, was discarded. The experience of member checking was the main reason: delays in replies would mean a delay in completing the thesis. The chosen path was to present only the English translation in the text and maintain the original in the footnotes. It was the best course to follow as I worried about how much power a researcher has in conveying meanings and values in data analysis.

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<sup>114</sup> Filep (2009) understand that the complexity of managing research in multilingual settings results from the need to translate not only the language, but also the participant’s culture must be somehow translated, interpreted, and dealt with.

## 4.7 Conclusion

This Chapter elucidated the methodological choices made during the development of the study by teasing out my decision-making processes along the research process, and revealing how I collected, processed and analysed data. I have also sketched out in detail how I approached the case of Mercosur as sectoral regionalism using historical and textual analytical frameworks, both of which were employed to consider causal explanations. Process tracing was revealed to be the main methodological and analytical tool to approach the case of Mercosur HE: it suggests an inductive decomposition of the events expected to reveal the causal chains of a process, combined with the event's sequencing enable the identification of their mechanisms and outcomes. This detailed approach provided the necessary reassurances of robustness that links the moments of region-building to its structuring mechanisms in context.

I close the Chapter by highlighting the role of the framework of CJs in the research as both a tool to narrow down the scope of the analysis and an analytical tool (Collier and Collier, 1991). The decision to adopting the CJ framework was key for the development of this thesis. It allowed the identification of historical change and their causal effects (Boas, 2014). Changes, in the CJ framework, indicate a legacy which shifted the direction of the work, leaving a legacy that endured through the development of the HE Sector. To do so, it is important to examine the 'mechanisms of production' of such a legacy (Boas, 2014). As the thesis moves into the empirical stage, where each CJ and their mechanisms of production are teased out, it is important to note that there were moments outside the CJs which were also pertinent for the analysis. I did not discard them as irrelevant for SEM or Mercosur. However, they were not analysed in the same depth as the events in the CJs.

## **Conclusion of Section I**

Section I aimed to make visible the theoretical and methodological tools used to carry out the study. It explained how this historical study will look for explanations of the ways in which Mercosur HE came to be using process tracing as research strategy and the framework of critical junctures.

It started by exploring the uniqueness of LA Regionalisms, and why the perspective that ‘one size fits all – i.e. the EU as the model for regionalism – does not work for the analysis of LA regionalisms. Furthermore, I accepted Hameiri’s invitation to consider the spatiality of region-making as part of its political project to establish specific forms of political rule. As such, regionalism expressions depend on their spatial, cultural, economic and political dimensions at any point in time, and will be necessarily variegated given that different processes can have different outcomes. Such a positioning entails that Mercosur HE must be examined with regards to the type of outcomes, mechanisms and strategies emerged along its almost three decades of existence, not to the success of failure of other HE regions.

The section has built the argument that HE sectoral regions are the expressions of global education policies. As such, decision-making in HE entails looking at the relationship between the different scales of power and ideas (national, regional, global), and how they affect HE practices and policymaking at the regional level – the focus of this analysis.

To conclude, a look into SEM as an ensemble indicates the current state of their Members, and its workings. The description of the HE Sector presented in pages 84-95 reflect the most current state of affairs. It enables me to look back to reconstruct its history by tracing its process. I am now able to ask: how did it get to be what it is? What alternatives could be in place to redefine the activities? And, more importantly, what elements could have given a very different outcome to the region? In a linear temporal development from 1991, this is what I will address in the next Section.

## SECTION II – THE CASE OF MERCOSUR HE AS SECTORAL REGIONALISM

### Introduction

This Section will present the results of the empirical work that led to the understanding of the changing relationships between Mercosur's region-making project and its education project, with an interest in the role of higher education (HE) in region-building. In line with the research questions, I am interested in learning about the spatial dynamics shaping the HE Sector, the existing power relations and the external influences that dialogue with it. The next five Chapters look for evidence that can offer explanations for how the regional education Sector developed and how its policy process in the area of HE has been shaped, and reshaped, throughout time under which conditions, by whom and for whom.

The analysis presented in the following Chapters draws on the role of mechanisms and the context in shaping the outcomes of Mercosur. It is inspired by Pawson and Tilley's model or realist explanation – ' $O = f(M + C)$ '. It is presented in a way to explore social events affecting the political economy of the Mercosur Member States the structure of their HE systems, changes in Mercosur as a region, as well as events in other sectors in Mercosur and other regions. All of those are considered under framework of critical education policy studies (Olssen et al., 2004; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Robertson & Dale, 2015; M. Simons et al., 2009); where matters of power, conflict, interests, and "the broader politics of education, knowledge and culture, as well as the politics of power within education" (M. Simons et al., 2009, p. 16) are taken into account. Finally, the analysis observes the features of LA regionalisms discussed in Chapter 3. As a reminder from the Introduction, the analytical framework does not contemplate a comparative approach between Mercosur's HE Sector and other HE regionalism experiences.

Section II is organised in five Chapters (see Table 4.2, Chapter 4). Each signals a Critical Juncture (CJ), which I define as moments of change that produced legacies in Mercosur HE. They are presented in historical order. I also introduce the HE systems of the four Mercosur Member States, in order: Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Brazil. I found important to offer more insights into the HE systems of the members states in lieu of the intergovernmental nature of Mercosur. This governance instrument puts emphasis on the roles the national members of the region play. The order the national systems is presented is

not innocent: it depicts points when changes at the national level meet the changes at the Region, apart from Brazil who stands out for having the least engagement, but a high power of decision, in the region.

## **5 DISCOVERY AND SELF-DISCOVERY: THE EMERGENCE OF A REGIONAL EDUCATION PROJECT**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This Chapter is concerned with the emergence of the Mercosur Education Sector (SEM) and the first HE regional policies and mechanisms elaborated upon its creation in 1991. It departs from the moment of policy entrepreneurship and advocacy that led to the emergence of the Sector from May 1991 until December 1991. Moreover, it explores the immediate effects of this new region in terms of ideas and instruments for SEM. The CJ concludes with the establishment of the HE Sector in September 1993. During this time the first intentions for HE emerge. In this CJ, I position Argentina's HE actors as the key figures in the emergence of SEM. The Chapter concludes with two reflections. I first explore the relationship between the education project and the shaping of the region as a whole, given their parallel timelines. What can this relationship reveal about the region, if it can reveal anything at all? Did SEM meet its initial assumptions? In what ways and with which consequences? A second reflection critically analyses the pertinence of CJ as an analytical framework in the context of the historical analysis of the Mercosur Education Sector.

### **5.2 Events that generated events: conditions for this regional education project to exist**

Mercosur's education project started during the early days of formalising the region in 1991. In thinking critically about this event, we can begin by starting with a question: what events led this regional project to happen? Three aspects help to answer the question: the influence of international organisations (IOs) in structural reforms in LA, the movement of education policy ideas, particularly from the EU, and the historical context of the Member States. In combination, these resulted in the opening up of the markets as a consequence of the changing world order.

First, research shows that the push for a regional approach to education policies can be located in the 1970s as a means to generate economic development and reduce poverty in debt-ridden LA (Munck, 2013). These policies later combined into what it is now known as

the Washington Consensus<sup>115</sup>: a set of 10 policy instruments that included deregulation, privatisation, foreign direct investment, and prioritising public investment. The reforms prompted by the Consensus invariably cascaded into education (Ballerini, 2017; Canen & Oliveira, 2000; Noveli, 2016). Authors have also highlighted the influence of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC/CEPAL) thinking of promoting “education for economic development” (Alcantara et al., 2013; Botto, 2015a, 2015a; CEPAL, 1992, 1992; Demange, 2009; Laredo, 1992; E. M. Larrechea & Castro, 2009)<sup>116</sup>. To CEPAL, education was a tool for improved human capital, therefore for economic development:

...the productive transformation presupposes the existence of human resources capable of adapting to the changing needs of the productive sector. In this sense, education and continuous retraining of the labour force are a necessary condition for the economy to advance along a path of sustained growth and equity (CEPAL, 1990, p. 121).

The second aspect is the influence of education policies that were happening at different scales. Examples are the Erasmus Mobility Programme and the Jean Monnet Activities<sup>117</sup> in Europe as well as the UN’s ‘Education for All’ movement, targeted to primary education, started in Thailand (1991). The 1987 Erasmus Programme is particularly relevant for the analysis of SEM, given the close timeline of its development. This unique cooperative programme within the EU moved from a labour mobility discussion into one of region-building through HE student mobility. Erasmus gained a ‘citizenship’ dimension before the signature of the policy, after 10 years after the negotiations started (Corbett, 2003, p. 324). As the analysis will reveal in different points, these events armed key Mercosur

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<sup>115</sup> The Washington consensus was a series of reforms, posed as ‘policy instruments rather than outcomes’, to bring ‘fiscal discipline’ to developing countries (Williamson, 1990). It was promoted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank.

<sup>116</sup> Elsa Kraychete describes how the discourse of poverty reduction emerged as a consequence of the influence of IOs in LA’s economic development: “under the argument that economic growth would not lead to the well-being of the great majority of the populations of underdeveloped countries, the first delineations of poverty alleviation policies, inspired by the idea of justice as equity, appear. The principles of liberalism prevail in the debate economic and political, which will present itself with renovations in the direction of redefining the treatment of the social question. The discourse of the International Organizations is permeated by the liberal principles of rights, freedom and justice. The liberal conception that starts to command the analysis of the institutions of international cooperation considers the existence of the basic needs to be given priority and that these needs can be measured, defined and classified” (Kraychete, 2012b, p. 185).

<sup>117</sup> Jean Monnet was a programme that promoted the insertion of ‘European Studies’ as a field of study, either as a new component, or as a ‘chair’ position within universities.

actors with ideas that influenced both their national reforms and the objectives for an Education Sector in Mercosur<sup>118</sup>.

The third and final factor that enabled a ‘regional education’ project was the historical context for all Mercosur founding countries; they were transitioning from military rule into democracies<sup>119</sup>. The opening up of/for free markets and the influence of (now global) organisations and policies also implied new possibilities for international cooperation in education – unlikely during the times of the military ruling. The growing influence of external educational contexts met the conditions of change within the Mercosur countries – as they welcomed and ushered in these ideas through open doors. Senior Manager 10 highlights this aspect in the Interview, and notes that for (then) Brazilian Minister of Education Murílio de Avellar Hingel (1992-1995):

there was a big concern ... to promote a bigger insertion of MEC into the international scenario. For this, he relied on the specific support from an Itamaraty diplomat<sup>120</sup> (Senior manager 10, personal communication, March 14, 2017).

As a consequence of Minister Hingel’s resourcing to diplomats to plan Brazil’s insertion of the global education arena, an ambassador led its participation in SEM. The consequences of this ‘professionalisation’, as highlighted by Senior Manager 20 (Uruguay), is the unbalance of power at the negotiation. It was uneasy to have the Itamaraty’s Ambassadors sitting at the table and negotiating education as part of Brazil’s External Relations portfolio, when the others had senior (technical) staff from the Ministries of Education.

If looking within the Mercosur Member States, the exposure to international ideas may have shed new light in the way cooperation in the education Sector happened in the new region. This fact is relevant because until then *regional* cooperation<sup>121</sup> did not mean

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<sup>118</sup> Although not specified by the Mercosur staff at the time, other programmes are: the Association of Universities Grupo Montevideo (AUGM, 1991), NAFTA’s Wingspread Process (1992) and the UMAP’s university mobility dialogue for the Asia-Pacific (1991).

<sup>119</sup> The period of dictatorships in the Mercosur countries is: Argentina (1976-1983), Brazil (1964-1985), Paraguay (1964-1989) and Uruguay (1973-1985). This is particularly important in the case of Paraguay, for its military rule only finished in 1989, a few years before the launch of Mercosur (Arce, 2011; Martini, 1999; Masi, 2011).

<sup>120</sup> Itamaraty is the colloquial name given to the Ministry of Foreign Relations in Brazil. It stands for the Itamaraty Palace, where the Ministry sits in Brasília.

<sup>121</sup> Here I use ‘cooperation’ to mean cooperative actions and interactions among different actors (Palestini & Agostinis, 2018). This use is distinct than the uses in international cooperation for development, or international aid, where there exists a relationship between a ‘donor’ and a ‘recipient’ (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engberg-Pedersen, 2003; Kraychete, 2012b; Milani, 2012). Such a differentiation becomes relevant when analysing the interviews because I noticed that participants

*Mercosur region-making*. SEM did not substitute the Member States' bilateral cooperation in education. There were cooperation activities in HE taking place prior to 1990 between Mercosur countries in the form of bilateral agreements at different levels: this included Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Education, sub-national regional governments (States or provinces), and a number of interinstitutional cooperation agreements between universities<sup>122</sup>. It is worth noting that bilateral programs continue to exist today. Indeed, whilst Technical Cooperation between Brazil and Uruguay has existed since 1975, a recent Working Group has established new bilateral cooperation projects for the period 2018-2020, out of which three are in the area of education (AUCI, 2018). This shows Mercosur cooperation did not superimpose or displaced other types of cooperation. Rather, it added a *new layer* of complexity into the regional cooperation practice, with the intention of region-building.

### 5.3 The European experience: a thread along SEM

In spite of many years of bilateral cooperation between Mercosur countries, the European experience in HE policy is often cited as the one aspect that inspired the shaping of Mercosur the most (Azevedo, 2014; Bartesaghi & Pereira, 2016; Krawczyk & Sandoval, 2012). Early documents, meeting minutes, publications, even interviews, point that the cultural and educational dimensions were a necessary condition for regional integration:

These advances were simultaneous to the actions carried out in the economic-commercial area, constituting a different experience from that of the European Economic Community, in which education began to be addressed two decades after the Treaty of Rome and that did affirm to Jean Monnet, the true animator and master of the work of the first European institutional infrastructure, that "...if he had to start over, start with education and culture" (Argentina, 1993b, p. 10).

This episode was revisited during the interview with Senior Manager 17:

Once the Treaty of Asunción is signed, it begins the discussion that it would be important to accompany a process that is born fundamentally economic and political... for the education Sector to collaborate, perhaps bringing to their own reality what Jean Monnet had said: that if he had to restart the work of the European

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tended to use 'cooperation' to refer to 'international cooperation'. This will be discussed further down in this Chapter (section 5.8), and again in Chapter 7.

<sup>122</sup> To illustrate, the Cultural Agreement signed between Paraguay and Argentina in 1967 suggested a binational commission composed by members of the Ministries of Education and Foreign Affairs, as well as universities, to "study and write a regulation that establish all related to equivalence of studies, admission of students, recognition, grants making, professional and teaching work" (Paraguay, 1967).

Union, the work of the European integration, he would begin with education. That was a phrase that they managed to... this experience from the Europeans... to bring it here to accompany the process of regional integration, also from education<sup>123</sup> (Senior Manager 17, personal communication, May 23 2017).

Although it is unclear whether the famous quote was indeed authored by Jean Monnet (Corbett, 2005), the idea that regional integration ‘should start with education’ offered the necessary validity and sense of purpose the policy entrepreneurs needed: Mercosur should have a different start to its regionalising project, with the bonus of learning from the Europeans. As SM 20 explained:

Let’s see, it doesn’t seem to me that Latin America has to imitate European integration, that we have to be like them, no, no, absolutely not. But it did seem to me that there was a lot to be learned from Europe<sup>124</sup> (Senior Manager 20, personal communication, June 24, 2016).

Therefore, the solution - to set a correct path for (a better) regional integration - was evident: it was necessary to set up an education project with the highest levels of decision-making in the Mercosur in order to avoid the mistakes Europe had committed.

## 5.4 Policy entrepreneurs: the role of key actors in shaping SEM

Bringing education into the Mercosur agreement required intense advocacy. The process lasted for over eight months, and four meetings. Serendipity seemed to have played its part by allowing four face-to-face encounters along the way. In March 1991, soon after the signature of the Treaty of Asunción, the Organisation for the Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture (OEI) and Argentina’s Ministry of Education hosted a workshop about *Decentralising education systems in Buenos Aires*<sup>125</sup>. During the event, experts and technical staff<sup>126</sup> from the ministries of education in Argentina, Brazil and

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<sup>123</sup> In the original: “Una vez que se firma el Tratado de Asunción, empieza allí a considerarse que sería importante acompañar un proceso que nace fundamentalmente siendo económico y político... para que desde el Sector educación se colabore, un poco haciendo experiencia propia lo que había dicho Jean Monet, que, si tuviera que volver a empezar el trabajo de la Unión Europea, el trabajo de integración europea empezaría por la educación. Esa fue una frase que trataron también, esa experiencia que fue de los europeos, de traerla acá acompañar el proceso de integración regional, también desde lo educativo”.

<sup>124</sup> In the original: “a ver, no es que me parezca que América Latina tiene que imitar la integración europea, que tenemos que ser como ellos, no, no, no en absoluto. Pero si me parecía que había mucho aprendizaje de Europa”.

<sup>125</sup> The event was called “I Regional workshop ‘Innovative developments in the planning and management of education systems: decentralising education’ (translated title) (España/MEC, 1992).

<sup>126</sup> In the context of this study, experts are academics or researchers in the area of education. Technical staff are civil servants working for the Ministries.

Uruguay took the opportunity to meet and exchange ideas about the integration process that had just began (Argentina & OAS, 1996; Piñon, 1993). These actors agreed that the signing of the Mercosur agreement was an important historical moment for its Member States, and that education necessarily had to be a part of the conversation. I consider them to be ‘policy entrepreneurs’ for their ability to actively influence policy debate and mobilise decision-making towards a certain goal<sup>127</sup> (Böcher, 2011; Corbett, 2003; M. Simons et al., 2009). As reported by Senior Manager 21,

And in that moment, we came to an agreement that it should not be something foreign to us, that it was something we had to get started on (...) Education could have consequences for the integration process<sup>128</sup> (Senior Manager 21, personal communication, April 12, 2017).

The group met again in May 1991 in Brasília (second meeting)<sup>129</sup> to define a positioning for the Sector. Rodolfo Gonzáles Rissotto, then Director of Education at the Uruguayan Ministry of Education and Culture, summarised the outcomes of the meeting:

(a) Education has a fundamental role in consolidating and projecting integration; (b) Our capacity as Latin Americans to reconnect in our common values and to claim our identities before the challenges of the contemporary world depends to a large extent on education; (c) the economic progress with social justice that the Treaty [of Asunción] indicates (...) presupposes action lines which are in fact closely linked with the educational (Gonzáles Rissotto, 1992, p. 7)

Having agreed on those principles, the task for setting up the regional project took an important step in the third meeting in Asunción in late July (29-31 July). The meeting had three objectives: to create a ‘reflexive space’ about the future scenarios for education, to share information about the state of education in each of the Member States, and to plan of *ideas-fuerza* (core ideas) of what to do together as a region (Gonzáles Rissotto, 1992). As relevant as these goals were for SEM, the most relevant aspect in this meeting turned out to be its *special guests*: the EU, the OEI, OAS, UN Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America (OREALC/UNESCO) and OAS’s Interamerican Centre for Research in Education

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<sup>127</sup> “Policy entrepreneurs are promoters who are able to develop policy ideas as well as to actively influence politics in order to realize these policy ideas during the policy process. Policy Entrepreneurs mobilize the public, build up actor-coalitions, and are willing to invest costs (e.g. money, labor and time) to push their ideas even against critics (Roberts/King 1991)” (Böcher, 2011, p. 1).

<sup>128</sup> In the original: “Y coincidimos en ese momento [sic] que no era algo que nos fuera ajeno, que era algo sobre el cual teníamos que poner en marcha. ... La educación podía generar consecuencias sobre el proceso de integración”.

<sup>129</sup> The Brazilian Ministry of Education hosted the International Meeting for Literacy and Citizenship during, 3-5 May 1991. This event was a consequence of the 1990 UN’s “Education for All” meeting in Jomtien, Thailand. Brazil was included as one of the nine case studies in the world to eradicate illiteracy (Haddad & Di Pietro, 1994, pp. 6–7).

Planning (CINTERPLAN)<sup>130</sup>. Why to invite IOs? Supposedly, SEM wanted to collect experiences, and to a large extent, political support for their endeavour using some of the IO's authority (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004)<sup>131</sup>. Out of the Paraguay meeting followed a draft of Protocol of Intentions forwarded to the Ministers of Education. A final meeting in São Paulo in November 1991 finalised the text.

After four meetings from May to November 1991, the actors had carved out a purpose, a minimum set of common values brought about with a historical argument, and validation before the main actors in international education. All of these granted them the necessary legitimacy to move forward with the process, for "...as possession of legitimacy empowers specific actors, standards of legitimacy also function as forms of structural power which constitute and constrain" (Symons, 2011, p. 2560). They had met and shared ideas in an important exercise of building trust. Notably, there is no evidence of the personal involvement of the Ministers of Education in any of the four preparatory meetings, or, indeed, how the negotiation with the Mercosur's CMC took place. Nevertheless, Mercosur would have an education Sector.

## **5.5 Realising power and generating new events: first mechanisms**

The success of the negotiations led the Council of Mercosur (CMC) to accept the recommendation for adding a 'Meeting of the Ministers of Education' into the regional structure (MERCOSUR/CMC, 1991). Two events formalised the role of the education Sector in the Mercosur structure: the signature of the Protocol of Intentions by the Ministers of Education (December 1991), and the approval of an education project as a Triennial Plan (June 1992). These first outcomes are interpreted as resulting from the function of the mechanisms (negotiations emanating from meetings) which were realised in a more

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<sup>130</sup> Based in Caracas, CINTERPLAN was created in Venezuela in 1970 as an agreement between the Venezuela Government and the OAS. Its goal was to give technical support for Latin American's governments to improve the efficiency of their education systems, usually done through training and research. It seems to be extinct today.

<sup>131</sup> Barnett and Finnemore (2004) indicate that IOs's authority depended the states' perception that IOs are 'in authority' and 'an authority' in the first place. In the case of this preparatory meeting in Paraguay, a EU representative shared the region's experience with the mobility programmes. It leads to the conclusion that the EU was seen as having the authority to talk about mobility for they the experience of implementing a regional mobility programme. As a consequence, it provided SEM with the knowledge necessary – and some authority, too - to negotiate an Education Sector for Mercosur.

favourable context for education ideas and policies in Latin America (LA) in the early 1990's.

### 5.5.1 The Protocol of intentions

The Mercosur ministers of education signed a Protocol of intentions on 13 December 1991 in Brasília. In what can be now regarded as a pivotal political instruments towards the formalising of the Sector in Mercosur, the Protocol makes a case for the fundamental role of education in ensuring the consolidation and visibility of the integration process (MERCOSUR/RME, 1991).

In terms of understanding the Protocol as a specific discursive moment, its intertextual features - of references to other texts and ideas - highlights the relational work that it was now being asked to do. They are also assumptions<sup>132</sup> of the role of education in regional integration: it evokes the economic goals envisaged by Mercosur as expressed in the Treaty of Asunción, such as 'improving human resources', 'development', 'education's formative and productive aim' and 'modernisation of the Member States'. What is more, and as I highlight more broadly in Chapter 2, some of these terms refer to CEPAL thinking of the time. Expressions such as 'modernization', 'equal/balanced development' (*desarrollo equilibrado*) and 'transformation with equity' can be found in both the Treaty of Asunción and the agreement between the ministers of education (Barbiero & Chaloult, 2001; Perrotta, 2013).

### 5.5.2 The first Triennial Plan

The Protocol's three goals became an action plan set for implementation over a period of three years. The 'Triennial' Plan was approved June 1992, on the occasion of the second Ministerial meeting (RME). More than being simply a list of actions, the Plan offers the conceptual basis for the development of the region. It places the events historically by exalting the 'conviction that the heaviest actors in the XXI century will be the regional blocs.' It also makes reference to Nineteenth Century *Símon Bolívar* when affirming that the Latin American (LA) "ideal of continental integration was revalued (*revalorizado*)" (Uruguay, 1992b, p. 23).

The Plan's first goal aims to *develop citizens' consciousness favourable to the integration process*. It stands out in terms of Mercosur's region-building project when it

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<sup>132</sup> Fairclough defines propositional assumptions as what is, or can be, the case when shaping the content of a discourse (Fairclough, 2003, p. 55-56).

indicates that education should pave the way into a region built ‘from within’ (Dang, 2016). The proposal, to “reconnect in our common values and to claim our identities before the challenges of the contemporary world” (as quoted earlier), is coherent with this objective. What is more, its intertextual features draw attention to ideas from external influences, such as policymaking in the EU as well as the LA historical context.

The second objective, *train human resources to contribute for development*, invokes discourses of the IOs leading structural reforms for the past 30 years in LA, where effectiveness and efficacy were achieved by a trained workforce (Kraychete, 2012a; Rodríguez-Gómez & Alcántara, 2001). To bring *compatibility and harmonisation of the education systems in the region*, third objective, probably took the longest as the systems had to discover for themselves first in order to shape the region. Evidence shows that the first two years of SEM demonstrate a path of discovery of their own, and their neighbours’, education systems from which they could find common ground so as to build a collective project. In addition, as pointed out by Daniela Perrotta (2012), a third and key element was the fostering of trust amongst the Member States. Evidence from the early documentation, as well as from the interviews, point to an initial period in which States looked for a common ground to work together by mapping the past and the present of the state of the education systems and existing bilateral cooperation:

Started ... the elaboration of national reports about the organisation, structure and workings of the [national] education systems, with the goal to then proceed with a comparative analysis (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 1992, p. 7).

Information about cooperation agreements between Mercosur countries: There were advances in collecting information about the cooperation agreements among the countries in the region. This activity, coordinated by Uruguay, will start the processing data phase next semester (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 1993b, p. 2).

John Agnew argues mapping is less of an exercise of information sharing, and more of an exercise of power (Agnew, 1999; Robertson et al., 2012). If so, more than an being simply an exercise of discovery, the information collected would/could be used to position the Member States in relation to the projects that would be designed, steering the regional policies towards one way or another. If accepting Arocena and Caetano (2011)’s theory about Mercosur’s ‘hegemonic poles’ (Chapter 2) – placing Argentina and Brazil at the geopolitical centre of the region – a critical eye would carefully examine what was going on at the national level in these two.

According to Argentinean scholar Roberto Miranda (1999), the Triennial Plan represented not only the political intention to link education and Mercosur, but also the *ilusión* (wish) that SEM could become a platform for the shaping of the cultural identities, and the productive transformation and democratisation of the integration amongst the member countries. The role of education in this process was clear, yet it showed awareness of the required effort and commitment – as if region-making would come ‘from within’. This implies making internal changes and agreeing on regional plans and programmes in education that would appear both legitimate and give continuity to the new policies and strategies in the framework of the integration process.

## 5.6 A HE project is born

HE activities appear distributed within the 1992 Triennial Plan. *Student mobility* appears as a tool for citizenship and region-building. *Postgraduate mobility and research programmes* figure as tools for training human resources, in the expectation it could offer support for the decision-making in Mercosur. Finally, a *studies and diploma recognition* Working Group (WG) allowed for planning the compatibility and homogenisation of HE degrees and credit units. However, the analysis of the Plan indicates a degree of confusion concerning the role of validating diplomas in the region. There seemed to be an awareness that having mechanisms for recognising previous professional qualifications was a condition for mobility, as declared in the minutes of the second Ministerial meeting:

...improve academic-technical-scientific mobility, at the higher education level, allowing a greater *mobility* of lecturers, students, researchers, and technical staff. To do so, it will be promoted the creation and improvement of the *mechanisms for the comparison and recognition of studies*, titles and diplomas, among the Mercosur Member States (MERCOSUR/RME, 1992b, p. 2, my emphasis)

This leads to the conclusion that, in SEM, diploma recognition was a mechanism for mobility rather than a project for ‘system’ compatibility. As such, the diploma recognition also composed SEM’s *mobility project*. Although in practice belonging to the same project, these two goals unfolded in different – yet parallel - ways across the years. Whereas SEM took the immediate step to set up a Working Group (WG) on Studies and Diploma Recognition (functional from 1994), the Mobility project gained in 2002, with a WG on Mobility created only in 2005 (Chapters 7, 8).

In 1993, the need for compatibility was discussed on a separate meeting for HE projects. CCR representatives working in HE decided to

...create post-graduate programmes and the implementation of equivalence systems and recognition of studies, titles and diplomas, development of university level language teaching and the respective teacher training [programmes] (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 1993c, p. 2).

The WG on studies and diploma recognition was the only active HE project in the first couple of years of SEM. Its interest in ‘diploma authenticity’ and the portability of ‘professional practice’ carried the economic objective of region-making that characterised the first years of Mercosur cooperation (Caetano, 2011; Perrotta, 2012, 2014). At this point, the meeting minutes reveal less interest in a credit transfer system at the level of discipline (‘*studies*’), and more interest in professional mobility (‘*titles and diplomas*’). Moreover, the transfer of credits could also be considered a case of intertextuality with the EU’s Erasmus Programme because it links to the idea of a credit transfer system as a mechanism to enable student mobility. Here it is impossible to avoid the link with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), which was piloted between 1987 and 1995 as part of the launch of the Erasmus Programme (European Commission/CORDIS, 2014). Finally, the analysis also points to intertextual references to the EU’s 1992 Treaty of Maastricht. The Treaty defined free of movement to all EU citizens beyond labour. The free mobility policy was “key to the notion of European citizenship and social cohesion among Member States” (Barlund & Busse, 2014, p. 17). The diploma recognition project in Mercosur faced difficulties after 4 years of discussions. As I will elaborate in the next Chapter (see section 6.4.1), the failed attempt to create a common credit system led to the establishment of the *accreditation* project in 1997 – the most successful HE programme in the region.

Although beyond its mandate and without any funding to implement the ideas, the coordinators of the HE Committee (henceforth CHE) went on to consider other activities. They proposed mobility programmes for teachers and researchers, academic committees to research strategic themes, exchange programmes with scholarships with focus on postgraduate students, meetings for early career (‘young’) researchers and shaping academic networks (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 1993e). As this list shows, there was no shortage of ideas. How many of them would be materialised, when and how, will be a matter of concern in the next Chapters.

## 5.7 Events that generate mechanisms somewhere else: National Ministries' responses to SEM

While the group of key experts/policy entrepreneurs worked together setting the stage for a regional project, some of SEM Member States were trying to grasp the potential impact of the regional process to their national systems. Uruguay and Argentina established National WGs to understand the direction of this process. In Uruguay, upon the emergence of Mercosur, the National Association for Public Education (ANEP) went ahead of the game and set up an internal working group to analyse the process in November 1990 (Uruguay, 1992a, p. 11). On 30 May 1991, after the initial meetings in Buenos Aires and Brasilia, the WG was reformulated to include new representatives from outside ANEP<sup>133</sup>. The group defined three main objectives: informative (learn and share knowledge about the process in Uruguay), formative (curriculum), and capacity building (professional development).

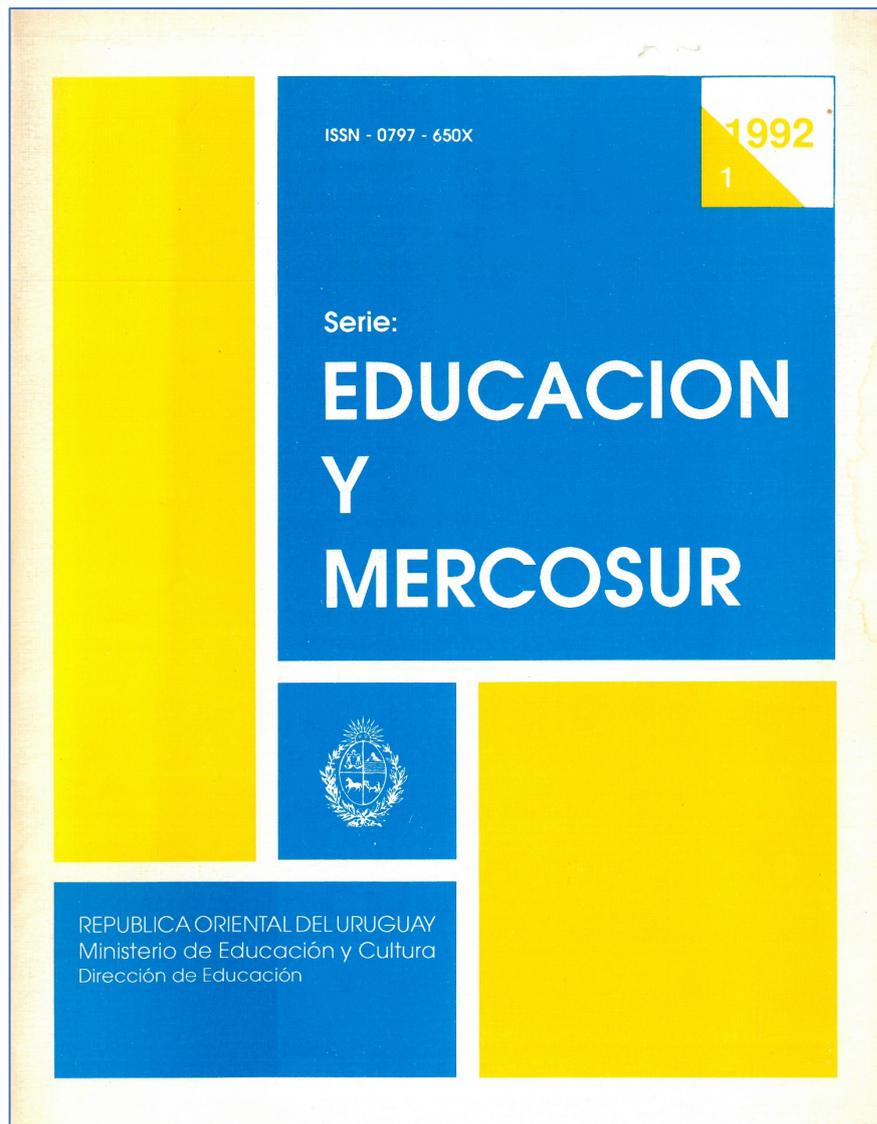
The Argentinean Ministry of Education established a similar instrument. On 12 September 1991, assembled a National Commission on themes of Education, Culture, Science and Technology in the context of Mercosur (Argentina, 1991). Although it is possible to identify the members, the records do not show what their role was, or what they did to deserve to be in the National Commission. This absence can be interpreted more as a case of *delegated authority* (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004). Those named were apt to take their functions in the Commission before the region. Both countries developed a series of reports, books and meeting notes (Argentina, 1993a; Argentina & OAS, 1996; Uruguay, 1992a, 1997, 2007).<sup>134</sup> The texts show an attempt to translate a new scale of action (the regional) into the national. They can be seen as an effort to ease its assimilation into the national education system, as well as generating legitimacy for the regional actions (Figure 5.1).

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<sup>133</sup> The WG welcomed representatives from different National Councils: Primary, Secondary, Technical education, Teacher training, and Education Planning.

<sup>134</sup> They are available for open access in the Ministry of Education's Library Institutional Repository archives ('Repositorio Institucional', n.d.), as detailed in Chapter 4.

Figure 5.1 Publication about Mercosur (Uruguay, 1992)



If considered as instruments, these publications are understood to have brought legitimacy to the regional project at the national level by keeping their national education sectors updated of developments and aware any upcoming changes that may result from it. It is also notable the countries' concerns around transparency and accountability regarding the regional process, especially given that several of the official documents were attached in the publications, and members of the commissions are named.

Although there is no evidence of a similar activity had taken place in Paraguay or Brazil, in the case of latter, the political crisis of the time hampered the interest in education. In the words of SM 10, it was

...a period of acute economic crisis and, above all, of very high inflation. Here in Brazil, it was only defeated with the Real Plan, but the Real Plan is from 1994. So, the experience I had during [sic] is of a very big economic crisis, with inflation strictly out of control. So, the space you had to examine the specific issues of education was a very small space. And what is more serious, Aliandra, and this is perhaps what it was most important to realise, there was no adherence by the government as a whole to the negotiations, say, in the education field, in the cultural and artistic areas. There was no adhesion. At most... they accepted it. But they didn't turn that into a government policy<sup>135</sup> (Senior Manager 10, personal communication, March 14, 2017).

## **5.8 With a little help from my friends: international organisation and/in SEM**

An aspect in the early stages of SEM was the early engagement of international organisations (IOs) with an interest in education and regional development, such as the OEI and the OAS<sup>136</sup>. As mentioned earlier in the text, the second preparatory meeting in Asunción (July 1991) invited a series of IOs as guests. They also appear frequently in the first meeting minutes of both RME and the CCR<sup>137</sup>.

Primary and secondary data reflect OEI and OAS participation was not only welcomed, but also endorsed. The Ministers declared priority for

...the planning of coordinated activities that take into account the interests of the regional education Sector in the international organisations that engage with Mercosur countries” (MERCOSUR/RME, 1992, p. 2).

Two reasons may have impacted this decision. First, whereas the IOs had the funding and institutional capacity to support the activities, the CCR and the RME needed both, as SM20 mentioned:

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<sup>135</sup> In the original: “é um período de crise econômica aguda, e sobretudo de inflação elevadíssima. Aqui no Brasil, só foi vencida com o Plano Real, mas o Plano Real é de 1994. Então, a experiência que eu tive, do final de [19]92, durante todo o ano de [19]93, e o primeiro semestre de [19]94, é de crise econômica muito grande, com a inflação rigorosamente fora de controle. Então, o espaço que se tinha pra examinar as questões específicas de educação era um espaço muito pequeno. E o que é mais grave, Aliandra, e é isso que talvez fosse mais importante perceber, não havia adesão do conjunto do governo às tratativas, digamos, na área educacional, na área cultural e artística. Não havia adesão. No máximo, aceitavam. Mas não transformava aquilo numa política de governo”.

<sup>136</sup> It is impossible here to disconnect or disregards here the histories of what these IOs invoke. The OEI, the Organisation of Ibero-American States, is based in Madrid – the great empire that colonised LA for three centuries. The OAS, based in Washington, has been an instrument of polarisation during the Cold War. As soft power institutions, their presumed roles and assumptions are not to be discussed here in this thesis. And yet, they are in the back of my mind.

<sup>137</sup> I will further problematise the role of IOs in Chapter 7.

AB: And the [international] organisations: Who else was coming? Who was knocking on your door?

SM 20: Well, I think we knocked on their door.

A: Were you knocking on their doors? How?

SM 20: Yes, because we wanted funding, because we wanted technical support<sup>138</sup> (Senior Manager 20, personal communication, May 20, 2017).

This can be taken to mean that the ‘resource’ to IOs in this case was less a case of influence of external agents and more one of looking for the ‘means to meet SEM ends’, and thus a strategic approach to make things happen. Such a relationship will persist in the development of SEM, in particular in the period of 2001-2003 (see Chapter 7). To offer a counterargument to SEM’s apparent pragmatism, the relationship between SEM and OIs does not seem to be the same today when they (the OIs) are devoid of funding:

AB: In the meetings, in the minutes, I noticed there are many international organisations. You can see the OEI, the OAS...

SM 30: Yes, but in [previous] years they had a more important presence than now. I imagine that it must also be because of an economic issue, because in the past the agencies also cooperated very much.

AB: Did they invest [financially]?

SM 30: Of course, there was always cooperation with OEI, with OEA.

AB: And today, it is no longer the case?

SM 30: I think it's more on the backs of the...

SM 17: It is no longer part of the agenda, of a meeting because there are no funds and... no<sup>139</sup> (Senior Managers 30 and 17, personal communication, May 20, 2017).

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<sup>138</sup> In the original: “AB Los organismos, ¿Quiénes más venían? ¿Quién bateaba la puerta? SM20: Eh.. creo que nosotros batimos la puerta de ellos. (jajaja). AB ustedes batían en la puerta de ellos, ¿cómo? (jajaja). SM20: Si porque queríamos financiamiento, porque queríamos asesoramiento técnico”.

<sup>139</sup> In the original: “AB:¿En las reuniones, en las actas, se nota que hay muchos organismos internacionales. Se nota la OEI, la OEA... SM 36: Sí, pero en otros años tenían una presencia más importante que ahora. Me imagino que también debe ser por una cuestión económica porque antes también los organismos cooperaban mucho. AB: ¿Aportaban [financially]? SM36: Claro, siempre había cooperación con OEI, con OEA. AB: Y hoy día, ¿ya no? SM36: Yo creo que más está en las espaldas de los... SM17: Ya no forma parte de la agenda de una reunión porque no hay fondos en realidad y... no.”

In any case, ignoring the fact that cooperation with IOs also meant the exchange of ideas and of funding<sup>140</sup>, what this evidence shows is that SEM actors realised from an early stage that without the IO's support (financial, mostly), it was not possible to move on with the Triennial Plan. The hidden message in this story indicates that there was a perception that Ministries of Education would not be able to fulfil this role – the funder. We do not have tools to analyse why would that be the case in this CJ, for there is no evidence of criticisms of the National Ministries in the documents analysed. I will return to the issue of the relationship with IOs in Chapters 6 and 8.

## **5.9 Argentina leading the way onto a regional education sector**

There is no better entry point to introducing the Mercosur national HE systems<sup>141</sup> than starting with Argentina. First and foremost, Argentina is the home of the 1918 Cordoba Reform movement, out of which many of the features of the idea of HE in LA originated. Even if brief, an introduction to the Cordoba Reforms is useful to establish important historical and conceptual lenses to understand the features of the region's HE. Second, the early 1990s marks a period of intense change in the Argentinean HE landscape. Many of these are a direct consequence of the structural reforms cited in the beginning of this Chapter. A look into the Argentinean case also provides a picture of how those external demands translated into the HE scenario. As a consequence, Argentina's reforms are a match to the first HE projects in Mercosur, explored in Chapter 2.

A glance at the system can complement the information in Table 3.3 in Chapter 3. In general numbers, the Argentinean system is composed of 131 HEIs, out of which 111 are universities (Argentina, 2019). The 61 national (public) universities are free of charge and enrolment is open access. At the University of Buenos Aires, for instance, students completing secondary schooling can enrol in any undergraduate degree in order to take a one-year basic cycle. At the successful conclusion of this cycle, students then apply to the Faculties (Law, Arts, Architecture etc), which may or may not have selection procedures. Each Faculty sets up its own selection procedure, and neither the Ministry nor the universities

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<sup>140</sup> During the interview, SM 10 mentioned the difficult working relationship with IOs such as UNESCO, due to their heavy lobbying to obtain funds from the Brazilian Ministry of Education.

<sup>141</sup> Due to space constraints I will limit my observations to the 'empirical' level of analysis of the national HE ensembles. It is the equivalent to say I shall look into the 'systems' of education (Chapter 3).

central administration imposes a standardised selection process. As a consequence of this open access system, Argentina has the only massified (Trow, 2000) system in LA with over 60% of the students cohort enrolled in HE.

Universities inherited the ‘autonomy’ to decide how to select their student body from the Córdoba Reforms (Lértora Mendoza, 2000). Symbolically emerging from the oldest university in Mercosur, the University of Córdoba (1613), the Movement was a student reaction against the undemocratic selection procedures for the leadership of the Faculty of Medicine: “our university model ... is founded under some type of divine law; the divine law of the university academics” (Manifiesto de Córdoba, 1918, para. 3). The Córdoba Reforms resulted in a particular organisational style and government, resulting from the Reforms:

What were the triumphs of the young Reformist? In a restricted sense, student participation in the university’s decision-making process. In a broad sense, they were university autonomy, the appointment of teaching staff by periodical examination and competition, open access to courses, updated teaching methods, and a system of university co-governance with the representation of three key groups (professors, students and graduates) in the governing bodies of the university (Mollis, 2000, p. 48).

The Cordoba reforms set out a wave of reforms in other LA countries. Even if considered to be a ‘myth’ (Figueiredo-Cowen, 2002), the Reforms helped to shape the perception of a social justice project in LA universities (Chapter 3). The modelling of democratic societies inspired the idea of co-governance where students would participate. It demanded autonomy and assumed the institution’s commitment to its environment, long known as the ‘*extensión*’.

There is a large volume of studies with critiques of the period of education reforms in the 1990s by Argentinean researchers (Alcantara et al., 2013; Ballerini, 2017; Guaglianone, 2011; Marquis, 1994; Mollis, 2000; Paviglianiti, 1995). Millis, for instance, named the period as the ‘Americanisation’ of the HE reform in Argentina (Mollis, 2000). It was after reading the much cited 1993 World Bank Report “Argentina, from Insolvency to Growth (World Bank, 1993) that I understood why. This process has been going on since the early 1990s, when neoliberal policies started to be implemented (Alcantara et al., 2013). This Report lists a series of ‘policy recommendations’ for Argentina’s HE, among other sectors. It brings to the reader’s attention well known elements of neoliberal discourse (P. Anderson, 1999; D. Harvey, 2005): “restructure the university” (p. xvii), the idea that “the universities suffer from poor quality, demoralization, and pollicization. They represent a difficult problem for

the Government because they are legally autonomous” (p. 89), and private. Rodríguez-Gomes and Alcántara summarise the consequences of the recommendations to Argentina: to increase institutional differentiation, to diversify the funding<sup>142</sup>, and to improve the quality of teaching and research, given the increasingly higher number of students (Rodríguez-Gómez & Alcántara, 2001, p. 514).

The response caused profound changes in the way HE operated. New institutions, such as a Secretariat for University Policy (SPU), emerged in 1993. SPU remains a key actor in the implementation of SEM activities until today when its officials represent Argentina in SEM’s HE meetings. With the hyperinflation episodes throughout the 1990s, universities started looking for partnerships with industry for revenue (García de Fanelli, 1994). The idea of ‘decentralisation’ implied the devolution of the national universities to the governing of their provinces. In the words of one researcher, Argentinean HE had become ‘dehumanised’; reduced to finances and subordinated to the performance of economic indicators (Mollis, 2000, p. 46).

The predominance of the quality assurance discourse in the 1993 World Bank Report affected SEM directly (Marquis, 1994; Mollis, 1994). Marcela Mollis (1994) explains the emergence of the quality project to several factors: reduced and rationalised funding – the structural reforms –, increased access, and the lack of trust on the ‘external responsibility’ of the university in showing its value to the academic community. A year later, the National Council for Evaluation (CONEAU) was launched. CONEAU, created in 1995, evolved into the most advanced accreditation agency in Mercosur (Barreyro, Lagoria, & Hizume, 2015). It was the model for the implementation of quality assurance agencies in Paraguay and Bolivia (Expert 5, personal communication, March 31, 2017).

The debates about quality assurance within Argentina were convenient for the regional strategy (Chapter 6). As Ballerini has argued recently, the advent of SEM allowed Argentina to consolidate the implementation of regulatory frameworks at the national level, as a ‘sender of diffusion’ (2017, p. 57)<sup>143</sup>. She writes: “for Argentine education authorities,

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<sup>142</sup> Concerning the subsidies to universities, an interim policy option would be to establish a combination of user fees--i.e., tuition and targeted subsidies (e.g., loans and scholarships for low-income, meritorious students) to enhance financing (p. 206).

<sup>143</sup> The author explains that “Argentina’s government became an agent of diffusion by promoting its evaluation model, first through regional accreditation, and later by advising other Latin American countries in the establishment of their evaluation systems” (Ballerini, 2017, p. 60).

the regional strategy provided a double solution: it reinforced the domestic quality assurance framework in higher education, while also consolidating a leadership role in the region” (Ballerini, 2017, p. 57).

The early 1990s provided a moment of reordering in Argentina’s HE system (Guaglianone, 2011): a new Law, new institutions, new (lower) budget, new student intake, decentralisation of the system. It reshaped the structural relations between the state and the universities, and influenced the shaping of the region, too.

## 5.10 Absences in the shaping of SEM

The analysis of the documents reveals absences in the process of shaping an education Sector in Mercosur. A notable example is the engagement with other sectors of the education systems, such as the institutions, class organisations and students. The early days of SEM have been built almost entirely by the (now) CCR members, i.e. technical bureaucrats or *tecnocratas modernizadores* (Benisz, 2017). Their essential role as policy entrepreneurs seems to become a mission for the group. The absence of other actors in the shaping of the region raises questions of legitimacy of the region. In a study about the intra-cabinet negotiation in the EU, Duina and Lenz (2017) discovered there is a high level of influence of both the administrative procedures and that of a small group elite of civil servants in determining the ministerial agendas in regional discussions. When it comes to the analysis of the role of actors in shaping SEM, the data available does not allow a conclusion of why or who within Mercosur took the decision to concentrate the role of region-building to the bureaucrats. Could there be an alternative model for an intergovernmental region, for instance, making use of an academic council or board of different actors?

Academics, for instance, have been involved in pursuing the idea of education as a tool for region building. Events as early as 1989 and 1990 in Porto Alegre reunited academics from the *Cono Sur*<sup>144</sup> countries to think about the possibilities of a regional education project at the time referred as ‘integration’. Although at the very early stages of the creation of Mercosur, the expectation of a ‘common academic market’ (p. 300, highlights in the original) was accompanied by the understanding that “the integrative process of Mercosur, in relation

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<sup>144</sup> *Cono Sur* is a geopolitical reference to the Southernmost part of South America.

to the university, has its contours established by the historical, political, economic and social reality of the countries involved, and by the insertion of such countries in the global events” (Morosini & Leite, 1992, p. 300). Those events aimed at building a network of knowledge among researchers in the field with the goal of understanding what shape this new order might have taken, and how similar this might reflect other blocs. There is no mention of the CCR or SEM liaising with the academics in these seminars in the SEM meeting minutes.

Finally, and an utterly important point, it is absent from both the Protocol and the CMC resolution any commitments regarding financial support for regional education policies. This issue will preoccupy the Sector over and over again and that defines much of its course of actions and activity in the coming 25 years, in particular on its relationships with IOs.

## 5.11 Conclusions

The successful outcome of over eight months of (political) efforts throughout 1991 was not only effective in formalising the Sector as a new structure in the customs union, but also in legitimising the actors’ arguments for this project to become a reality. By bringing together political will from within the Ministries and IOs and collecting discourses already legitimised in the events that precede the signature of the Protocol of Intentions, those key actors were able to kick off a process that continues to be active in the region even today. It opened the door for education to undertake its (proposed) fundamental role in the process of regional integration.

The question of where to start from to create a common education project from scratch must have kept many of SEM’s policy entrepreneurs awake at night over the period of 1991 and 1992. Data from the ‘pre-history’ of the regional education project suggests three elements. First, the importance of the role of key Mercosur *actors* within the members state’s Ministries of Education in shaping the project. Second, the idea of a path of *discovery* of their own and their neighbours’ education systems (looking ‘inward’ and ‘sideways’) from which they could find common ground to ‘integrate’. Third, looking *outward* to experiences of regional integration outside Mercosur and the Members States’ realm, of which the European integration was the most relevant one. To understand those three aspects requires a look at the conditions which allowed the region to emerge; the historical context of the early 1990s. The

seeding of this new regional education space also offers early insights into shifting geometries of power at play (Robertson, 2009) in education in LA, even in SEM's pre-history. They are led by both the existing social structures and the agency of the actors, with their agendas and beliefs. In the case of education, these were orchestrated via the use of 'positive power' (Agnew, 1999), i.e. via cooperation and negotiation. Nonetheless, the following years of the evolution of SEM indicate a sluggish development. For instance, the 1992 Triennial Plan had its validity extended until 1998, meaning that for the first six years no major change in education strategy, or HE projects, took place.

In reading the pre-history of SEM, we find a compelling account of the spatial-temporal dynamics and their impact in the changing spatiality of politics that took place in 1991 in Latin America. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, there is a variety of influences over absolute, represented and lived spaces in the shaping of the past, present and future (D. Harvey, 2006, p. 274). Such encounters of conditions are visible in the negotiations towards SEM. Moreover, in spite of the lack of experience of the actors, their actions as (now) regional policy entrepreneurs could be understood as the crafting of what Kevin Cox describes as a space of engagement (K. R. Cox, 1998). Their initial role as bureaucrats representing a national context with local interests (space of dependence) shifted into "constructing spatially much more extensive networks of association" by drawing in centres of social power (i.e. IOs and the EU) through which they "hoped to accomplish their ends" (Cox, 1998, p. 15). By imagining a global future, looking inside to reflect upon their own national realities, and aiming to develop a shared regional vision of what could/should be achieved as the collective, the actors have 'jumped scales' (Collinge, 2000). That is to say, they ventured from one scale of rule to another to justify their project. Their mechanisms set the regional project in motion as a result of a series of enabling conditions which allowed them to exist (Sayer, 1992). They were: the historical context of the fragile political economy structures in LA in the 1990's, the existing post-dictatorship social structures were willing to listen to IOs and be recipients of 'development projects' funding their national reforms. A final condition was the skilful action of actors able to reach out to the centres of decision-making to legitimate their ideas.

The history of Mercosur shows how the four founding countries managed to put together an initiative in the field of Education following ideas of integration coming from both LA and European sources. In the field of HE, the data analysed show how the

possibilities for mobility shaped the ideas for integration. The goal to have mobility programmes incited a path of self-recognition, where the first step for the countries was to map their own systems looking for similarities in terms of diploma recognition and later accreditation. In sum, mobility drove the rise of the Mercosur's HE project.

The next step in this path of discovery will be looking at the maturation of the Sector, specifically when the first joint HE projects start as a search for legitimacy within and across the region. Not only does the SEM family grow with the addition of Bolivia and Chile, but also new mechanisms and social events lead to the very first HE initiatives.

### **5.11.1 A reflection before moving on: on the framework of critical junctures**

A reflection on the suitability of critical junctures as an analytical framework can be useful at the end of this first bloc of analysis. As presented in this section, the launch of RME is considered to be the first critical juncture in the development of the Mercosur's education project. Its duration goes from March 1991, the launch of Mercosur, until February 1993, when a working group specific for higher education activities is set (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 1993a). The antecedent condition that led to its emergence was the absence of education objectives in the Treaty of Asunción. It then generated a reaction from the sector, or a *crisis*<sup>145</sup>, which inspired change: the perception that education was a necessary element in regional integration processes. The testimony of actors participating in the early stages of the RME as well as local publications about SEM indicate a shared awareness that the lack of an education project in Mercosur could somewhat impact in the success of the regional project as a whole. Such perception derived mainly from the European Union's experience and, in particular, Jean Monnet's attributed declaration that 'if he was to start the EU again, he would start with education' (Argentina & OAS, 1996, p. 18). As a consequence, and in spite of its many challenges along 26 years, the RME left a *legacy*: an education project that is active until today.

A look at rival (or counterfactual) explanations to the CJ is also proposed in order to verify its robustness as an analytical argument (Mahoney, 2004). It implies looking for the alternative scenarios to the launching of SEM, therefore suggesting 'what could have happened differently'. One possible rival explanation would be to assume that, unless both the Ministers of education and the Council of Mercosur conferred the authority to the group

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<sup>145</sup> A cleavage or crisis show the consequence of the antecedent condition(s), which then triggered the event that became the CJ (R. B. Collier & Collier, 1991).

of experts that lobbied for the education sector<sup>146</sup>, it would not have been possible to create a new sector which did not address directly aspects of trade and the shaping of a customs union – the aim of the Treaty of Asunción. As a consequence, without the RME there would not exist an institutional structure linked to the highest levels of policymaking in education that could ultimately legitimise joint education projects. It enables to confirm that the legacy of the CJ1 depended on the legitimacy and authority to the RME project which was conferred by both the current ministers of education and the CMC. A second rival explanation would suggest a link to role of the external influences in shaping SEM: had the European Union not experienced the launching of a cultural project, the actors who pushed for SEM would not be able to use the ‘legitimate’ experience from another case of regional integration to base their arguments about the role of education in shaping a region. Could both hypothesis suggested here – the role of the expert authority (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004), and the influence of external processes - account for the emergence of SEM?

The history of Mercosur shows how the four founding countries managed to put together an initiative in the field of Education, following ideas of integration that come from both Latin American and European sources. In the field of higher education, the data analysed showed how they were - and continue to be, as a matter of fact - shaped around the possibilities for mobility. To this point in time, the mechanisms to allow mobility underwent a path of self-recognition, mapping their own systems, looking for similarities in terms of diploma recognition and later accreditation. In sum, mobility has been the main goal of the region.

A second stage is to look at the maturing of the process, specifically when the first joint HE projects get put together meanwhile the region itself looks to solidifying its legitimacy within and across its space. The first maturing of the process happens a few years after its launching. Not only the family has grown with the addition of Bolivia and Chile, but it also seems to learn to contour the challenges to showcase a few projects of their own.

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<sup>146</sup> According to Barnett and Finnemore (2004, p. 20), authority requires consent from other actors, so that “when authors confer authority and defer to the authority’s judgement, they grant a right to speak and to have those statements conferred credibility”.

## **6 FROM A POLITICS OF HOMOGENISATION TO HARMONISATION THROUGH THE RECOGNITION OF DIFFERENCES**

### **6.1 Introduction**

After spending the first couple of years looking for common knowledge and ‘new frameworks’ in the name of regional integration, the (then ‘Technical’) Commission for HE (CHE) launched its first project in 1997: the accreditation project. The enabler of this regional output was the discourse of quality. Such discourse permeated the national systems inspired by the UN’s ‘Education for All’ debate at the time (Barreyro, Lagoria, & Hizume, 2015), even if targeted at primary education. In this Chapter, I will argue that its structuring mechanisms had less to do with the imposition of international organisations (Finnemore, 1993) and more to do with the fact they were seen as the most convenient and strategic option to implement. The immediate question now becomes: for whom? I will suggest that one compelling answer is that it was strategic to the hegemonic poles, Brazil and Argentina. It did not require internal changes at the national level, but a new type of project where these two Members could take part without proposing immediate changes in their internal national structures. However, I will argue that to Paraguay and Uruguay, this was a different story. As a consequence, SEM moved from the 1992 Triennial Plan’s idea that, to compete in a globalisation world, “implies making internal changes and agreeing on regional plans and programmes in education, (which are) able to legitimate and give continuity to new policies and strategies in the framework of the integration process” (Uruguay, 1992b, p. 24). In other words, I propose that it moved from a politics of homogenisation of HE projects to the harmonisation of ideas through the recognition of differences.

In addition, and in conformity with the idea of polarised hegemony in Mercosur (Chapter 2), these shifts took place following the leadership of Argentina and Brazil. They were the only countries with experience in quality assurance in the region. Their hegemony enabled the recognition of SEM projects as more than a collection of nation states, who in this new arrangement, retained their national sovereignty. Through the quality project this enabled the representation of differences, and yet such differences were at the same time recognised as equivalences.

The context could not be more amenable for change. A convergence of social events led to these changes in the nature of region-building during 1997 and 1998. These emanated from a mix of regional crisis, a revamped Mercosur project, new SEM objectives, a new Triennial Plan and the materialising of HE projects – some of which remain active until today. Moreover, during this period, SEM experienced the first shift in its geometry, when Chile and Bolivia joined SEM meetings as Mercosur Associate Members. This Chapter will trace the relationships between the events and the emergence of new mechanisms and look into the second national ensemble: Uruguay, the smallest of the HE ensembles taking part in SEM who in this period acquires, as a matter of fact, a HE system.

## **6.2 Events that generated events: a region in crisis**

The period between 1997 and 2000 can be understood as a sign of a difficult phase for Mercosur (as discussed in Chapter 2.4). In spite of the series of consensual agreements taken at the highest level of decision-making - CMC with the Heads of States and GMC with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs (Chapter 2) -, the implementation of regional goals was problematic and ineffective. Regional decisions were absorbed unevenly in the Member States, if absorbed at all. Researchers attributed this to the fragility of the economies of the region (Gasparini, 2014), Mercosur's weak institutional capacity (Caetano, 2011), and even the asymmetric interdependence between the Member States (Bouzas, 2003)<sup>147</sup>. There is agreement, though, on the role played by growing internal conflicts, in particular between the hegemonic poles Brazil and Argentina, in perpetuating the political and economic crisis in Mercosur, thus resulting in a conflictive and hostile climate among the partners (Caetano, 2011).

An instable period between 1997-2000 prompted a 'relaunch of Mercosur' in the early 2000 (Phillips, 2001). To Caetano (2011), this first major crisis (and yes, there will be more periods like this) established the conditions for the addition of a stronger *political* dimension to the region. New themes and agreements emerged outside of the economic common market

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<sup>147</sup> The uneven level of macro-dependence between the Mercosur countries' economies meant that some countries were more affected than others by the region's problems. As such, economic crises in Argentina and Brazil would cause a much higher impact in Uruguay and Paraguay, than the other way around (Bouzas, 2003).

dimension. Amongst them was the signing of a ‘democratic protocol’, the Ushuaia Protocol (MERCOSUR, 1998a).

There is evidence of how these major events in the region affected the Education Sector as well. To illustrate, a reflexive account of the planning for the next Triennial Plan (see below) shows the Ministers’ intention to reassure the role of Education to manage frustration with the outcomes of regional integration as a global regional project:

The Planning for 1998-2000 recognises the *intrinsic value of instruments for education integration to enhance economic integration*, in particular when the outcomes of globalisation raise criticisms once the insertion of national political and economic systems in a global economy does not guarantee alone neither growth nor development (MERCOSUR/RME, 1998a, p. 3)(my emphasis).

This passage also indicates the complexity of analysing SEM in this period. On the one hand, it highlights the extent to which SEM was aware of the multi-scalar relationships of both the national level (“national political and economic systems”) and the global level (“global economy”). On the other hand, the passage resonates with Alfredo Gomes and colleagues’ claim that the economic project remained the main battlefield in Mercosur, and that education remained a subordinating force in region-building (Gomes, Robertson, & Dale, 2012). In other words, there could be no sectoral region without the broader region. And yet, the Ministers of Education recognised the limitations of the economic project in the new global order (“does not guarantee alone neither growth nor development”). As the following pages will show, the reflection above did not prevent the Sector from launching new ideas.

### **6.3 A sectoral region on the move: a quest for legitimacy**

By 1997, there was not much novelty occurring in the work of SEM. The 1992 Triennial Plan was renewed twice and remained the main policy directive for the Sector. And yet, Member States kept meeting at a constant pace: by the end of 1996, there were 10 RME meetings (twice a year), 20 CCR meetings (four times a year) and 10 CHE meetings (three to four times a year since their start in late 1993) (Annexes 3-5). The main output of the initial five years of SEM was the definition of equivalence tables for primary and secondary education. When it comes to HE, changes did not happen until late 1996.

Given evidence of the existence of the governance instruments (consensus) and the contexts to meet, it is pertinent to ask about the factors which appeared to have hindered the

implementation and design of new projects? If the regional mechanisms for change were in place, as they seemed to be, could there be a matter of context that prevented change (Pawson, 2000; Pawson & Tilley, 1997)? Or was it a matter of the nature of the decision-making mechanisms themselves that did not yield enough legitimate authority to make the projects advance? For instance, the discussion over a Protocol for the recognition of degrees generated responses from Brazil. The fact that Brazilian representatives composed, discussed and later signed the Protocol did not prevent their Head of International Relations to send in a fax explaining that the terms of the Protocol clashed with the Brazilian Constitution, and therefore it needed to be amended.

At this point in time, what I want to suggest is that the inability to implement projects indicate that SEM did not have the capacity in terms of knowledge to build legitimacy. The lack of legitimacy resulted in little political engagement from its Member States.

Legitimacy plays a crucial role in the exercise of authority (Avant et al., 2010; Dickson, Gordon, & Huber, 2015; Symons, 2011). In the Weberian sense, legitimacy is a descriptive concept that indicates a belief on the normative rules, leading to acceptance and compliance (imitation) based on rational, traditional and charismatic grounds (Dickson et al., 2015; Weber, 1947). A departure from this broad conceptualisation includes new elements in the process of ensuring and accepting legitimacy, such as the role of the actors' expertise (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004), power (Symons, 2011), and rewards and agency (Dickson et al., 2015). Allen Buchanan and Robert O. Keohane see legitimacy as having normative and sociological meanings (Buchanan & Keohane, 2006). A normative meaning is the *de facto* right to rule to achieve social control, therefore attaching values to those who comply and costs to those who do not. A sociological meaning will focus on the perception of that legitimacy in different spheres of social relations – either within the institution or the wider society.

A regional organisation such as Mercosur would be expected to seek legitimacy because:

...organisations might seek legitimacy not simply as a means to achieve social control but because their members and decision-makers are also influenced by accepted standards of appropriateness and legitimacy. At the same time as possession of legitimacy empowers specific actors, standards of legitimacy also function as forms of structural power which constitute and constrain (Symons, 2011, p. 2560).

Interested in the sociological perspective of legitimacy, I approached the participants to investigate their perceptions of trust in the region's work, i.e. the perceived legitimacy of its actors and projects. The responses were revealing. In Argentina, SM 22 highlighted the role of joint mechanisms and outcomes as a legitimising force:

AB: How long did it take to reach a level of confidence that projects could be developed where everyone could contribute?

SM 22: The bet was [that it would be] from the beginning, but it was clear that it became stronger as certain processes were consolidated which were being carried out with a few mechanisms, the accreditation or mobility mechanism, when some projects that were discussed for a long time and thought and debated began to materialise, such as the mobility or accreditation programme<sup>148</sup> (Senior Manager 22, personal communication, April 12, 2017)

A Brazilian participant active during this CJ's period shared a rather different perception: SEM was seen as an exercise of diplomacy, in which the Ministry of Education "had to play the part".

You had to do it [to take part in the education activities] because it was fashionable. It was less a question of an 'act of faith', and more a question of a process that should be carried out, [in which] each one had to play their part<sup>149</sup> (Senior Manager 14, personal communication, March 17, 2017).

The evidence shows that different members states representatives had different perceptions of SEM. Such a perception is in line with the intergovernmental nature of Mercosur (Chapter 2). So far, there was evidence of a mobilisation of Uruguayan and Argentinean actors in promoting a regional dimension within their countries (Chapter 5). The perception from Brazil adds a new layer of complexity in the analysis of the behaviour of SEM policy actors. In fact, it touches upon my first hypothesis of this thesis: *the decision-making of Mercosur HE is bound to the actorness of the political actors that led the region in a certain period of time*. If Members States had varied objectives and motivations to act in

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<sup>148</sup> In the original: AB: ¿cuánto tiempo llevó para que se llegara a un nivel de confianza que se pudieran desarrollar proyectos donde todos aportaran juntos? SM 22: La apuesta fue desde el principio, pero claro fue más fuerte en la medida en que se vieron consolidados ciertos procesos que se estaban llevando en marcha con algún mecanismo, el mecanismo de acreditación o de movilidad, cuando se empezaron a concretar algunos proyectos que fueron durante mucho tiempo discutidos pensados y debatidos creo que como el programa de movilidad o el de acreditación".

<sup>149</sup> In the original: SM 14: "Tinha que fazer porque tava na moda. AB: Tava na moda? SM 14: Tava na moda, né. Tinha os calendários de... não... tinha os calendários das cúpulas, né, sempre tinha coisa acontecendo, então foi sendo tocado. Era menos uma questão de... menos uma questão de 'procissão de fé', e mais uma questão de um processo que foi posto pra andar, e cada um teve que fazer a sua parte".

SEM, what consequences do these different motivations bring to SEM's quest for legitimacy? My understanding sides with the 'bipolar' configuration (Arocena & Caetano, 2011) in which Brazil and Argentina have an informal advantage, geopolitical and financial, to convey their message across. And yet, in an environment of consensus, the border countries (Uruguay and Paraguay), negotiate with their ability to veto. This assumption is centred on the role of the individual Member States. What new strategies will the members adopt to overcome these difficulties, and allow HE projects to grow in spite of the differences?

#### **6.4 The first HE mechanisms: harmonisation**

In line with the 1992 Triennial Plan, the main purpose of SEM in the 1990s was to look for harmonisation and compatibility. Evidence shows how the activities in HE during this period reflect this aim. As presented in Chapter 5, SEM's initial goals were: to create post-graduate programmes and to implement equivalence systems for the recognition of studies, titles and diplomas. A working group (WG) on HE started meeting in 1993 with the mandate to explore possibilities for a studies and diploma recognition project. The WG recognised regulatory difficulties to performing its task due to national regulatory frameworks, in particular from Brazil. The project was later dropped by an accreditation project (as I will explore later in this Chapter), but it makes a return from 2010.

SEM's efforts for harmonisation were launched in the form of three Protocols, signed by the Ministers of Education:

1. **Protocol for the recognition of degrees to carry out postgraduate studies in Mercosur countries** (MERCOSUR/CMC, 1995, 1996b): A 1996 version substituted the first Protocol signed in 1995.
2. **Protocol for training of human resources at the postgraduate level among Mercosur countries** (MERCOSUR/CMC, 1996a): Proposed by WG in Postgraduate matters. Commitment to generate activities for training university teaching staff and researchers, such as joint research groups, mobility programmes, and the exchange of information, documents and publications<sup>150</sup>.
3. **Protocol for the admission of degrees for academic activities in Mercosur Member States** (MERCOSUR/CMC, 1997b, 1997a): Broader arrangement for

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<sup>150</sup> After the launch of this Protocol, the WG in PG issues separated from the HE commission. It became a Commission in itself (CPG). The first meeting of the Commission took place in March 1996. The analysis of the first meeting minutes of the CPG indicates the large interest in the shaping of research groups, as well as on the evaluation and accreditation of PG programmes. The latter is in line with the activities proposed in the CHE, as this Chapter shows.

the mobility of academics. The Protocol does not provide a definition for ‘academic activity’. Suggests that regional citizens must follow the same conditions and requirements as national academics. Brazil mentioned it was not possible to follow through because the Constitution ensures autonomy for HE institutions to run diploma recognition of foreign diplomas. The Protocol generated a heated debate and even legal action (Gonçalves, 2012)<sup>151</sup>.

The intended consequence with the Protocols of allowing equivalences to promote mobility met with the national regulations of each Member State. The unintended consequence was for Member States to find some of these proposals unfeasible. To illustrate the internal dynamic of the HE Sector then, I present the negotiations for the third Protocol mentioned above: ‘Protocol for Academic Activities’, for short. Its first goal was to allow the circulation of University staff. The XIX CCR meeting (June 1996) framed the contradictions and limits that the Member States’ regulations for labour mobility. To illustrate, Paraguay pointed out how “the problematic is highly complex, granted its relationship with the professional exercise” because it depended on the “legislations of the Mercosur countries” (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 1996b, p. 2). Nonetheless, CCR members considered that the Protocol could allow mobility for university teaching staff and requested CHE to compose the Protocol in their next meeting.

CHE members showed a different opinion on the project’s pertinence. In the IV CHE meeting (August 1996), although agreeing the need for “facilitat[ing] the inward and outward mobility of university teaching staff” (p. 1), the project was deemed inadequate. The lack of motivation seemed to be linked to the barriers for labour mobility, already identified by Paraguay in the CCR meeting. Below I reproduce the full discussion, as presented in the meeting minute:

To Brazil, the Protocol will not aggregate anything to the current reality;

To Uruguay, the only novelty will be that that the foreigners, when participating in the public *concursos*, would have – similar to the Uruguayan nationals – the right to the aspects relative to foreign diplomas;

To Paraguay, the Protocol would not be valid, given that the National Constitution prohibits foreigners to take permanent teaching posts;

To Argentina, who has no representatives in the meeting, it looks like the Protocol would not add anything.

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<sup>151</sup> Paulo Gonçalves makes a thorough analysis of the outcomes of the Protocol for Brazil in his masters thesis (Gonçalves, 2012). HE concludes that the Protocol did not have the desired effects because it clashed with the intention of its proponents. The problem, he argues, emanates from the differences between the national implementation of the regional protocol with the institutions that are able to recognise the diplomas – given that CAPES had announced that the Mercosur diplomas would still require recognition as specified in the Brazilian Education Law.

The Protocol would therefore *have an effect that is solely political, of marketing of the Mercosur education*. (CHE meeting, 1996, p. 1, my highlights)

Notwithstanding the consensus of the Protocol's inefficiency, CHE members still decided to go ahead with the project: "In spite of these considerations, *it was decided to work in the elaboration of a first proposal* [for the Protocol]" (CHE meeting, 1996, p. 1, my highlights).

The discussion to elaborate the Protocol reveals the power relations inside the region between the levels of decision-making. As a recap of the structure, RME and CCR are the decision-making bodies, and the CHE remained a technical body – whose mandate is to execute strategies. In this case, the power relations of RME and CCR trumped the expertise of the members of CHE. The case of the Protocol – an unwanted project for HE – revealed how the of CCR authority played its part in defining the direction of the Sector. Actors acted against their consensus. Even when not believing in the Protocol, there was the effort to elaborate a document said to be a 'political' instrument. What happens when there is consensus and the actors follow it?

#### **6.4.1 Quality assurance discourse turned mechanism: the launch of the Accreditation project**

By 1996, the mention of objectives related to quality assurance is constant and diffused across many of the meeting minutes, reports and in strategic documents at the three levels analysed: CHE, CCR and RME. Its regularity points to the prominent role of international organisations in influencing state structures, as argued by Finnemore (1993) in the analysis of the impact of UNESCO. Even if regional projects might be more deeply rooted in domestic structures and prone to respect the interests of domestic coalitions (Jayasuriya, 2003a; Verger & Hermo, 2010), an active policy arena could still open the possibilities for multiple influences. In Mercosur, it is possible to see how the influence of the quality discourse has permeated the work of the Sector. Added to the experiences of

Argentina and Brazil with their quality assurance programmes at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels respectively, it gained considerable strength in shaping the projects in the region. To illustrate, in the Mercosur 2000<sup>152</sup> Declaration, the Ministers of Education

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<sup>152</sup> The 'Mercosur 2000: Goals and challenges for the Education Sector' was an attempt to define specific goals for the Education Sector.

place quality assurance at the very centre of the work of SEM. The argument for quality assurance is reasoned in the need for

policies aimed at improving the quality of education systems, which is a demand that cannot be postponed as the new characteristics of global society accentuate the central role that education plays in the entire development process (MERCOSUR/RME, 1996, p. 2)

This goal was not immediately translated into HE, or into what would become the accreditation project. The regional accreditation project as we know today was not an immediate achievement or objective – on the contrary. As mentioned in section 5.6, its origins are in the aim to create a table of equivalences to revalidate studies and diplomas. In 1995, CHE members defined that one way to operationalise such an ideal was to select a few degrees to understand elements could be made compatible (Uruguay. Ministerio de Educación y Cultura, 1995). The look into the programme was broad – it went from the hours and credits taught until the professional qualifications a certain diploma entitled its owner to have. It was decided to ask to collect information about the HE system in each country, their lexicon (a ‘HE grammar’): curriculums, graduate profiles and structure of all degrees from different institutions. Three programmes were defined to kick off the mapping exercise: accounting, law and civil engineering<sup>153</sup>. What they did not expect was to encounter a substantial amount of information. Even though the exercise allowed to improve the knowledge of the HE systems in the region, it also overwhelmed SEM members with information. It not only became difficult to manage, but also exposed the diversity of the HE systems. A reaction came in 1996. In the V CHE meeting, participants suggested a shift of gears.

The advances [in creating equivalence tables] obtained until now refer, above all, to the larger knowledge all have gathered about the different national realities. This leads the Commission to propose a change in the optics of the work: reassess the mechanism of table of equivalences, made extremely difficult for diverse realities and work under the optic of accreditation of degrees. (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR/CTR-ES, 1996, p. 1)

This ‘shift of gears’ became the first successful HE project in the region. The failed attempt to import a European idea represents the first peculiarity of SEM as a region. The

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<sup>153</sup> There is no information as to why these three programmes were chosen to start the mapping exercise.

crises of the impossibility for homogenisation and credit transfer opened a possibility to develop its own regional project on a system of accreditation.

In 1997, a Working Group (WG) was created to plan the accreditation programme and in June 1998 the Ministers of Education signed a memorandum of understanding. The accreditation of undergraduate degrees was understood to be the first step towards the recognition of diplomas and mobility within the region (MERCOSUR/RME, 1998b)<sup>154</sup> – both objectives could not be abandoned. The Memorandum gave origin to the Experimental Mechanism for Accreditation (MEXA), which became an accreditation system 10 years later, in 2008<sup>155</sup>. It was finally named “System for the Accreditation of University Courses in Mercosur”, as known as *Arcusur* (sometimes *Arcu-Sur*, in Spanish) and *Arcusul* (*Arcu-Sul* in Portuguese).

Arcusur was made viable by the National Accreditation Agencies of the Mercosur countries. Curiously, in 1998, when the project was first piloted as MEXA, the only country that had an accreditation agency was Argentina. Neither Uruguay, Paraguay, Brazil nor Chile or Bolivia as Associate Members had theirs in place<sup>156</sup>. Brazil held evaluations for post-graduate programmes. The reasoning behind the project can be attributed to different factors, including those broadly understood as institutional. Solanas highlights these institutional factors as:

...[on the one hand] accreditation would be put on the agenda of the bloc on the basis of the need to recognise university degrees *without going through the complex and time-consuming mechanisms involved in the validation procedure*, in order to guarantee the free movement of "productive factors". On the other hand, in order to consider the possibility of professionals being able to exercise their profession in the other Member States without having to undergo this slow procedure, a limited option of temporary professional practice is emerging (Solanas, 2014a, p. 44).

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<sup>154</sup> Although the Memorandum details the workings of the programme, i.e. its internationally peer-reviewed process, a notable absence was the indication of how the Mechanism would be funded. Moreover, the requirement of National Accreditation Agencies pushed for national reforms in the Mercosur countries (Perrotta, 2013).

<sup>155</sup> Scholars have highlighted how MEXA Protocols and the accreditation programme as a whole have been influenced by the Argentinean experience with the national accreditation agency, CONEAU (Solanas, 2014a) and the Brazilian experience with the accreditation of Post-graduate programmes, with CAPES. It is also the most studied programme, probably for being the most successful. Researchers, including Daniela Perrotta (2012, 2013, 2014), for instance, have argued how the accreditation project influenced the integration process including the implementation of the mechanisms in different countries. Passarini and colleagues, for instance, demonstrate their concern with the candidates meeting national requirements for accreditation (Passarini, Juri, Borlido, & Nogueira, 2015).

<sup>156</sup> The Accreditation Agencies were implemented as the MEXA was implemented. Paraguay created theirs in 2003; Brazil, established a national system in 2004 (although it was decades of experience in managing evaluation of post-graduate programmes, and INEP carrying it out evaluation of courses); Chile in 2006; Uruguay created an Ad-Hoc Commission for Accreditation in 2008, and Bolivia implemented theirs in 2010. Colombia, who is also a member of ARCUSUR, had an agency since 1992.

Still, Ministers seemed to have seen it as a possibility for reform and approved the project.

Arcusur gives a ‘public’ certification amongst the SEM countries of the high academic and scientific levels of the courses<sup>157</sup>. In many ways, the accreditation project attended to many of the wishes of the countries: lesser ‘bureaucracy’ in implementing an international project for countries with little international experience, no need to deregulate internal norms at the national level, and the legitimacy of a project made ‘from within’ that could fit the different HE ensembles that formed the region. This is particularly important in the context of the 1998 Triennial Plan (see below) which introduced a new understanding in SEM that countries would have different levels of development in the accreditation process. If building on the metaphor of the train, as mentioned in Chapter 3, the Sector would show the patience to welcome the countries to catch up with the development of this new HE mechanism:

It was evident when the pilot accreditation mechanism project was initiated. We were four countries and Paraguay and Uruguay ended up creating councils - the exact word was not councils but - all [national] sectors were represented [in them] because they had no agencies. And it took over eight or nine years for a law to be passed to create a national accreditation agency. I mean, it wasn't that they didn't want to. They didn't have the mechanisms, they had to wait for their opportunity, but they participated, they contributed, they trained until [an agency] was created. The case of Bolivia was the same, for many years they had the assistance of Argentina until they were able to develop their own agency<sup>158</sup>. (Interview, SM 27, personal communication, April 12, 2017)

The Accreditation project is without doubt the most studied aspect of higher education in Mercosur for it is arguably the most successful project to date<sup>159</sup>. The question to be posed, however, is: who defines the route of the ‘train’? As we have seen, the ‘quality’ discourse

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<sup>157</sup> A summary of the main features of Arcusur can offer more details of its workings today: (a) Arcusur is managed through the network of SEM’s accreditation agencies (RANA), under CHE; (b) accreditations happen via calls of interest. Each Member State’s Accreditation agency decides when to open the calls, the subjects it is able to evaluate, and the calendar for the process. The application process is free of charge; (c) the criteria for analysis is had been defined regionally, with the expectation that the academic level required is as demanding, or more, than the ones established at the national level; (d) it respects the legislation on each country and the autonomy of the institutions; as a volunteer process, institutions are free to apply or not; (e) only those degrees that are recognised nationally, and that have had graduates/ alumni are eligible to apply.

<sup>158</sup> In the original: “Esto es claro, por ejemplo, cuando se empezó el proyecto de mecanismo experimental de acreditación. Éramos cuatro países y que Paraguay y Uruguay terminaron creando consejos - la palabra exacta no eran consejos pero - estaban representados todos los sectores porque no tenían agencias. Y necesitaron por ahí un proceso de más de 8 o 9 años para darse una ley para crear una agencia nacional de acreditación. O sea, no era que no querían. No tenían los mecanismos, había que esperar las etapas, pero fueron participando, sumando, capacitando hasta llegar a crearla. El caso de Bolivia fue igual, durante muchos años tuvieron la asistencia de Argentina hasta que pudieron desarrollar su propia agencia”.

<sup>159</sup> There are excellent analyses about the implementation of the accreditation project in the different Mercosur. Some of the works are: Barreyro, Lagoria, & Hizume, 2016; Barreyro, Lagoria, Hizume, et al., 2015; Botto, 2015a; Coppari, 2011; Fernandez Lamarra, 2003; Lamarra, 2010; Marran, de Souza, & Martins Real, 2016; Martins Real, de Souza, & de Souza, 2016; Passarini et al., 2015; Perrotta, 2012, 2013; Schmoeller et al., 2012; Solanas, 2014a.

was a strong one in Argentina and Brazil. And the fact the Uruguay and Paraguay did not have the mechanisms to implement did not seem to be a problem at the time. Would there be the same outcome if Paraguay and Uruguay, rather than Brazil and Argentina, were the ones with experience in accreditation? Probably not, as the example with the Protocol, initiated in Paraguay, showed.

In spite of all odds, the impact of the Accreditation Project has been mentioned by the interviews as one of the main gains in the region. Its novelty and efforts are a reason for pride for the SEM actors involved in its implementation. As one of my interviewees observed:

Well, because the idea is that there should be a common system of accreditation and recognition for all Mercosur countries. That was a very strong idea, and it's also pre-Bologna. I mean, we built a lot of things with a lot less tools, which took Europe a lot longer, and it invested a lot more resources with a centralised structure. By which I mean that what was done here is very worthy. ... these are things that we had advanced, not with those criteria, but with the possibilities of what MEXA implied in terms of the possibility of exchange, recognition, recognition of credits, etc., with, I mean, many limitations. But this had excited several countries for different reasons. In Paraguay, for example, this was the basis for the creation of a National Evaluation Agency, which did not exist. And that there was no policy on the matter - and when I say no policy, not even a criterion for authorizing new universities. From this a thing was generated.<sup>160</sup> (Senior Manager 2, personal communication, April 7, 2017).

## 6.5 A new Triennial Plan: the quest for legitimacy continues

The outcome of hurdles in implementing the first education instruments led to a renewed sense of the work of the Education Sector. It was the moment to launch a new strategy for SEM, after extending the 1992 Triennial Plan until 1997. After a semester of discussions, the new strategy, henceforth the 1998 Triennial Plan, brought three innovations. First, it establishes a mission for the Education Sector, an important positioning missing in the 1992 Plan:

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<sup>160</sup> In the original: "... la idea es que hubiera un sistema común de acreditación y reconocimiento para todos los países del Mercosur. Eso era una idea muy fuerte, y que además es pre-Bolonia. Quiero decir, nosotros construimos una cantidad de cosas con muchas menos herramientas, que a Europa le llevó más tiempo, e invirtió muchísimo más recursos con una estructura centralizada. Con lo cual quiero decir que lo que se hizo aquí es muy meritorio. Y, de hecho, una de las conclusiones justamente del informe acerca de la situación del Mercosur, era esta: porque nosotros... o sea lo que después nos vino era a plantear con los proyectos 6x4 de Tuning y qué sé yo, son cosas que nosotros habíamos avanzado, no con esos criterios, pero sí con las posibilidades de lo que implicaba MEXA en cuanto a posibilidad de intercambio, reconocimiento, reconocimientos de créditos, etcétera, con, digo, muchas limitaciones. Pero esto había entusiasmado a varios países por distintas razones. En Paraguay por ejemplo esta fue la base que permitió la creación de una Agencia Nacional de Evaluación, que no existía. Y que además no había ninguna política al respecto - y cuando digo ninguna política ni siquiera un criterio para autorizar universidades nuevas. A partir de esto se generó una cosa".

To contribute to Mercosur's objectives by stimulating the training of a citizen consciousness for integration and promoting quality education for all in a process of development with social justice and in line with the cultural singularity of its people (MERCOSUR/RME, 1998a, p. 2)

Second, it laid down two priority areas for the period: (a) the development of a regional identity by stimulating mutual knowledge and a culture for integration; and (b) the promotion of regional policies for the training of human resources and the improvement of quality. Third, these priority areas would be defined in four strategies. An *intra-sectoral* objective aimed to establish and coordinate links with other Mercosur sectors. A *multi-scalar* objective proposed to connect SEM activities to national education plans and the processes of education reform and renovation. By promoting horizontal cooperation among Mercosur's Member States and institutions as well as with other regional blocs, it delineated *inter-institutional and inter-regional* goals. And, finally, it aimed to promote actions that favour student, academic and researcher mobility and the exchange of experiences and professional practice, which can be summarised as mobility and information-sharing.

In terms of HE, a discussion in the XII CHE meeting in Salvador (Brazil) in 1998 suggested three action points for the period:

1. To implement an accreditation mechanism in three undergraduate courses in at least two Mercosur countries by 2000. The WG on Accreditation chose the degrees of Medicine, Engineering and Agronomy to pilot the Mechanism. It was a prerequisite that all countries had their National Accreditation Agencies running, and that they reach an agreement on the criteria for evaluation by then.
2. To create three networks in different areas of cooperation in research to foster a culture of integration.
3. To implement a mobility programme for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. It will require a mechanism of credit transfer and data bases of researchers, and institutional programmes.

The new elements in the new plan indicate that the Sector was taking a step towards its institutionality. The Sector was not only able to agree on a mission in consensus, but also to define in strategic actions how to reach that mission is a sign of increased coordination, to which Hettne and Söderbaum (Hettne & Söderbaum, 2000) would name *regionness*.

An important novelty in the Plan is the realisation that the diversity of the education, particularly HE, ensembles was a defining element in the shaping of the region. A homogenising plan would not be possible as the national *cultural singularities* – and

particularly normative – were too great to be flattened. If the region was to be built, it would have to be by building on the differences. Such a realisation emerged out of the discussion about equivalence of diplomas, as SM 15 explained:

when we went there we spoke of what was called the homogenisation of degrees; and in that meeting, which took place at the University of the Republic in Montevideo, what we saw was that it was not possible to homogenize the degrees because it also lost a fundamental aspect of university education that one acquires a professional profile according to the house of studies where one is formed, it is not the same to be formed in a confessional university as in a public or private university, etc<sup>161</sup>.

Although this contributed to establishing a new culture in the cooperation, it still failed to implement the ideas set for the period. At the end of the period of the Plan, only the first goal of accreditation was - partly - achieved. There was an accreditation project *en marcha* (in motion), but the agencies were not running. One important absence in the second plan was the lack of indicative of funding instruments. There were no networks or mobility during the 1997-1999 period. While the reasons for underachievement are not clear in the documents, the fact that no funding stream is provided in the 1998 Plan can be a justifiable reason. The lack of funding and capacity to run activities can be a good reason as to why only the first of these objectives was partly implemented. Resources are a key element for the implementation of change for they provide institutional capacity for action (Gornitzka, 2006). Although the Experimental Mechanism (MEXA) run a successful pilot, Paraguay, as we shall see in the next Chapter, only managed to implement its Accreditation Agency in 2003. As of March 2019, Uruguay did not implement an Agency, but a Commission that manages accreditation at the national level. SEM still had important lessons to learn with regards to ‘cultural singularities’.

## 6.6 Shifting geometries: Chile and Bolivia as Associates

The first expansion of the SEM as a region happened when Chile and Bolivia signed agreements to adhere to Mercosur in the quality of Associate Members in 1996. Marking the

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<sup>161</sup> In the original: “ ... Cuando fuimos ahí se hablaba lo que se llamaba homogenización de títulos; y en esa reunión que tuvo lugar en la Universidad de la República en Montevideo, lo que se vió es que no era posible homogeneizar los títulos. Por que además se pierde un aspecto fundamental de la educación universitaria que uno adquiere un perfil profesional de acuerdo a la casa de estudios donde se forma. No es lo mismo formarse en una universidad confesional que en una pública o en una privada etc.”

social events of the expansion of SEM, representatives from the Chilean Minister of Education joined SEM meetings from June 1996. In the XIX CCR meeting, for instance, the Chilean representative declared that “integration is a fundamental theme”, to which the Argentinean delegation expressed wishes that “the MERCOSUR-Chile relationship grow quickly and be permanent in the future” (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 1996b, p. 4).

SEM members expressed an awareness that Chile was an ‘Associate’ member, not a full one, and that it takes part in a number of activities that are strategic to them. Such a view was confirmed by the Chilean representative in SEM:

Chile is a non-member Associate [country] therefore Chile participates only in some initiatives which seem important to them in the point of view of [its] public agenda and that can positively impact the agenda of the nation, local and from that promote the issue of regional mobility and regional integration<sup>162</sup> (Senior Manager 23, personal communication, May 5, 2017).

The first register of Chile in the HE project is from November 1996 (V meeting). The reason the country joined was explained during the interview:

... at some point there was pressure from Argentina and Brazil that Chile, which from their perspective, was the third country that should undoubtedly be in CHE because [these three have] the best universities in South America, i.e. Brazil, Argentina and Chile. So, there was some political pressure for Chile to join that Commission, that was in the 1990s. Later, Chile saw in Mercosur the only space for regional mobility. Therefore, before the accreditation commission was created, for example, Chile saw in Mercosur the possibility for academic mobility. That is why there is interest for Chile to participate in this instance: one due to pressure from the largest Mercosur states and another due to Chile's interest because it is the only mechanism that currently allows regional mobility<sup>163</sup> (Senior Manager 23, Personal communication, May 5, 2017).

Bolivia joined Mercosur as an Associate in February 1997. It first attended RME in June 1998 (XIV meeting, 01/98). Although Bolivia's participation does not seem to be as constant as Chile's because it does not appear as often in the meeting minutes, the country was perceived as working closely with the region.

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<sup>162</sup> In the original: “Chile es un Estado asociado no miembro, por lo tanto Chile participa solamente en algunas iniciativas que le parecen importantes en un punto de vista de la agenda pública y que puedan impactar positivamente a la agenda de la nación, local y a partir de eso fomentar el tema de la movilidad regional y la integración regional.”

<sup>163</sup> In the original: “En algún momento, hubo presiones de Argentina y Brasil de que Chile, desde la perspectiva de ellos, era el tercer país que debiera sí o sí estar dentro de la Comisión de Educación Superior porque están las mejores universidades de Suramérica, o sea, Brasil, Argentina y Chile. Entonces hubo una presión política, de cierta manera, para que Chile entrara en esa Comisión. Eso por una parte en los años 90, y posteriormente Chile vio en el Mercosur el único espacio de movilidad regional. Entonces antes de que se creara la comisión de acreditación, por ejemplo, Chile vio en el Mercosur la posibilidad de intercambios académicos. Y por eso hay un interés más bien de Chile de participar en esta instancia: una por una presión de los Estados más grandes de Mercosur, y otra por interés de Chile, ya que es el único mecanismo que permite en estos momentos movilidad regional.”

But for Mercosur they have worked as if they were practically with us, the Bolivians have worked a lot and the Chileans have worked a lot<sup>164</sup> (Senior Manager 17, Personal communication, May 23, 2017).

What impact did this first shift in the shape of Mercosur? For the first time in seven years new members would engage with the Education Sector. Documents show that the immediate CCR reaction was to establish *rules* for the region. According to Baldwin, rules are means of exercising power (Baldwin, 1997). In this case, it was also an expression of SEM actorness as a region, which so far had been reserved for external negotiations of cooperation projects with international organisations. This time, they seek to look inside to make room for more ideas to come in. It was a topic of debate in the XX CCR meeting in Natal:

The Argentinean Delegation mentioned the upcoming expansion of the Committee, started with the adhesion of Chile and Bolivia ... This prospect makes it necessary to elaborate norms defining the work of the Committee. The Argentinean Delegation offered to present to the other Committee members, in up to 30 days, a minute for the regulation of CCR, to be discussed in their next November meeting (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 1996a, pp. 3–4).

Second, the framing of the Associate countries as exceptions in the case of integration (“as if they were practically with us”) indicate the conditions within which Associate countries participated in SEM. Associate can decide which projects to get involved in. Chile and Bolivia’s intention to integrate despite their institutional affiliation as Associates earned the appreciation from SEM members.

In the interviews, I speculated if the interest in having more countries adhering to SEM (now 10) could indicate that SEM acted as a model for the rest of Latin America. The response indicates that SEM’s first intentions were rather modest:

I think it appears as an integration process that had four members, but open to the incorporation of others. That's true. Now, that's voluntary, as we've just mentioned. If Chile, which from the beginning wanted to participate, but only to participate in certain things, it was open [for them] and they went and participated but they did not have a say: *they had a voice, but not a vote*<sup>165</sup> (Senior Member 18, 2017, my highlights).

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<sup>164</sup> In the original: “Pero, para Mercosur han trabajado como que fueran prácticamente con nosotros, han trabajado mucho los bolivianos y los chilenos han trabajado mucho.”

<sup>165</sup> In the original: “Yo creo que aparece como un proceso de integración que tenía cuatro miembros, pero abierto a la incorporación de los demás. Eso sí. Ahora, eso es algo voluntario como te decimos ahora. Si Chile que desde el comienzo quiso participar, pero solo participar hasta determinadas cosas, está abierto e iban y participaban, no tenían el voto: tenían voz, pero no voto.”

Having a voice but no vote confers legitimacy to the guests, yet no authority. Their opinions they could give input but not a vote on consensus. Their opinions were often registered in the meeting minutes.

## 6.7 Uruguay – from a university-system to a system of HE

Uruguay is a very special case, whose evolution of the HE system brings many interesting aspects of a small country. Until the mid-1980s, its HE ensemble was formed by one institution: the University of the Republic (Udelar), founded in 1849. Udelar functioned as a form of institution-Ministry, as the only HE institution allowed to operate in the country. Consequently, changes in the University’s regulation meant changes in the Uruguayan HE ensemble. This changed in 1984, when private institutions were allowed to operate (Table 6.1). Although Udelar continues to be the main HE in the country, hosting over 85% of all undergraduate students in Uruguay, new private providers required new system-wide regulations, outside the domain of the university.

Table 6.1 Education Laws in Uruguay (1950 - 2017)

Date	Title
1956	Law of Education – Udelar
1984	Law about Private HE (Decreto Ley 15.661)
1995	Regulates Law 15.661
2009	Law of Education (Ley General de Educación, N. 18.437).
2014	Regulates Law 15.661 (on private HE)

Source: Elaborated by the author.

Out of this intense regulatory activity the 2009 Law of Education presents two points related to HE that deserve mentioning here. First, the 2009 Law considers HE to be a right of the students, and an *obligation of the families* (Art, 7). It is a rare find, given that the other countries in the region see the obligation of access, i.e. Argentina, only until secondary education. Second, the 2009 Law of Education can be interpreted as setting up a system of HE. What used to be a one-institution system (Udelar), now has a HE system, new

institutions, and a decision body, the National Commission of Education (COMINE)<sup>166</sup>.

The new National System of Public Education defines that HE in Uruguay is formed by: the University of the Republic, the University Institute of Education, the Technological University (UTEC) and the University of Work (UTU)<sup>167</sup> (Uruguay, 2008, sec. 79). Apart from the public universities, Udelar and UTEC, the HE university system in Uruguay now includes a list of four private universities (see Table 6.2, below), and 20 university institutes.

Table 6.2 List of universities in Uruguay

Date	University
1849	University of the Republic (Udelar)
1985	Universidad Católica del Uruguay
1996	Universidad ORT
1997	Universidad de Montevideo
1998	Universidad de la Empresa
2013	Universidad Tecnológica de Uruguay

Source: Elaborated by the author.

Uruguay incorporates regional education in the 2009 Uruguayan education Law. Article 13 says that one of the objectives of education is to “promote justice, solidarity, freedom, democracy, social inclusion, regional and international integration and pacific living”. How much of this regulation has been inserted in the practice of education? In terms of HE, it is clear that Udelar has a major say in the country’s participation in the region, to the point of one being confused with the other. A representative of Udelar explains these changes:

And well, we [at Udelar] attend the meetings and we also follow up here [internally at the university] and we do the internal meetings with the Ministry of Education, because *that reality has also changed*. Since the beginning of the regional integration process, [talking about] the national level now, let's say that *the leading voice in higher education is now shared with the Ministry*, in reality. The country's position at the higher education level is coordinated with the Ministry of Education. So we always have coordination meetings. We had one last week, we will have another one

<sup>166</sup> The Law establishes HE to have two levels: level 4 corresponds to undergraduate degrees, and level 5, postgraduate degrees. Level 4 has three modalities: non-university degrees, technological education, teacher education and university degrees.

<sup>167</sup> UTU offers non-university HE degrees.

the day after tomorrow... there is always a working link there as well<sup>168</sup> (Senior Manager 30, personal communication, May 15, 2017).

In spite of this awareness that the role of Udelar has changed, I have noticed that some confusion still remains. That was made clear when I asked what they perceived Uruguay has gained by taking part in the Mercosur Education Sector; the response pointed out first what the university gained – rather than the country:

AB: What has Uruguay gained from its participation in the SEM?

SM 17: It gained in the sense that higher education... *the University began* to have, to incorporate everything that is [related to] evaluation systems. With the Mercosur it begins everything that is accreditation, which has as a very important base element, all self-evaluation and peer evaluation. So, it was really mobilising, if Mercosur had not been there, what was achieved in a short time [in the area of] accreditation would not have been achieved. I think that was one of the most important achievements...

Interestingly, SM 17's response seems to indicate a repositioning of her role as a representative of Uruguay in SEM – no longer the Udelar – when indicating 'our':

SM 17:... in *our* case... *Uruguay* also got much closer to the internal entities. We got much closer. We were always on the phone with the University of the Republic, with ANEP.

SM 30: We picked up the phone and knew who was on the other side.

AB: Didn't this happen before?

SM 17: No. In the case of Uruguay, no<sup>169</sup> (SM 17, 30, Personal communication, May 17, 2017, my highlights).

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<sup>168</sup> In the original: "Y bueno, asistimos a las reuniones y además hacemos el seguimiento acá y hacemos las reuniones internas con el Ministerio de Educación, porque también esa realidad cambió. Desde los inicios del proceso de integración regional - a nivel nacional ahora, digamos que la voz cantante en la educación superior ya se comparte con el Ministerio, en realidad. La posición país a nivel de educación superior se coordina con el Ministerio de Educación. Entonces siempre tenemos reuniones de coordinación. Tuvimos la semana pasada, pasado mañana volvemos, siempre está ese nexo de trabajo también allí."

<sup>169</sup> In the original: "SM 17: Ganó en el sentido que educación superior... la Universidad empezaba a tener, a incorporar todo lo que es sistemas de evaluación. Con el tema Mercosur empieza todo lo que es la acreditación, que tiene como un elemento de base muy importante, toda la autoevaluación y la evaluación por pares. Entonces, fue, realmente, movilizador, si no hubiera estado Mercosur, no se hubiera logrado lo que se logró en poco tiempo para la acreditación. Yo creo que ese fue uno de los logros más importantes. ... En nuestro caso, Uruguay también se acercó mucho más a los entes internos. Nos acercamos mucho más. Teníamos el teléfono permanente, con la Universidad de la República, con la ANEP. SM 30: Levantamos los teléfonos y sabíamos quienes estaban al otro lado. AB ¿Y antes no pasaba esto? SM 17: No. En el caso de Uruguay, no."

The perception of the relevance of the accreditation process for Uruguay has also been mentioned by other participants from outside Uruguay. SM 2, for instance, highlights the internal coordination the Uruguayan institutions had to do after taking part in SEM:

SM 2: In Uruguay, even though the issue [of an accreditation agency] was not resolved to this day, criteria were put forward regarding what should be, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, and it was very useful to organize a few things and for there to be dialogue among the actors, something that until then had not happened.

A: No, what they achieved was an ad hoc commission, that's the most I've found.

SM 2: Exactly, but that ad hoc commission made the University of the Republic, the Ministry and the private universities had to sit at a table and talk about it. And that was an important advance<sup>170</sup> (Senior Manager 2, personal communication, April 7 2017).

Uruguay went through profound transformation since the launch of SEM. In this section I highlighted two of the changes. On the one hand, the implementation of a HE 'system', which ended up diminishing the role of the Udelar as a voice in HE in the region. On the other, new actors gained prominence and a say in contributing to the regional projects either by coordinating Uruguay's participation in SEM, or by taking part in the regional projects, such as accreditation. Finally, the accreditation project is perceived as the project from which Uruguay has benefited the most.

## **6.8 International organisations as a source of mechanisms to strengthen legitimacy**

As it has been hinted at in Chapter 5, IOs such as the OEI and the OAS have been a major part of the development of SEM. I will argue that this relationship has changed from the first CJ, where it was mostly a source of information, to the second CJ, where it becomes a means to make ideas materialise. This is in line with my argument - that this second CJ is

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<sup>170</sup> In the original: "SM 2: En Uruguay, aun cuando hasta el día de hoy no se resolvió el tema [de la acreditación], se plantearon criterios respecto de que debería de haber, etcétera, etcétera, y le sirvió bastante para ordenar unas cuantas cosas y que hubiera diálogo entre los actores, algo que hasta ese momento no sucedía. AB: No, lo que lograron fue una comisión ad hoc, es lo máximo que he encontrado. SM 2: Exacto, pero esa comisión ad hoc hizo que la Universidad de la República, el Ministerio y las universidades privadas tuvieran que sentarse en una mesa a dialogar sobre. Y eso fue un avance importante".

illustrative of a qualitative jump in the development of SEM. Process tracing can once again guide us in understanding how this unfolded.

At the end of 1998, CHE proposed a discussion about the relationship with OIs. The text goes like this:

It was also discussed how this [HE] Commission will forward proposals aiming at Cooperation Programmes with International Organisations. It was suggested that, for the Next Meeting, each country present a General Agenda to link the activities developed in the field of HE [in Mercosur] with the offer available in International Cooperation, and, in particular, with the organisms that have their headquarters in the [Mercosur] countries. (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR/CTR-ES, 1998, p. 2)

The ‘offers’ cited above refer to a list compiled in a previous CCR meeting (April 1998). There is no information on how the list was compiled, who was invited, and why. The minutes for these two meetings are not available to be reviewed<sup>171</sup>. In terms of discussions at the level of HE, it seems the meeting worked like a form of *speed dating*: ‘show me what you have and I show you what I have got’. As presented in the XIII CHE meeting (November 1998), the list compiled for HE is the following:

- The French Cooperation indicated teacher training;
- The OEI offered ‘all of their programmes’ to support Mercosur
- UNESCO cited a project named ‘HE and Mercosur’, of which the CHE members said that they needed more information about;
- The World Trade Organisation (WTO) pitched in with two projects, namely about the “identification of a system of accreditation of HE degrees” and “alternative systems of recognition of diplomas”.

In spite of the presence of large OIs, participants indicated that SEM was still ‘at the driving seat’ of SEM:

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<sup>171</sup> I contacted the Mercosur Secretariat in Montevideo, and the Brazilian committee in 2017 with a list of missing documents and did receive responses not manage to get them. The meeting minutes for CCR 1/98 and 2/98 were in the list. There is a CCR 01/98 minute available on the Mercosur Document Repository website, but the file is not on Education, but the Commission for Culture.

The Organisms were observers at the meetings, but they had a voice. So, they spoke. And... but I don't remember them putting that agenda away, no. They always put it as a thing of: 'we can support whatever the countries decide, count on our structure to support'. So, the OREALC, the OEI always participated, right? <sup>172</sup> (Senior Manager 16, personal communication, 30 March 2018).

There is one IO which deserves special attention for its constant presence in SEM meetings throughout the years: the Organisation of Ibero-American States. Frequently mentioned in meeting minutes and in the interviews, what can be said of its role in the Shaping of SEM?

### **6.8.1 The role of the Organisation of the Ibero-American States (OEI) in SEM**

I would like to briefly address an important gap in the analysis of SEM. The OEI has been the IO with the largest presence in the development of the SEM, in time and effort. And yet, to the best of my knowledge, there has been no analysis of the nature of this relationship. OEI was seen as a 'great ally', as reported by SM 20. Its influence is reported to be mostly positive. Having a regional office in Buenos Aires and being able to access the Spanish negotiations with the EU could have given the OEI a legitimate position to advise in terms of regional integration. Moreover, the figure of the OEI General Secretary generated trust. The reason, as SM 20 indicates, was the ideological alignment: "*at the time it was led by the Spanish socialist Pepe Torreblanca. And that OEI was very collaborative with Mercosur*"<sup>173</sup> (SM 20, personal communication, 2017, my emphasis). Torreblanca stayed in the post from 1990 until 1997, when Francisco Piñon, an Argentinean who was deeply involved in SEM from its early days, took over.

It must have been refreshing to cooperate with an agency that was believed to want to reform and privatise its HE system – with 'socialist' values. However, their insight into the SEM could also result positive for the European goals. As SM2 suggested, the OEI acted as a "double agent": its position allowed both Mercosur and the EU to learn about each other's projects" (Interview, Senior Manager 2). Without a doubt, the OEI has been able to offer structure, administrative support, and funding, for the mechanisms that the SEM developed.

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<sup>172</sup> In the original: "Os organismos eram observadores nas reuniões mas eles tinham voz, né. Então falavam. E... mas eu não lembro deles tarem colocando essa agenda, não. Eles sempre colocaram como uma coisa de: 'podemos apoiar o que os países decidirem, contem com a nossa estrutura pra apoiar'. Então, a OREALC, a OEI sempre participava, né".

<sup>173</sup> In the original: "en aquel momento la dirigía el socialista español Pepe Torreblanca. Y esa OEI fue muy colaborativa con el Mercosur".

And yet, the role of the OEI has been seen as legitimising SEM: As SM 4 explains:

SM 4: There is one thing about the OEI that is not only economic, but what gives the legitimacy of Mercosur education. That gives the good image of that the work we were doing is getting and that was really transmitted in some way. And I think ... that was for the sceptics of Mercosur, because there were also sceptics in societies 'because Mercosur doesn't work, because I don't know what', well, all the economic part, but Mercosur is not only about economy. That's how it is, it has worked that way, in reality that is to say... and the education part is just a sample of that and it advanced a lot for what many technicians or external people really wanted or didn't want... it was like a real proof that things could be done. Then they were achieved in Mercosur, especially in the area of Higher Education<sup>174</sup> (Senior Manager 4, personal communication, May 17, 2017).

The question for the next CJ is to observe whether, if at all, SEM regional projects in higher education have been created having in mind the OEI as a partner, and what would be the consequences should that have been the case.

## 6.9 Conclusions

This Chapter has argued that the emergence of the accreditation project was due to the strategic role it represented to Argentina and Brazil in implementing changes at the national level. As secondary reason was the incapacity to homogenise the region's systems due to the differences in the HE ensembles; it provided the main barrier for joint ventures. By creating a project that required different changes at the national level (for Brazil and Argentina, that is), the accreditation project gave SEM the legitimacy it needed to act as a region (Cammack, 2006). In line with the critical junctures framework, I will argue that the launch of the accreditation project characterises the legacy: a change in the nature of HE regionalisation in Mercosur. The legacy solved the crisis of the impossibility of generating joint projects in HE because it enabled to move from a politics of homogenisation to the harmonisation of ideas through the recognition of differences. The data showed how the accreditation process was in one way to give a step ahead towards the possibility of mobility

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<sup>174</sup> In the original: "Ahí hay una cosa de la OEI que no es solamente económica, sino lo que da la legitimidad del Mercosur educativo. Lo que da la buena imagen que está obteniendo el trabajo que hacemos y que realmente de alguna forma se transmitía. Y creo que ... eso era para los escépticos del Mercosur, porque también había escépticos en las sociedades "porque el Mercosur no funciona, porque no sé qué", bueno toda la parte comercial, pero el Mercosur no es solamente lo comercial. Eso es así, o ha funcionado así, en la realidad es decir... y la parte educativa justamente es una muestra de eso y avanzó mucho para lo que realmente muchos técnicos o gente externa o que no quería... era como una prueba realmente de que se podían hacer cosas. Entonces se lograron en el Mercosur educativo sobretodo en la parte de la Educación Superior".

and at the same time overcoming the regulatory barriers imposed on the recognition of diplomas. By changing the focus to the analysis of the programmes/ undergraduate degrees SEM members, rather than on the recognition of diplomas, it was possible to allow a bases for comparison of degrees. Moreover, as it will be seen in the sequence, the responsibility and the labour for the review process shifted to the institutions themselves, not the Ministries of Education.

In addition to the changes in the nature of the HE sectoral region, two other social events marked the development of the new Sector. The first one was the launch of a second Triennial Plan (1998-2000). It reflected the quality assurance policy debates taking place at the global level, now under the auspice of UNESCO and the Education for All movement. As a result, creating ‘a culture of evaluation’ and a new politics of equivalences figured as a new objective for HE in the second Triennial Plan (MERCOSUR/RME, 1998a). Once again, national policies were influenced by multiple actors, global, regional and national, and this will reverberate and feed into the process of region-making.

The second social event is the adhesion of Chile and Bolivia to SEM (1997), what is considered as the first shift of the project’s geometry. The addition of two new countries induced SEM’s ‘founding fathers’ to adopt the demeanour of ‘actorness’: as a regional unit. As the analysis revealed, in order to ‘let others in’, it was necessary to plan forms of institutionalising SEM in a way that could be easily grasped from the outside. This was done by creating mechanisms, such as a SEM structure, with norms and regulations. Unsurprisingly, Argentina was quick to volunteer to define all of these instruments; a practice that flows from its complex relationship with Brazil as the larger nation and thus with claims to authority. In a way, these mechanisms mirror the experience SEM actors had when establishing SEM: an exercise of self-recognition to develop a new identity to be shared with others (Chapter 5).

By the end of the 1990’s, the Education Sector had been largely searching for common ground to put regional projects forward. This finding is in line with what Daniela Perrotta (2013) has indicated to be a period of ‘self-recognition’. Tracing how this mission was portrayed in the data reveals the difficulties in setting up joint initiatives, in spite of the determination of the actors. On the one hand, putting together the information from the four Member States looked like a very time-consuming activity and one which may not produce comparable aspects (no templates were provided). On the other, projects conducted without a

prior research implied in delayed projects, or even the suspension of Decisions, as it happened with the ‘unwanted’ Protocol for academic mobility.

Other scholars have a different account of the period. Roberto Miranda (1999), writing from the National University of Rosario in Argentina, indicates that most of SEM’s actions until 1999 targeted two aspects: operational (the harmonisation of education systems) and promotional (of quality education for all). While it is possible to contend that mechanisms for harmonising structures depend on a deep knowledge of the national systems that are to be harmonised – which again points to Perrotta’s argument above about recognition. Miranda seems to refer to the purpose of the *mechanisms* established: as strategies aimed to achieve harmonisation rather than the mission of the region as a whole. Regardless of the angle with which these authors have approached these events, none of the conclusions make reference to what SEM planned to do at the time, as the mission laid out in the 1998 Mission : “To contribute to Mercosur’s objectives by stimulating the training of a citizen consciousness for integration and promoting quality education for all in a process of development with social justice and in line with the cultural singularity of its people (MERCOSUR/RME, 1998a).

A remaining question from both accounts above is *why* did SEM need any of these strategies (recognition, operation, promotional) in the first place? Put differently, what type of (higher) education regionalism was being created in Mercosur? As I have argued in Chapter 6, this was done in the name of legitimacy, and, in a way, authority. This aspect will be further explored in the next Chapter.

Finally, the rise of new regional projects hinted to the extent in which the education policies of the Member States (national level) reverberate into the process of region-making. The case of the accreditation showed furthermore that the policy arena in Argentina and Brazil were the largest influencers into the process of region-making, even if their arena is highly influenced by global processes. The Chapter also detailed how the two countries, Argentina and Brazil, perceive the changes in the region: two stories with the same outcome: regional leadership. It concluded with the impact of the regional HE reforms in Uruguay. If thinking of the theoretical debate proposed in Chapter 2, it could be explained by the argument of the relationship with hegemony: the relationship with the global level could be seen as a hegemonic (western, northern or indeed US-based imperialism – the ‘bad’ kind), hence not assimilated. The catch is that – once global policies are diluted into the national

level, they seem to be almost harmless, and would be welcomed into the region. Will this behaviour persist in the next projects?

## 7 NEW STRUCTURES, NEW MEANINGS: INSTITUTIONALISING THE REGION AND THE PRODUCTION OF A NEW COMMON SENSE

### 7.1 Introduction

This Chapter departs from the understanding that the agreement on the accreditation process represents an epistemic shift for HE in Mercosur. As elucidated in Chapter 6, the HE project assumed a different perspective when proposing ideas for harmonisation through the coordination of differences. This is in contrast to the homogeneous actions for Mercosur's education through 'one-size fit- all' Protocols, such as the equivalence tables adopted in the area of basic education. I have also established that this shift happened under the veiled hegemony of Argentina and Brazil. The former had quality assurance very high in their national agenda (Perrotta, 2014), whereas the latter was also interested in quality but could not overcome its internal regulatory barriers for the recognition of international diplomas (Gonçalves, 2012). As a consequence, the accreditation project was approved precisely because, when searching for comparable levels of quality in the region's undergraduate programmes, it would not demand changes in the national structures in the region's hegemonies. Finally, following the metaphor of 'the train' presented in this thesis's Introduction, 'the Mercosur Train' now had wagons to accommodate diversity, and was now ready to take off.

The next period of SEM development was equally eventful. In this Chapter I will contend that two events characterise the development of SEM during 2001-2003. First, the search for a robust *institutionality* both within the region and within the Member States (Gornitzka, 2006; March & Olsen, 1998). The conditions were favourable. It was time to design a new Strategy. There was interest in gaining political power and to improve SEM's management (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 2001, p. 4). CCR had started a conversation in 1999 about revising its working structure and mandate. What is more, Mercosur's 2000 Relaunch brought new calls for Member States to implement regional decisions (MERCOSUR/CMC, 2000a).

Second, the data demonstrates the emergence of a new set of meanings being incorporated into the regional discourse. The production of this new common sense had first influenced by the promotion of a Mercosur social agenda with the Letter of Buenos Aires

(MERCOSUR, 2000). It added a new vocabulary to SEM's agenda. This new lexicon was further expanded with the inclusion of the idea of education in Mercosur as a 'space'. This signals an intertextuality with the events taking place in the EU at the same time as a consequence of the launch of the Bologna Process in 1999, and the idea of a European Higher Education Space.

Finally, I will introduce Paraguay as a case of a Member State at the receiving end of SEM's increased regionness (Hettne & Söderbaum, 2000). I suggest that the increased actorness gained after the inclusion of Chile and Bolivia enabled SEM to influence education policies at the national level, too. However, not all SEM countries will be at the receiving end of this new multi-scalar relationship where ideas start to travel in a reverse direction: from the regional to the national.

## **7.2 A busy turn of the Millennium: SEM embedded in context**

The turn of the Millennium is embedded in a moment of political, social and economic instability across the Member States. Paraguay has been dealing with the spillover effects from the *Marzo Paraguayo* in 1999 when the Vice-President was murdered, and violent public unrest resulted in the loss of many lives that in turn culminated in the renouncing of President Raúl Cubas (Soto, 2001). From 1999 Argentina implemented austerity measures inspired by the International Monetary Fund-oriented to manage external debt, exchange rate crisis and the rise in unemployment. These measures did not prevent the country from falling into a deep recession with rotating five presidents in a week after declaring it would default on loan repayments (Bouzas, 2003). Uruguay experienced an acute banking crisis, to the extent that the International Monetary Fund (FMI) suggested Uruguayan President Jorge Battle also declare it would default as Argentina had done. This action was avoided due to Battle's positive relationship with the United States and a consequent loan. Brazil had devalued its currency, with the result that it deeply affected the exports from other countries in the region.

In Mercosur, the 1997 crisis lingered unresolved. Bernal-Meza (2008) indicates how the difficulties to advance the common market partly resulted from the differences in Brazil and Argentina's strategic approach building the region. On the one hand, Brazil positioned itself as a 'natural regional leader' yet its external relations strategy resembled one of

hegemony (see Introduction, Chapter 3). On the other hand, Argentina's positioning had been largely defined by the 'triangular relationship' between with Brazil and the United States. In this relationship, the latter offered more opportunities for expanding the country's markets; a set of possibilities as arising from President Carlos Menem's relationship with the US. A resolution for the regional crisis came with the a new political agenda aiming to "deepen integration and intensify subregional policy coordination" (Phillips, 2001, p. 580)<sup>175</sup>. In late 2000, several innovations were proposed in order to manage the national and regional difficulties, such as: unrestricted access to Member States' internal markets (MERCOSUR/CMC, 2000b), a process for Member States to incorporate regional decision (MERCOSUR/CMC, 2000a), and a regional approach to foreign relations<sup>176</sup> (MERCOSUR/CMC, 2000c).

At the global level, two events deserve attention regarding the context of Latin America. The first is the launch of the EU's Lisbon Strategy, which triggered a formal competitive rhetoric for the EU as the "the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world" (European Council, 2000). The Lisbon Strategy laid out a new governance mechanisms, the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), which impacted the development of education policies in the region (Gornitzka, 2006; Warleigh-Lack & Drachenberg, 2011). The second event is the US shift of focus into the 'War on Terror' in September 2001, with the result that US's external relations foci shifted from Latin America's polity to the Middle East<sup>177</sup>.

### **7.3 New winds of change: increasing institutionalality**

SEM established a few mechanisms that would help improve its institutionalality: a new strategy with the 2001 Plan, and a revisited structure and new approach to implementation, via projects. Acquiring institutionalality entails the strengthening of its institution-building processes, or creating stable and viable rules with adequate procedures,

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<sup>175</sup> To Philips (2001), the 'new regionalism' in Mercosur has three features: restructuring of the regionalist governance, new mechanisms for economic governance, and the resulting form of regionalism itself.

<sup>176</sup> Decision 32/2000 stipulated that external relations involving Mercosur states must be carried out on behalf of the region, preventing individual Member States to establish bilateral agreements.

<sup>177</sup> The influence of the United States in the development of the HE Sector is indirect. The data analysed does not make any explicit reference to the US or any of its US department in the shape of SEM, apart from the overarching influence of the OAS. I have not explored this relationship further in the thesis for having to prioritise the most relevant external influencers in the shape of the HE Sector, although I do recognise the historical role of the US in Mercosur, its Member States and the Latin American regionalisms as a whole (Chapter 2).

funding, and the capacity for action from which behaviours and meanings are created and considered legitimate (Gornitzka, 2006; March & Olsen, 1998). These instruments were, after all, instruments of change. Change happens in “the relationship between actors and the context in which they find themselves” (Hay, 2008, p. 64). This relationship results from the work of policy entrepreneurs, often institutionalised subjects and institutional environments and the contexts they are embedded in (Hay, 2008; Leca & Naccache, 2006).

Before looking into the mechanisms and their outcomes, it is important to highlight the role of the actors in this period. Once again, the main protagonists of change in SEM were the members of the Regional Committee (CCR). The combination of its member’s seniority at the national ministries of education, and the advisory role to RME, grants them the necessary authority with SEM to do so. Their influence in the advancing of SEM in this period departed from a reflection in 1999 on the reasons for CCR’s difficulties in performing its role as advisory members to the Ministers (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 1999, p. 5). The outcome was the definition of a new mandates for CCR, grounded in a professional vocabulary:

- a *political* mandate would look after the dialogue with RME;
- a *steering* mandate aiming at improving the coordination of the work between the technical commissions and working groups; and,
- an *operational* mandate occupied with establishing criteria for the genesis and funding of projects and ways to make SEM’s actions visible.

The mandate for the now called ‘Area Committees’ (where HE sits) became:

- to plan and implement action lines
- to summon provisory instances to run specific projects
- to analyse and evaluate projects
- to manage and implement projects

Furthermore, CCR members voiced a shared understanding that “the new structure had to be more compact and capable of facilitating integration and the harmonising of social aspects” (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 1999, p. 5). The introduction of technologies for governance, and a virtual desk was proposed to offer more flexibility and a smoother

transition between the coordination of Pro-Tempore Presidencies (PPTs)<sup>178</sup>. They agreed that the expected ‘qualitative jump’ and technology-aided ‘system efficiency’ would depend heavily on the availability of resources to ‘ensure the improvement in quality’ (MERCOSUR/CCR, 2000, p. 13). These elements set out a new ‘moment of education politics’ (see Chapter 3) aiming at introducing new governance mechanisms. The new governance structures were based on the coordination between actors, and project-based funding<sup>179</sup> (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 2002).

At that point in time, it is pertinent to ask: what might have been the purpose of HE regionalism in Mercosur? Given the difficulties in creating regional projects in HE, I had been inclined until now to consider its purpose as the search for legitimacy. Barnett and Finnemore have drawn attention to the way in which the legitimacy of public organisations “...depends on whether their procedures are viewed as proper and correct (procedural legitimacy) and whether they are reasonably successful at pursuing goals that are consistent with the values of the broader community (substantive legitimacy)” (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004, p. 166). Because legitimacy has direct implications in the capacity to act (Avant et al., 2010)– and until now it seemed that the context made SEM somehow *unable* to or even *prevented* from, act(ing), it would conclude that the region has a low level of legitimacy.

However, as Avant and her colleagues have reminded us, the prospect of success in implementing a certain policy has also to do with the level of *authority* of the actors aiming to push a project forward. If accepting that institutions use authority as a mechanism to orient action and create social change (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004, pp. 6–7), then it is authority that is a condition for exerting power, and it is directly related to managing levels legitimacy. Legitimacy is a sign of power. What this translates into is that for SEM in this period and context it was authority which was the missing form of power that would in turn enable the achievement of results.

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<sup>178</sup> As a reminder, the coordination of SEM activities shifted every six months with the rotating leadership of Mercosur. The rotation followed alphabetical order (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela). The country hosting the PPT is responsible for setting the calendar, inviting, planning and hosting the meetings of all SEM instances. As I showed in the introduction, this can amount to over 30 meetings in a semester.

<sup>179</sup> The EU has adopted a similar strategy in 2000 with the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in the 2000 Lisbon Strategy (Cammack, 2007; Gornitzka, 2006; Warleigh-Lack & Drachenberg, 2011). The OMC entails a soft power approach to promote the informal co-ordination of state policies without harmonisation.

How was this done? By revising the structure, reviewing mandates and defining roles and norms in a very specific moment; the 2000 Reflexive Seminar.

### 7.3.1 When an event generates many other events: the 2000 Reflexive Seminar

In August 2000 the CCR met for a Reflexive exercise to plan a new Plan. Although there is no information about who from which country took part in the seminar, the Meeting minutes of the subsequent RME Meeting in December 2000 indicates the CCR proposed the changes. No other member of area committees or working groups, such as HE, were mentioned<sup>180</sup>. The event was also used to review SEM's structure, functioning and the funding of its activities (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 2000b).

The 2000 Reflexive Seminar is a key social event in the development of SEM. It offered the space for the Sector (CCR) to assess the Sector's accomplishments up until this point, to recognise its hardships, and to plant the seeds for the new strategy. Its main outcome was the framing of an agenda in the form of a 10-page 'Reference Framework' (*Marco Referencial*) (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 2000a). The Document's suggested invocations of the legitimacy of the work of SEM, its governance and its value in contributing for the shape of Mercosur run through the document, as the extract below illustrates:

SEM identifies as the most significant achievements of the decade having generated at the intergovernmental level **instances of coordinated work**, which allowed the definition of **conceptual, normative and operative frameworks**; having contributed to the training of a **conscience of belonging to a broader space, bringing awareness to the education systems and actors** of the region's civil society. At the same time, it considered valuable reaching a first level of articulation with international organisations, capitalising on the experiences in design and coordination of regional projects (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 2000a, p. 3) (highlights in the original).

As mentioned above, the 'Framework' cites aspects they believed to have hindered the development of SEM. One example is the mention of the need to *insert the Sector in the institutional structure of Mercosur*, and its normative and functional aspects. Until then, only the RME had been recognised by the Mercosur Council (CMC) as a structure within Mercosur. To what extent had the lack of institutional validation due to the absence from the region's formal structure conditioned the CCR efforts in the region? I was unable to find

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<sup>180</sup> By October 2000, there were 14 different groups meeting either as Technical Commissions (TC) or as Working Groups (WG): CT Basic Education, CT Technological Education, CT Higher Education (CHE), WG on Postgraduate Issues, WG on Accreditation, CT Special Education, WG on the teaching of History and Geography, CT Distance Education, CT Diploma Recognition of Basic (non-Technical) Education, WG on Linguistic Policies, CT Information and Communication System, WG preparing a course in Public Policy, WG for Specialists in Education Terminology, WG Specialists in Education Indicators. There were 28 attendees in the XXXV CCR Meeting in Brasilia in October 2000.

evidence of whether this decade of activities would have been different if a formal structure was recognised. It did not appear to be the case.

In addition, the Document invokes a particular lexicon which is revealing; that of ‘lack of visibility’, ‘review of its institutional aspects’, ‘diffusion of actions’, ‘models for internal and external communications’. This discloses SEM’s awareness and desire for increased legitimacy in the region.

Finally, the document concludes with a reflexion that is surprisingly political: “The axis of Mercosur is the strategic alliance of the countries that compose it” (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 2000b). This is a reassurance of the Sector’s intergovernmentalist vocation, rather than the intention of establishing a supranational institution in the model of the EU (Chapter 2, also discussed in Perrotta, 2014). In sum, as a social event, the Reflexive Seminar is evidence of SEM’s efforts to build as a sectoral region not only from ‘within’ but also ‘from outside’ (Robertson et al., 2016). The outcomes of this Seminar will drive the work of SEM for a decade: a new organisational structure, a new Strategic Plan, and the vision of Education in Mercosur as a space. I will address each below.

### **7.3.2 A new structure**

One outcome of the Reflexive Seminar was the proposal of a new institutional design for SEM, which was approved at the XIX RME meeting in December 2000 (MERCOSUR/RME, 2000b). Organisational structures are mechanisms created to claim authority (Avant et al., 2010). If accepting that institutions use authority as a mechanism to orient action and create social change (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004, pp. 6–7), then authority becomes a condition for exerting power and is directly related to managing levels legitimacy (Chapter 6).

The new Structure proposed two main changes. The first was the promotion of actions that generate ‘visible results’ with an impact on the region’s education systems. The second innovation introduced the use of ‘projects’ as flexible way of implementing activities. In this new modality of action, Technical (now Area) Commissions would have the power and authority to put forward ideas to CCR after carrying out a feasibility analysis of the

projects<sup>181</sup>. If approved, the CCR would be responsible for looking for ways to fund the projects. The goal was to ensure that ‘the impact and the visibility of the results reached in the education systems and in societies confirm the clearest indicator of efficiency in the sector’(MERCOSUR/RME, 2000b).

As a consequence of this search for a robust institutionalisation, it can be argued that what we are looking at is a new shift: from an *ideational* SEM into a more *material* regional project. Documents in this period reveal an urgency to *get things done*; to achieve results even if in the midst of profound social, economic, political and institutional national crises mentioned above. In this process, what also emerges in the documents is the use of a market-like vocabulary, such as ‘offer’, ‘processes’ and ‘efficiency’<sup>182</sup>.

### 7.3.3 The 2001-2005 Plan

Out of the Reflexive Seminar it also emerged the objectives for the Period 2001-2005.

<sup>183</sup> It defines three strategic objectives for the period:

1. Strengthening a citizen's consciousness favourable to the process for regional integration which values cultural diversity
2. Promoting of a quality education for all in the region and of policies for training and capacity building of competent human resources
3. Creating a regional education space for solidary cooperation

The new objectives show a mix of past and future goals. The first one brings together the very first goal of developing a citizen’s consciousness with the new nature of the region – a region composed of its differences. The second goal justifies the quality discourse under the global policy of ‘education for all’ pact (Mundy, 2006) with arguments around human capital. Finally, the biggest of the changes: an education space for solidarity cooperation.

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<sup>181</sup> This involved: Planning and implementing over the region’s action lines, call the commissions to elaborate the projects (i.e. Ad-hoc Commissions), analyse and evaluate the projects, do follow up the projects’ management and execution (MERCOSUR/RME, 2000b).

<sup>182</sup> Another aspect that is mentioned is the involvement of other actors. To Azevedo (2014), regionalism in Mercosur depends necessarily of the involvement of social actors.

<sup>183</sup> There is no register of when and who defined the change from three to five years. By the XIX meeting of the HE committee in November 2000, the participants still mentioned a three-year Plan.

Table 7.1 Comparison of SEM objectives in 1992, 1998 and 2001

1992-1997 Action Plan	1998-2000 Action Plan	2001-2005 Action plan
1. Training of a citizen's consciousness favourable to the integration process 2. Training of human resources to contribute to economic development 3. Compatibility and harmonisation of the education systems	1. Developing a regional identity by stimulating mutual knowledge and a culture for integration 2. Promotion of regional policies for the training of human resources and the improvement of quality	1. Strengthening a citizen's conscience favourable to the process for regional integration which values cultural diversity 2. Promotion of a quality education for all in the region and of policies for training and capacity building of competent human resources 3. Creating a regional education space for solidary cooperation

Source: Elaborated by the author.

The evolution of the strategies – or the purpose, even – reveals a maturing of the thinking of the Sector, at least in discourse. The example of citizen consciousness is interesting as illustrative for it seems to exist as an awareness of a build-up. From ideas in 1992 that you had to plant the seeds for integration, to ideas in 2001 when the idea of cultural diversity is explored, there is not only an interest in making the region a part of societies' lives, but later to ensure their gaze is diverse. As explained in Chapter 6, the frustration with a homogeneous process led to the inclusion of a vocabulary of respect for the development of each country – each in their wagon as SM 22 explained. Now 'cultural diversity' became the norm.

### 7.3.4 'Space' as a purpose

The reference to SEM as a 'space'<sup>184</sup> appeared for the first time in the 2000 Reference Framework document, and consistently from December 2000 onwards. Since then, forming an 'education space' figures in SEM's mission:

<sup>184</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2, spaces are the product of social relations; an open, multiple, relational and unfinished process influenced by time and history. It often has a place where it takes place, yet it is the social relations that define their making (Massey, 1994, 2005).

... to contribute to the Mercosur's objectives by forming a joint education *space*, in a process to be developed with social justice and respect for the cultural diversity of the peoples of the region, stimulating the shaping of a citizens' conscience for integration, mobility and exchange with the goal to achieve quality education for all, with special attention to the most vulnerable sectors (MERCOSUR/RME, 2000a, p. 1).

A critical discourse analysis reveals the intertextuality of this concept with the European experience. The launch of the Bologna Process (BP) in Europe in 1999 opens up a debate about HE sectoral regionalism with the project that gave rise to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)<sup>185</sup> (Chapter 5). The use of a spatial reference to a project in HE became a policy agenda after the Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations in 1998, and 1999, respectively. As a consequence, a new terminology with concepts such as 'common areas', 'HE space' and 'common frameworks' are introduced in the vocabulary of HE policy-making around the globe, many times influenced by the designers of the BP process themselves (Zgaga, 2006).<sup>186</sup>

Another set of events can explain why space makes an appearance only now in SEM documents. SEM had some involvement with the BP due to the role of Brazil in the EU-LAC Common Higher Education Area (later ALCUE)<sup>187</sup> (Barlete, 2018). From 2000, Brazil was one of the representatives in the ALCUE Follow-up Group and shared ALCUE documentation with the CCR. As I will later explore in Chapter 8, evidence from the data shows that the SEM countries had agreed that Brazil would be 'the voice of the region' in ALCUE. The tracing of the process also reveals that Brazil's Minister of Education at the time, Paulo Renato, attended the Ministerial meeting for the launch of the ALCUE in November 2000 in Paris only a couple of weeks prior to the Ministerial Meeting with

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<sup>185</sup> Although both the BP/EHEA and SEM started out as intergovernmental instruments, the European one took a different path. The BP/EHEA had the support from the national ministries of education, the engagement of the institutions and could support its development on the existing EU programmes that promoted mobility, i.e. Erasmus. In addition, two EU-wide strategies led the way in the policy-making: the Europe of Knowledge and the Lisbon Agenda. These became inter-twinned with the Bologna Process (Beerens, 2008).

<sup>186</sup> The influence of the EU HE reforms in the early 2000s around the world have not gone by unnoticed and generated a vast scholarship, mostly comparative, about the influence of the EU in other parts of the world (the 'external dimension' as Zgaga named it. With regards to Mercosur, Mário de Azevedo has conducted extensive research on the relationship between the EU and the evolution of SEM (Azevedo, 2014, 2015b). The author suggests that Mercosur shows an implicit trend towards the Europeanisation of its HE space, and that this is both a strategy and a desire of the Mercosur States. As this research does not explore such a comparative line of inquiry, I do not elaborate further on the subject.

<sup>187</sup> The ALCUE common area was an inter-regional project for the HE systems in the European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean. Brazil was one of the members of the Follow-up Committee, therefore was participating in the decision-making of the direction of this region. It was agreed the Brazil would bring a regional position to the ALCUE negotiations, rather than a national one. As such, the ALCUE documents were taken to CCR for debate and to design a 'Mercosur' response.

Mercosur. The sequencing of these events offer a good causal link for the adopting of this new discourse into SEM (Trampusch & Palier, 2016).

### 7.3.5 A plan for HE

The new strategy brought new responsibilities onto the HE Commission (CHE), such as to design HE's strategy. For the first time CHE defined the HE objectives. In November 2000, the group defined three broad themes (Table 7.2): accreditation, mobility and interinstitutional cooperation.

Table 7.2 HE objectives in the 2001-2005 Plan

Themes	Objective
<b>Accreditation</b>	A system of accreditation of degrees as a mechanism for the recognition of qualifications.
<b>Mobility</b>	Academic and institutional management, mobility system of credit transfer and exchange of teachers, students and researchers.
<b>Interinstitutional cooperation</b>	Joint actions in the development of collaborative degree and postgraduate programs, in programs of research, in the establishment of networks of excellence, and in the promotion of the working together with other levels of education in the field of teacher training.

Source: CHE Meeting 01/01 (May 2001)

I was unable to gather insight on the decision-making process that led to the choice for these specific projects and not others. There are CCR and CHE meeting minutes missing and the ones available do not offer enough detail. However, CHE showed the surprise when finding out in the following Meeting that one of the objectives proposed had changed. Supposedly added by CCR, a new goal figured as a new milestone for the HE Sector: an agreement for the recognition of post-secondary non-tertiary degrees. In the meeting minutes of the III CHE meeting (2001), the Committee

*.. observed a difference between the goals defined in [CHE]'s first meeting [01/00] and the ones that appear listed in the Strategic Plan. [The Committee] reiterates the priorities defined for HE: mobility, accreditation and interinstitutional cooperation, and understands that the mandate received about the theme of recognition of post-secondary non-tertiary degrees implies only on a positioning about the need to consider the theme. [The Committee] decided to propose to CCR that an Agreement for the recognition of non-tertiary degrees should be deleted from the list of goals for HE for the period. (Mercosur/RME/CCR/CRCES, 2001, p. 2, my italics).*

Although missing the document to check CCR's response (XL CCR meeting), the line did not disappear from the text of the 2001 Plan. As evident as the dispute for power among the different SEM structures – in this case, CCR and CHE –, is the hint that not much change was to be expected from the restructuring SEM had gone through. Could CCR really delegate some of its decision-making powers and authority to the Area Committees? Perhaps a closer look in the shaping of the next two HE projects, mobility and knowledge production, can shed some light on this (Chapter 8 and 9).

#### **7.4 The 'social dimension' makes a first appearance in Buenos Aires**

Whereas the previous action plan was in line with the democratic values detailed in the Ushuaia Agreement, the 2000 Plan is inspired by a new commitment that the Mercosur heads of state had committed themselves to in the Letter of Buenos Aires, signed in June 2000. The letter declared that economic development and full regional integration can only be achieved in the framework of social justice and equity" therefore it becomes a priority to "deepen the social dimension of Mercosur and taking into account that all aspects of the integration process must advance together" (Carta de Buenos Aires, 2000, p.1).

The Letter of Buenos Aires is referenced directly in the opening of the Gramado Commitment, another outcome of the 2000 Reflexive Seminar. The Commitment brings together the elements of diversity from 1998 and the need for solidarity and social justice, as part of SEM's new mission:

*Assuming the instruction of the Presidents, the SEM's mission incorporates the generation of favourable conditions for the coordination of policies and exchanges, aimed at overcoming the most acute problems affecting their societies, in a vision oriented towards the construction of a culture of solidarity and social justice (Compromiso de Gramado, 2000, p. 2, my highlights).*

When using a vocabulary from another Mercosur text, SEM also demonstrates a commitment to the regionalism that was being developed at Mercosur.

In this analysis, the elements that caught my attention concern the process of shaping of these ideas. If looking at the context of how and when these decisions were made, and by whom, important contradictions emerge. Despite repeatedly making the argument for the need to engage other sectors of society in the shaping of SEM in the meeting minutes, the

2001 Plan repeated a pattern from previous years: it was designed by a restricted group of actors, many of whom were based at the buildings of the ministries of education. Although their authority as actors in shaping the HE Sector is not questioned, it has been discussed in the literature (e.g. in Dale 2005) how authority in shaping Education has many sources and the State is only one of them. If so, why did this continue to happen in contrast to the aims of improving visibility? What could have been done differently? SM 15 raised this issue, and has a suggestion:

SM 15: The pending initiative is the incorporation of professional bodies. I mean, if we are going to analyse... the pertinence of HE in the region, the professional associations must be there discussing this issue [too] and they are not there.

AB: How would you invite them?

SM 15: The same way that they were originally invited [by the national Ministries] and then setting up the dialogue tables. That's where you have to be present, because if not, it becomes an endogenic process. That's what we were talking [earlier] about of the 'I see myself' make up [factor], right? If I am the only person who appreciates my own improvement, my evolution, I am the one that probably needs an external opinion and that's not happening<sup>188</sup> (Senior Manager 15, personal communication, March 27, 2017).

Could there be a renewed public interest, even from the professional bodies in the aspects of regional HE? Researchers have explored the wider public interest in SEM. In Brazil, Nora Krawczyk (2008) indicated there is an incipient interest from Brazilian researchers to form academic networks with Latin America. But even in the countries where there is interest in forming these academic networks, as SM 15 indicated to be the case for Paraguay, there seems to be no special engagement so far, inclusive from the broader media. To illustrate, in a discussion about Uruguay's lack of understanding of SEM's strategic relevance for the country, one of the participants explained that:

SM 4: I was interviewed once... academic interviews, like, yes, but [media] interviews... once, like... but - I myself don't care about interviews - but... I tell you, in other countries the same thing happens.

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<sup>188</sup> In the original: "SM 15: La iniciativa pendiente es la incorporación de las corporaciones profesionales. O sea, si vamos a analizar... la pertinencia de la educación superior en la región, tienen que estar los gremios profesionales discutiendo esta cuestión y no están. AB: Y ¿cómo les invitaría? SM 15: De la misma manera que se invitaron originalmente [por los Ministerio nacionales] y armando luego las mesas de diálogo. En eso tienen que estar presentes, porque, si no, se va convirtiendo en un proceso endogámico. Es lo que hablábamos del maquillaje 'ahí me veo' ¿verdad? Sí yo soy la persona que aprecio mi mejora, mi evolución, soy la única que entonces probablemente se necesita la mirada externa y eso no se está teniendo".

AB: For the interest of society... the society with interest in the subject...

SM 4: The importance that it has, the importance that is given to the strategic. The strategic aspect is very important. Think about how important can Uruguay be in the knowledge society, except by doing these little things, if we don't achieve [any impact] regionally? In other words, who are we going to do a program with, China? No... if we don't do it at the regional level - of course it's okay to go to China or let students go to Italy, to France, let them keep on going [anywhere] - but the regional channels are extremely important. It's not just a matter of proximity, it's also a matter of... let's call it of *survival, in terms of knowledge [production], bueno*.<sup>189</sup>(SM 4, personal communication, May 7, 2017, my highlights).

Such perspectives indicate that SEM's legitimacy derives from having themes that are of interest to society, including the media. The passage above hints to how little interest the education regional frameworks have generated for the wider public. The situation is difficult, and I will continue to think out loud and pose questions I have no answer for at this moment: if the themes SEM proposes are not of interest to society, how to find out societies' interest to make changes? If Brazilian researchers are not interested in engaging with SEM, as Krawczyk suggested, how to make the regional projects attractive in a way they will want to get involved? In other words, what could give SEM the legitimacy it seems to want to validate its work in its members?

## 7.5 International cooperation as an institution-building mechanism

At this point of the empirical analysis it has become clear the crucial role that the international organisations (IOs) have played in the success of *any* plan that SEM proposes. On the one hand, IOs have shared experiences, funding, human resources and they can lend their expertise. On the other side of this coin, the lack of resources made available for Mercosur as a region (Azevedo, 2014) indicate a lack of political interest in the work of the region. As such, to keep the regional HE space running, the more projects are created, the more external assistance is needed, and depended on.

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<sup>189</sup> In the original: "SM4: Me hicieron alguna entrevista alguna vez, entrevistas así académicas sí, pero entrevistas, una, así, pero, no me importa la entrevista a mí pero... te digo en otros países pasa lo mismo. AB: ¿Por el interés de la sociedad... la sociedad con interés en el tema? SM 4: La importancia que tiene, la importancia que se le ve en lo estratégico... el tema estratégico es importantísimo. Fíjate: ¿qué importancia puede tener Uruguay en la sociedad de conocimiento salvo haciendo estas cositas chiquitas, si no logramos en términos regionales? O sea que vamos a hacer programa con quien, con China... no... si no hacemos a nivel regional - por supuesto que está bien que se vaya a China o estudiantes que vayan a Italia, que vayan a Francia, que se sigan yendo - pero los canales regionales son importantísimos. No es solo un tema de proximidad, es un tema también de... vamos a llamarlo así de supervivencia, en términos de conocimiento, bueno."

The key theme here is resources. How else would the Sector be able to develop its ideas? The answer is through that the CCR calls ‘international cooperation’. Cooperation here means making project-based partnerships with international organisations who are looking for ideas so as to spend their funds, most of the times following a North to South direction (from donor to recipient).<sup>190</sup> IOs become essential to the development of regional activities for they offer some form of resource and externally-derived authority and legitimacy. The IOs that most often appear in the work of SEM are: the EU, the Andrés Bello<sup>191</sup> Agreement, the OEI, UNESCO, and the Latin Union. Specifically, in HE I will highlight the work of OEI and the EU. The data analysed and presented in different points of this work show SEM is lucid that, without external funding, many of the programmes would not have been launched. As the next Chapter will indicate, steps have been taking to solve the problem of resources, such as funding and capacity to run the projects, but these took too long to arrive. Moreover, new actors will question the intention of IOs in cooperation. Adding these changes with the global financial crises that hit European countries in 2008 – particularly Spain, who hosts the OEI – by the end of 2010 hardly any IOs appear in the meeting minutes.

## 7.6 Paraguay: “from an obedient society to an intelligent society”.

Mercosur had an important impact in the reform of Paraguayan education system following the end of the longest dictatorship period in Latin America (1954- 1989) (Britez, 2012; Lafuente, 2016). The quote in the subtitle come from the minutes from a 1997 CCR meeting, in which the Paraguayan Minister Vicente Sarubbi Zaldívar expressed his expectation that

work meetings like these allow for an egalitarian relationship amongst the Member States and the other Regional Organisations and will help Paraguay to strengthen its fight for the step *from obedience to intelligence* (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 1997, p. 2) (my highlights).

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<sup>190</sup> The OECD monitors a framework for international cooperation, the Official Development Assistance (ODA) framework. It establishes that 1% of the OECD members’ PIB (donor country) must be spent in activities or projects aimed at bringing long-term sustainable growth to a developing country (recipient) with the ultimate purpose of reducing poverty (OECD, n.d.).

<sup>191</sup> André Bello Agreement (CAB) was created in 1970 in Bogotá as an intergovernmental organisation with the aim to support cultural integration in the áreas of sciences, educational, scientific and technological.

Paraguay's interest in Mercosur has been declared to be part of its 'integrationist vocation' as a landlocked, dependent nation with weak social structures. The country joined SEM in the hope that regional integration would happen in "a systematic, efficient way, and respectful of the cultural identities of the participating nations" (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 1993a, p. 3). As a matter of fact, the country was in need of reforms that could account for the social changes started since the return to democracy.

The Paraguayan HE sector faced two challenges in 1991, when Mercosur emerged. First, a national regulatory system for the new HE institutions. Until 1991, Paraguay had only two universities: the historical and public National University of Asunción (UNA), created in 1889, and the Catholic University *Nuestra Señora de la Asunción* (UCNSA), dated from 1960. There was pressure to increase the access to HE. By the early days of 1992, another three universities were established. By 2000, there were 19 universities. Up to 1992, there was only one law for HE, the Law regulating UNA. A new governance model between the universities and state was conceived in line with the regional requirements (Rivarola, 2008) that could tackle the problems of the new universities. A 1993 Law for Universities allowed private universities to operate, yet without regulation, and created a Council of Universities. The Council had the role to coordinate and formulate a national HE policy, and evaluate HE institutions (Britez, 2012, pp. 211–212).

Second, the 'doubtful' quality of the new institutions became a point of concern (Zaldivar, 1996, p. 14). The rise of the accreditation project in Mercosur in 1997, even if pressured by the global discourse of quality assurance, and happened to its SEM neighbours Brazil and Argentina, it also indicated an opportunity. It prompted the Ministry of Education to "get directly involved with the university system, particularly due to the responsibility it assumed for the mandate of [SEM] in setting in motion the National Agency of Evaluation and Accreditation" (Rivarola, 2008, p. 561). As a reminder, the 1998 Plan established that all Member States should have their own National Accreditation Agency which will evaluate, accredit, and follow up, undergraduate degrees in the framework of the MEXA Memorandum.

Out of the four Mercosur countries, Paraguay is the one in which the regional level exerted the largest influence on. In spite of its gains, Paraguay is less a decision-maker than it is a decision-taker of Mercosur's HE sector. My conversation with two participants reveals the difficulties the country faced:

AB: Is there a project that came as a suggestion from Paraguay?

SM 33: Specifically, the reality of Mercosur Education presented the following: the two largest countries, Argentina and Brazil always proposed projects because they had sources of financing, while Paraguay and Uruguay always adhered to projects because they were financed by the other countries, so it was very complex to present a project because the one presenting projects also presented how to finance that project.

SM 6: It was always a very big limitation, but we had a vote, we could decide and say it corresponds or it doesn't correspond, we like it, we are going to implement this way in Paraguay but we never had that possibility of...

SM 33: not directly... it's very difficult<sup>192</sup> (Senior Managers 33, 26, personal communication, April 2, 2017).

The expectation that the country with a young HE system would be able to follow the same evaluation criteria as Brazil and Argentina, with strong research cultures, was unimaginable. SM 1 illustrates how the different HE systems and traditions in research is a key aspect that affects Paraguay's engagement in SEM:

SM 1: You know very well, for example, that CAPES operates in Brazil for many years. And when it comes to research, they are flying high compared to Paraguay. We are just beginning to take the first steps. For example, one of the great differences, and what we notice when there are Mercosur evaluations, is that Brazilians arrive with the research mindset. It is true, research is very important, but we as a country are still crawling in that. So, it's like we are too distant from them. And suddenly they are very demanding and do not realise that, in our country... for example, it is a country that does not invest much in research. Therefore, we have a big deficit [in this aspect]<sup>193</sup> (SM 1, personal communication, March 28, 2017).

This excerpt shows a clear example of how the social event of the recognition of the differences (Chapter 6) was incorporated as social structure in the activities of Mercosur HE. As a mechanism, it mediates the conditions for the future activities in the history of SEM. In

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<sup>192</sup> In the original: "AB: ¿Hay algún proyecto que vino como una sugerencia de Paraguay? SM 33: Concretamente la realidad del SEM presentaba lo siguiente, los dos países más grandes, Argentina y Brasil siempre proponían los proyectos porque tenían fuentes de financiamiento. En cambio, Paraguay y Uruguay siempre se adherían a los proyectos porque estaban financiados por los demás países, entonces era muy complejo que presentemos un proyecto porque el que presentaba proyectos también presentaba como financiar ese proyecto. SM 6: Siempre fue una limitación muy grande pero, si, en todo teníamos voto, podíamos decidir y decir si corresponde o no corresponde, 'nos gusta a nosotros'... 'vamos a implementar de esta manera en [país]'... pero nunca tuvimos esa posibilidad de...SM 33: directamente no... es muy difícil."

<sup>193</sup> In the original: "Sabés muy bien, por ejemplo, que la CAPES que está en Brasil tiene años. Y ellos en el tema de investigación están, pero, volando alto en comparación a Paraguay. Nosotros apenas estamos empezando a dar los primeros pasos. Por ejemplo, una de las grandes diferencias, y lo que notamos cuando hay evaluaciones del Mercosur, es que los brasileros por ejemplo cuando vienen, vienen con esa mirada de que la investigación-- Es cierto, la investigación es muy importante, pero nosotros como país estamos gateando todavía en eso. Entonces es como que nos falta mucho en comparación a ellos. Y de repente ellos son muy exigentes y no aterrizan que en nuestro país, por ejemplo, es un país que no invierte mucho en investigación. Entonces, ahí tenemos un déficit muy grande."

the case of the accreditation process, a visit of peer-reviewers (social event) will implement the structures agreed in 1997 (Chapter 4).

## **7.7 Conclusion: A new form of regionalism for HE?**

Chapter 7 introduced fundamental changes in the governance of SEM. The data analysed for the period 2000-2003 suggests that SEM improved its capacity for institutionalisation by revising its structure, reviewing mandates, and defining roles and norms. In turn, the new elements established a new ‘moment of education politics’ (see Chapter 3), or new *rules* for SEM. Taking the advantage of the window of possibility for reflection opened with the Mercosur crises, this new common sense did more than structural changes. It delegated some decision-making powers to the Areas committee, such as HE, and shifted the way of working in the Sector, into project-based activities with their own funding.

Overall, the period indicates a strong pretence to find a higher degree of visibility that could establish and consolidate the Sector’s legitimacy. Given the absence of HE actors in SEM meetings, I will argue that the visibility gained at this time did not help to improving the democratic participation in the shaping of the Sector. According to the texts analysed, the lack of visibility is the result of the lack of resources – material and human - to implement activities that can reach different corners of the HE space.

Nonetheless, the lack of Mercosur’s political support and resources consistently undermined SEM’s actorness and authority. As a consequence, the CCR purposely invited IOs for SEM meetings for session that might be regarded as a form of ‘speed dating’: profile-matching of project ideas, and funding available. However, they still use international and global policies to obtain support at the national level. The consequences of this are twofold. First, that making ideas come true requires resources. The sum of Mercosur’s governance model and the economic crises in the region (Chapter 2.4) made national investment in SEM unlikely. Therefore, it generated an increased dependence on the support from IOs, such as the OEI. Second, the need for authority to ensure legitimacy ended up coming from the outside: the IOs themselves were the only actors capable to confer the required legitimacy to SEM because they enabled projects to materialise. It is almost as if the list of mandates and responsibilities were all filled in by external actors, rather than the region’s Member States.

Recurrent in this period is the apparent need for ‘change’. The changes proposed influenced the ways the actors would relate to each other, their priorities, and ways of negotiating internally and externally, and the pace of the projects – from being *an ideational project into a material project*. This is a legacy that characterises this critical juncture. The antecedent condition of regular meetings with little outputs was changed with the event of the accreditation project (Chapter 6). However, the *idea* of accreditation has still to be implemented. There was a level of consciousness that things needed to happen. The joint effort to reimagine and reset the HE region’s governance allowed not only changes in power dynamics, but also the material consequences to the its Member States: with the impact of the accreditation project in Paraguay’s HE is a clear example of it. The counterfactual explanation for this legacy sits on the inability to materialise activities, had the governance of HE activities not be transferred to the HE Sector. As a consequence, it introduced a discourse concerned with ‘results’, ‘efficiency’, and so on – alluding to a vocabulary others have called neoliberal (Robertson et al., 2016), in spite of the new ‘social dimension’ brought into the agenda of the Education Sector.

Finally, SEM incorporated the concept of a ‘space’ into the core of its activities (mission). Process tracing indicated this change was closely related to the influence of the European education policies in the shaping of the HE Sector. A combination of factors enabled this outcome to happen: the period of designing a new Action Plan for SEM, the advent of the Bologna Process, and the involvement of SEM Member States in inter-regional projects (ALCUE/EU-LAC), all of which happened in a short period from one another. It leads to the conclusion that SEM converses with other scales of rule and looks for a way make the outcomes of these conversations work to its own advantage. In so doing it contribute the instituting of HE in Mercosur, even if to a weak degree, and to the production of a new common sense. The introduction of the spatial vocabulary is not considered a critical juncture because it did not respond to an antecedent condition in Mercosur HE, and its absence did not represent a crisis for the Sector.

## **8 ACTORNESS IN THE HE SECTOR: POSITIONING AND AUTONOMY**

### **8.1 Introduction**

The changes introduced in 2001 resulted in more than a new way of working for the Mercosur Education Sector (SEM). The new mandate given to the ‘Area Committees’, including the Committee for Higher Education (CHE), gave increased autonomy and decision-making to formerly ‘technical’ and ‘executive’ Sectors, such as HE. As a result, CHE was to develop and control their own programmes, in addition to enacting the policies the Regional Committee (CCR) delegates. Did the new mandate result in an increased actorness for CHE in the shape of the HE project? If so, in what ways did these changes happen? Could these have affected the power dynamics in the Education Sector and the election of the new governments from 2003?

In this chapter I look into CHE’s expressions of actorness (Wunderlich, 2012) as a moment of change for the HE sector in two arenas: an internal and an external. The ‘internal’ arena refers to the working relationships with other SEM areas, and with other Mercosur sectors. The second arena explores the ‘external’ political arena, such as other regional arrangements in Latin America (LA) and beyond. The Chapter concludes with a discussion about the contradictions that a sense of regional actorness meets the national actorness of the Member States.

### **8.2 Events that generate events: A new (political) wave arrives**

A renewed interest in regional integration emerged from 2003 with the election of new governments in Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay<sup>194</sup>. The political alignment of the Heads of State, positive to regionalism in LA, changed the pace of the decision-making in the region (Jatobá & Luciano, 2018). The increased regional political agenda brought to light

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<sup>194</sup> New Centre-Leftist governments took office in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay in 2003, 2003 and 2005, respectively. Paraguay elected Colorado Party conservative Nicanor Duarte as President in 2003 – however, Duarte spent 10 years as Paraguay’s Minister of Education (1993-2003) and himself and his cabinet attended SEM meetings uninterruptedly. Because of Duarte’s familiarity with SEM, I infer he endorsed the work of the Sector to his successor as the new Minister of Education.

the key role of the States and their Foreign Policy in shaping Mercosur<sup>195</sup> (Malamud & Gardini, 2012). To Malamud, the political shift maintained Mercosur's core feature of depending largely on 'inter-presidentialism'; its "presidents were targeted as the only possible suppliers of decisions, enforcement, and dispute resolution" (Malamud, 2005b, p. 148). Moreover, Mercosur expanded to new Associate Members (Colombia, Peru, Ecuador), and also added a new full member (Venezuela, in 2012)<sup>196</sup>.

A new discourse of 'cooperation', 'social inclusion', 'peoples', 'solidarity' resonated in the words of the region's political declarations from the newly elected Presidents (MERCOSUR, 2003)<sup>197</sup>. This new order of discourse (Fairclough, 2003) replaced perceptions of regional integration as economic blocs. The scholarship on the theme however seems to be divided on the nature of the power being deployed to bring such a social transformation. On the one hand, new theoretical debates about LA regionalism emerged<sup>198</sup>. Proposals of post-hegemonic regionalism (Riggirozzi & Tussie, 2012) and post-liberal regionalism (Sanahuja, 2012) elucidate this shift<sup>199</sup>. These scholars considered this new project of regionalism an attempt to revert the legacy of exclusion brought by the Washington Consensus (Serbin, 2013). On the other, another group of LA researchers classified the use of this vocabulary as 'declaratory regionalism' (Jenne, Schenoni, & Urdinez, 2017). Through a quantitative analysis of presidential discourses in the United Nations (UN)'s General Assemblies during 1994-2014, Jenne and colleagues argue that political declarations created no more than expectations of action which, in the case of Latin America, remained largely unfulfilled<sup>200</sup>.

How did the Education Sector incorporate these discourses to frame its activities, if at all? The Ministers of Education's immediate action was to sign a declaration reassuring their

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<sup>195</sup> Malamud and Gardini (2012) understand Mercosur's emphasis in Foreign Policy as an indication of the national interests overcoming regional projects. They claim that "if regionalism remains purely a question of foreign policy then regional organisations can be viewed as cumulative layers of contending national strategies" (Malamud & Gardini, 2012, p. 130).

<sup>196</sup> Mercosur not only expanded, but briefly retracted. Paraguay was suspended during 2012-2013. The conditions and political negotiation with the new Associate Members offer an interesting picture of the regional dynamics, however they extrapolate the realm of this work.

<sup>197</sup> No reference to these terms was made in the 2001 Heads of State meetings, for instance (MERCOSUR, 2001).

<sup>198</sup> Using an amusing classification, Gardini (2011) differentiates two groups of scholars analysing Mercosur: 'sceptics', and the 'believers'; their positioning is self-referential. The sceptics are much more fun to read. To illustrate, Argentinean Andrés Malamud (2005) defined the region to exist in a 'dissonance' between its leader's discourse and reality: "Mercosur is more wishful thinking than an accurate reflection of reality" (Malamud, 2005a, p. 425).

<sup>199</sup> Chapter 2 – Understanding LA Regionalisms explores the features of post-hegemonic and post-liberal regionalism.

<sup>200</sup> It is important to recall that the approach used in this thesis – as detailed in Chapter 4 – understand declarations differently – as *discourses*. Discourses reflect social events which are shaped by the causal powers of social structures and social practices. Ultimately, they are an expression of how social practices emerge out of the semiotic processes in which they were created.

commitment to take SEM forwards under the new governments in 2003 (MERCOSUR/RME, 2003). In a sense, they mimicked the actions of the Presidents. The lexicon was frequent in the RME meeting minutes – as if following a template where the order of discourse was repeated every six months. It also resonated in the 2005 and 2010 Strategic Plans, thus denoting the deep political role these instruments have. As I was able to witness during my fieldwork when CCR elaborated the Plans (section 4.4.5.3). It was present, yet less frequently, in the interviews I conducted with CCR members. However, when it came to the written memory of the HE Sector, it was a different story.

Even with the new political governments, SEM's problems of legitimacy and political support continued. They are revealed in the official meeting minutes. After five intensely debated meetings of the CHE commission in 2002 to ensure the launch of the pilot for the accreditation project (MEXA), there was only one CHE meeting in 2003. Its meeting minutes are not openly available for consultation. One participant attributed this gap to the impact of the transition of government in Brazil. In a discussion about the influence of the Member States in SEM, I became aware of the complexity of the shifts in the first part of the 2000s when listening to one of my interviewees:

...[there was no influence] except the natural flow of change in governments, which is an aspect that is always hindering in regional initiatives, right? The delay is not [because] they are deterring on their [own] will, that is to say, what they do is to delay the processes, because... For example, when [President] Lula [da Silva] wins in Brazil, Brazil withdrew for almost a year from the Mercosur meetings, therefore for a year there was a partner who was not [there], and so on. Every time there is a change of government these things happen. When [President Fernando] Lugo won in Paraguay [in 2008] something similar happened, it was a little shorter, but it was the same and, well, so with the various changes of government in each country. Then that is an aspect that is inherent to the shaping of the region<sup>201</sup> (Senior Manager 15, personal communication, March 27, 2017).

The fact that 'every time there is a change in government these things happen', cited above, can be related to the governance of Mercosur as an intergovernmental project. Nonetheless, this behaviour is also coherent to the Mercosur practice of regionalism as an inter-presidential activity (Malamud, 2005b). A third factor is the situation of 'weak'

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<sup>201</sup> In the original: "SM15: No, excepto las cuestiones naturales de cambio de gobierno que son un aspecto que en las iniciativas regionales son siempre retardatorias ¿verdad? Retrasan no es que sean retardatorias por el pensamiento, osea, lo que hacen es retrasar los procesos porque... por ejemplo, cuando gana Lula en Brasil, Brasil se retiró casi un año de las mesas Mercosur, entonces durante un año hubo un socio que no estaba, y así por delante. Cada vez que hay un cambio de gobierno pasan estas cosas. Cuando Lugo subió en Paraguay pasó algo similar, fue un poco más breve pero se dió igual y bueno y así con los diversos cambios de gobierno en cada país. Entonces ese es un aspecto que es inherente a la conformación de la region."

institutionality of the Education Sector, as presented in Chapter 7. As a matter of fact, another similarity with Chapter 7 is the HE Sector's call for more resources for HE activities. By the end of 2005, in bold letters, CHE declared that:

**It is requested for CCR to elevate to RME the need to assign national budget resources for the purpose of ensuring the execution of the activities that allow to reach the expected results of the 2006-2010 plan**

(MERCOSUR/RME/CCR/CRCES, 2005b, p. 1) (highlights in the original).

To demonstrate how pressing the issue is for the HE Sector, the issue was again present in the meeting in preparation for the 2006-2010 Action Plan:

The allocation of human and material resources is a necessary condition for the achievement of the 2006 Plan's goals and objectives (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR/CRCES, 2006a, p. 1).

The passing of time was not enough to incorporate the renewed order of discourse. The lexicon of "solidary cooperation", for instance, appeared in a few events that included civil society, such as the 2006 Higher Education Forum event in Brazil, and the 2008 Regional Conference of Higher Education (CRES 2008, see below). They were hardly a part of the outputs of the CHE meetings. To illustrate, I present the word clouds of two CHE meeting minutes. The first is in Spanish (Figure 8.1), written in May 2004 in Buenos Aires (01/2004), and the second is in Portuguese (Figure 8.2), dated November 2008 when the CHE met in Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil (03/2008)<sup>202</sup>. The word 'cooperation' (*cooperación*) is one of the 60 most common words in 2004, but it does not appear as frequently used in 2008. It can be inferred that CHE operates within an 'executive' frame – as in making things happen.

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<sup>202</sup> The meeting minutes 01/2004, and 03/2008 created the word clouds using the online-programme 'wordclouds.com'. The clouds include the 60 most used words excluding articles, pronouns and numbers.



In sum, evidence shows that the new political wave had a weak impact on the work of the HE commission, in spite of the ideational change at the Heads of State level. Using the conceptual resources developed by Lefebvre we might say that these discourses were broadly *representations* of the region as a space (Lefebvre, 1991; Middleton, 2014). Although still a form of space, it has a weak relation to what Lefebvre calls *lived* space; that is the situated and institutionally framed experiences of the HE Commission within a discursively framed understanding of the region. A stronger relation can be seen in the text of the RME meeting minutes as well as in the goals of the Education Sector's Plans. So why is that the case? Given the new role and common sense generated by the 2001 changes, CHE's market-making mandate required it to practise the regional space differently: in this case it meant managing projects and achieving results. As such, it began to build a space in a different way - but it was a process of building, nonetheless.

### **8.2.1 'New kids on the (Mercosur) block': new geometries of space and power**

From 2004, SEM experienced a new shift in its spatial geometry. Peru, Venezuela, Colombia and Ecuador joined the Sector as Associates, pushing to 10 the number of SEM members. Spatially, this meant that the region's activities had the possibility of reaching almost the totality of South America (what Unasur managed to do in 2007, see below). Given this, it might be expected that the management of the delegation of Authority to the CHE is now tasked with the management of the relationship with new associate members within the SEM.

Whereas the new members first attended the CCR meetings between 2004 and 2006, their attendance to the HE commission was slower and targeted to the accreditation project. Venezuela was a constant presence in HE meetings following it joining CHE in October 2006. It went on to host two meetings in 2013 in Caracas when it held the Pro-Tempore Presidency. After 2012, however, when the Venezuelans acquired full membership (and hence had power to vote and veto), its participation was less frequent. There is little indication of participation during the meetings. Determining the causes for this becomes a difficult task because I did not collect data on Venezuela. However, it raises questions about the visibility, power dynamics and representation of the Committee (Jasanoff, 2017). It should also be noted here that in August 2017 Venezuela was been suspended from Mercosur for infringing the region's democratic clause (Chapter 9).

The other countries had a minor engagement. Colombia joined CHE in September 2008 for only one meeting; Ecuador, from November 2010. They joined Arcusur in 2012 and 2014, respectively. Apart from the accreditation project, they also joined the working group of the future Mercosur Mobility System (SIM). As a result, almost all South American countries had been assigned to the accreditation project, reinforcing its status as the most successful project in HE in Mercosur.

### **8.3 HE as an actor within SEM**

Prior to developing my argument - that the HE Sector in Mercosur has acquired a political actorness as a result of its accumulated history and the shape of new meanings - I would like to return to two concepts introduced earlier in the thesis. On the one hand, Chapter 2 elaborated how that regions can also behave like political actors, thus becoming power-filled as meaning-making organisations ‘for themselves’ (Cammack, 2016; Dang, 2016; Hettne & Söderbaum, 2000; Wunderlich, 2012). On the other, in Chapter 3 I discussed how HE operates in an environment of global education policies embedded in multiple scales of rule that create social spaces relationally. When approaching the Mercosur HE Sector as an actor, it is worth reminding ourselves that policy-makers, regional or otherwise, adopt new mandates and design plans, texts, and regulations, to solve burning problems. They are also charged with setting an agenda, and implementing and influencing their own arena of debate, as well as that of others. This is done as a result of the influences of other actors, such as international organisations (IOs). The burning question here is: how did all of these social relations and events happen in Mercosur HE?

In a comparative study of the European Union (EU), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the United Nations (UN), Jens-Uwe Wunderlich defines actorness as “the emergence of regional organisations as subjects and actors in their own right within the global governance framework” (Wunderlich, 2012, p. 128). Regional actorness, he posits, is dependent on how informally or formally institutionalised regional structures are<sup>203</sup> in terms of three aspects: regional representation, a culture of norms and compliance

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<sup>203</sup> Wunderlich (2012) suggests that it is helpful to think of informal as equivalent to intergovernmental; and formal, to supranational. My critique to this perspective recovers the arguments developed in Chapter 2 when thinking with Cammack: regionalising processes are more complex than this – and the methodological ‘EU-ism’ can offer only a partial picture unless recognising that the mechanisms in context that make a region are fundamentally different than the EU’s (see chapter 2.2.3).

mechanisms, and decision-making processes and the articulation of collective interests. Informal institutionalisation, based on mutual understanding and even consensus, tends to impose limits on actorness because of its slower and inefficient decision-making processes, which are usually non-binding for the members of the region. Formalised institutionalisation, by contrast, operates under stronger legal binding outcomes, representing internal cohesion.

If linking Wunderlich's conceptualisation on the relationship of actorness and institutionalisation to the arguments from Chapter 7, we are now in a position to open up an avenue of inquiry to explore the relationship between the institutionalisation of SEM and the actorness of one of SEM's structures, the HE Sector. SEM's consensus-based governance would denote an informal institutionality, which in turn would also limit the region's actorness due to inefficiency. Our interest in spatiality, however, adds a new element to the equation: the influence of other scales on decision-making processes in education policies.

I propose to analyse the relationship between actorness and institutionalisation by looking into the elements of (a) regional representation, (b) a culture of norms and compliance mechanisms, and (a) decision-making processes in two cases within the HE sector. The first example examines the construction of the ideas around the notion of a HE space, and the second is the shape of the mobility programme. These examples were chosen in that they require of the HE sector extra work in finding a unifying voice, or position, either as a common space or as a negotiator between the constant dynamics each actor brings to the room acting as a region and as a representative of its own country. Such a perception emerged in the interviews. Participants acknowledged the toll of the asymmetries in shaping the region, as well as the weight of the 'double hats, double identity and double set of commitments they keep when coming to the meeting: in this case, a regional one and a national one.

SM 5: Working on issues of interest to the region with problems that may be common, overcoming asymmetries, in return it has a double component: the national policy goal, the internationalisation of [higher education], but at the same time the strategy allows advancing with the regional integration<sup>204</sup> (Senior Manager 5, personal communication, July 7, 2016).

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<sup>204</sup> In the original: "SM 5: Trabajar en temáticas de interés para la región con problemas que puedan ser comunes, superación de asimetrías, entonces de vuelta tiene el doble componente: es una línea política nacional, la internacionalización de la universidad, pero al mismo tiempo la estrategia permite avanzar en la integración regional".

Wearing double hats can sometimes be “contradictory”, as Senior Manager 8 revealed: SEM members, not only in HE, maintain a “Mercosur identity”, in which they “promote regional integration” in their home countries (SM 8, personal communication, June 21, 2016). Meanwhile, they “defend” a national position during the SEM meetings. This dual identity and set of politics, will of course set up interesting dynamics in the region-making spaces.

### **8.3.1 Space: from the ideational to the material to the discursive**

As suggested in Chapter 7, the idea of an ‘education space’ first appeared in SEM in December 2000<sup>205</sup>. The concept of a HE space, and in some cases as an ‘area’, had been circulating in Europe since 1999 when the Bologna Process emerged (Chapter 3). By tracing the use of the vocabulary of space in CHE meetings, it can be observed that SEM incorporated the concept after the first meetings of the EU-Latin American and Caribbean Space which took place in Paris in 2000. The EU-LAC, later ALCUE, was an inter-regional HE project aiming to establish the largest HE space in the world, with 60 countries in the three regions (Barlete, 2008, 2017). As mentioned in the previous Chapter, Brazil’s Ministry of Education sat in the ALCUE’s Follow-up Committee. Documentary analysis reveals that the same representatives of the Brazilian Ministry of Education who attended ALCUE meetings also took part in the CCR meetings in SEM. With Brazil sitting in both spaces, one in which the idea of the Bologna Process was being seeded, it was not surprising if these concepts were to travel.

It took over five years, in between the first mentioning of space and actions, to design its shape, nature and purpose in HE. The conviction there should be a Mercosur HE space was the outcome of the one academic event about regional HE that took place in Foz do Iguaçu in October 2006. The HE commission can be seen to have mentioned in the XX meeting that participating countries “discussed about the general guidelines to orient the constitution pace”. Unfortunately, there is no mention of what was agreed upon. At around the same time, a change in the pattern of notetaking after the meetings can be observed. The meeting minutes report on the activities debated, but not on the outputs. As a result, it was to

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<sup>205</sup> The October 2000 XXXV CCR meeting does not mention ‘space’. If its insertion was a decision of CCR, it would have been done in the XXXVI meeting (November 2000), prior to the December 2000 ministerial meeting where the new Plan – with the mission of a ‘space’ was approved.

become harder and harder as an analyst of these processes to make assumptions of the work of SEM.

In May 2008, Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay made suggestions for what might fill this ‘space’. Brazil proposed the launch of joint undergraduate degrees in history and geography in May 2008. It was a late response to the Ministers of Education’s request for a High-Level Group to ‘set up the space’, in November 2006. According to the Ministers, the HE space was to be composed of programmes scattered in different institutions across the region (MERCOSUR/RME, 2006). Argentina arrived at the next meeting with three projects in hand: (a) a network of ‘support’ projects (*proyectos de asistencia*) targeted at Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay, (b) an ‘excellence’ network for high quality doctoral programmes between Argentina, Brazil and Chile, and (c) a mobility programme for graduate students. Finally, Uruguay, via the University of the Republic, suggested an academic conference in the theme of *Guarani-Misioneros*<sup>206</sup> Indigenous peoples as an extension project. However only the ‘seminar’ and ‘mobility for post-graduate students’ took place. In lieu of the proposals, the HE commission pondered that, in fact, the Mercosur HE space “already exists”, and that they were only looking for “its formal constitution” to improve coordination.

The different proposals to strengthen the idea of a Mercosur HE space reveal a conceptual plurality of what a HE space is – or should be. None of the three projects resembled the Bologna Process, for instance, in terms of harmonisation of degree cycles. The data available in the meeting minutes does not indicate the background for the proposals, how they were conceived, who wrote them, how they were discussed internally in their Ministries of Education, or if they were inspired by any other model. The reasons for an original model could be related to the relationship to hegemony: it might be concluded, for example that to ignore the European model means declaring that there is more than one way to create a space.

### **8.3.2 The mobility programme**

“The idea of a mobility system at the Mercosur level, having a regional impact comparable to the Erasmus project, was as inconceivable as travelling to Mars” (Bertone & Tangelson, 2015, p. 174), wrote in confessional tone a couple of academics after taking part in one of SEM’s Mobility projects. The story of ‘mobility’ crosses through the development

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<sup>206</sup> The Guaraníes were an Indigenous group evangelised by Jesuit missionaries in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries the ‘Misiones’ region between Southern Paraguay, South Brazil and North East Argentina.

of the Sector. From its first early days until now, the idea that mobility is a key asset for region building continued to be on the agenda, as I have expressed many times in this work.

Similar to the origins of the accreditation project<sup>207</sup>, establishing the Mobility programme followed a process that changed with time. From an early summit goal of Ministers of Education planning homogenisation and EU policy borrowing (Dale & Robertson, 2012), it then became ‘the end of the means’ with diploma recognition<sup>208</sup> and the accreditation of projects. Mobility gained traction once again to become its own project after 2001, starting from the inverse order: the possibilities imposed by the States capacity, whilst at the same time respecting their diversity among the HE ensembles. Meeting minutes show how actors first did their research to learn all possibilities prior to suggesting its approval. This may well be the result of the experiences acquired in the first 10 years of Mercosur. In this case, it indicates an awareness of the neighbours’ limitations and possibilities for joint projects. Alternatively, it might mean a new modality of work established by CCR, in which projects must first pass a feasibility test prior to being approved. If the second option is correct, it indicates that the changes proposed in the restructuring of Mercosur (Chapter 7) were, in fact, useful. The new modality of project-based funding worked for the region. In a way, it might be observed that integration in education became less a matter of political output of summit diplomacy (Melissen, 2003) and more of a socially constructed space between its members. Now, how do you determine which one I the correct answer, if there is one? My suggestion is that the experience of working together bought them the trust to try and error with more confidence. I therefore settle for the middle.

It was a long way coming to materialise the mobility project. It gained traction after a combination of factors. I have identified three, in particular, to explore in this thesis. The first is the results from the pilot of the accreditation project which successfully accredited courses in Agronomy. Second, is the commitment of the Member States. Argentina and Brazil, once again, demonstrated leadership in taking the region forward. Argentina first volunteered to compose a draft for the Memorandum, hence shaping the political negotiation. Brazil produced a draft of the programme; a symbol of its technical capacity. Once approved,

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<sup>207</sup> As a reminder, the accreditation project emerged out of the realisation that it would not be possible to work on equivalence tables, for the offer and the HE ensembles of the SEM countries were not equivalent. Therefore, to establish new values that did not imply in change at the regulatory structures in the countries. In addition, the context in which these discussions were taking place was one of quality assurance.

<sup>208</sup> According to SM8, the Diploma Recognition project became a priority in the 2016-2020 Plan.

Uruguay, Argentina and Paraguay took turns managing it. Finally, the improved coordination between CHE and international organisations (IOs) gave rise to the missing resources to make the project happen via cooperation, first with the OEI<sup>209</sup> and then with the EU – a point which I will explore further below. In 2004, OEI accepted to fund a pilot for the Mobility programme. The Protocol of Intentions that later formalised the relationship between SEM and the OEI recognised the presence and cooperation of OEI in the educational field for Mercosur’s integration process from its beginning. It also detailed how OEI’s programmes were ‘adjusted’ to the demands and priorities of SEM.

The first call of the Mobility project was first proposed in 2006 to students of the 17 degrees accredited by MEXA<sup>210</sup>. The rationale was to give visibility to the Accreditation Project, but also to instigate cooperation amongst the institutions. In a nutshell, it fulfilled the goals established in the 2001 Plan. As such, it was named MARCA (the acronym for ‘Regional Academic Mobility for Accredited Degrees’<sup>211</sup>). Up to today, MARCA has provided mobility experiences almost 1000 students (though in relation to the EU, its size is small). Its evolution will be discussed in Chapter 9.

In spite of a coordinated effort, there were still times where national interests would cross right through the region. Whereas the countries struggled to look for funding for the first MARCA call, Brazil announced a budget to fund a project of its interest. At the XVII CHE in 2006, the Brazilian Secretary for HE informed it ‘had the resources to implement ... a mobility program for university and high school teachers, in the framework of the Mercosur mobility goals’. Although the teachers’ mobility was integrated into the mobility programme, with its merits and opportunities for the involvement of other social actors than the members of SEM, what it does not explain is why Brazil did not offer to fund MARCA instead, when it needed the funds.

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<sup>209</sup> In 2004 OEI accepted to fund a pilot for the Mobility programme. Part of this negotiation built on the relationship SEM had with OEI’s General Secretary of the time, Dr. Francisco Piñón. Piñón was a former Argentina’s Director of International Relations at Ministry of Education, who was very much involved in the shaping of SEM from its beginning.

<sup>210</sup> The report with the degrees was presented in the LI CCR meeting in 2004.

<sup>211</sup> In Spanish: *Movilidad Académica Regional en Carreras Acreditadas*. I have first come across MARCA in the LI CCR meeting, Annex X: “Projeto de Mobilidade Acadêmica Regional em Cursos Autorizados (MARCA) para cursos de agronomia que participaram do MEXA (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 2004).

## 8.4 External actorness: official representations of the Mercosur HE space

The relationship between SEM and IOs, in particular the EU and the OEI, has changed over the course of the development of the region. Chapter 5 revealed how it started as a way of collecting ideas, and later became a utilitarian, if not a pragmatic, relationship: OIs were seen as a source of funding and of technical support for SEM activities. Participants were clear about their needs and the risks of engaging with OIs, as two of them demonstrate below:

SM 27: In the 1990s, even though we had financing from the OAS, and the OAS somehow allowed the activity [to take place] here with [the provision of] funds for the organisation or the transfer, tickets... but the discussion of ideas was never fixed by an organisation beyond that funding. Without that funding the meeting would have been held. [SEM] requested because it knew that it could get the funding - and [the OAS] could also provide us with guidelines or with the planning of sub-regional projects in the framework of South America ... of which gives shape to Mercosur.

SM 22: Let's say there are some elements that mark the education agenda at the global level, the discussion arrives, but in any case, a certain degree of independence has always been maintained<sup>212</sup>.

In the Education Sector, the relationship with IOs grew extensively. CCR maintained a section called “Cooperation Space” which was meant to debate the possibilities for cooperation, usually with IO’s presence. At the same, there were other instances connected to SEM. Examples such as the Engagement with the ALCUE common Space (which I will address in the Section on EU below) and the OEI’s Ibero-American Network of Accreditation Agencies, can illustrate these working relationships<sup>213</sup>.

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<sup>212</sup> In the original: “SM 27: en la década del 90, por más que teníamos financiamiento de la OEA y la OEA era de alguna forma quien permitía con los fondos la organización o el traslado, pasajes, la actividad aquí, pero la discusión de ideas nunca estuvo fijada por un organismo más allá de con ese financiamiento, sin ese financiamiento la reunión se hubiera hecho. Se recurría porque se sabía que podía llegar a financiar - y además podía aportarnos guías o formulación de proyectos subregionales en el marco de América del Sur, de lo que va conformado Mercosur. SM 22: Digamos hay algunos elementos que marcan la agenda educativa a nivel mundial, la discusión viene, pero de todos modos siempre se mantuvo cierto grado de independencia”.

<sup>213</sup> SEM formulated an important positioning against the insertion of education services in the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) (Verger, 2010). Meeting minutes reveal three years of discussions (2004-2006). However, this was negotiated at the level of CCR, not CHE. Therefore was not used as a case for analysis in the thesis.

### 8.4.1 CRES 2008

The 2008 Regional Conference on Higher Education (CRES, for its Spanish acronym) was the Latin American preparative session for the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education 2009<sup>214</sup>. In anticipation of the Conference, CCR was considered to be ‘strategic’ for SEM to have a positioning and delegated the task to CHE. Argentina prepared a draft of a text. Under the name of the ‘HE Commission’, the document depicts a confident invocation to others to ‘join forces *with* SEM’. Terms that were not common in the CHE Meeting Minutes opened the letter: they referred to ‘strengthening of a solidary regional culture’ and ‘the integral development of our peoples’. The main proposals suggested a continent-wide HE integration based on:

- Strengthening the dialogue among countries for the regional coordination of public policies in higher education.
- Implementing joint action strategies for the transformation of higher education as a means to contribute to the sustainable development of our societies.
- Coordinating common positions for the articulation with extra-regional instances (international organisations, networks, education blocs, among others) (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR/CRCES, 2008).

The very first comment I wrote in my field notes following my initial reading of this text was ‘regional leadership’. It was before I found the Annex to the Declaration, which attaches SEM’s mission, vision and goals. It indicates political positioning of the leadership of CHE. The strategies to present the SEM as a working regional space is also built on the experiences CHE was facing at the time. This is evident in the relationship with the EU-LAC space, to which Brazil brought a regional voice. Having Brazil as the ‘voice of the region’ was a regional strategy “for the consolidation of SEM’s education space, that have political impact at a short and medium terms” (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR/CRCES, 2004, p. 3)<sup>215</sup>.

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<sup>214</sup> A series of regional conferences gathered specific demands to bring to the World Summit in Paris. The Latin American edition took place in Cartagena, Colombia, on 4-6 June 2008.

<sup>215</sup> Brazil performed its role in promoting SEM in the 2002 EU-LAC meeting in Madrid: “Presentation by each delegation of its conception of the UEALC higher education space. Brazil notes that MERCOSUR’s experience helps it to conceive in a very positive way the creation of a wider higher education space where the evaluation of the quality of curricula and institutions must predominate. The development of mobility is part of this internal political framework for each region” (ALCUE FUC, 2001, p. 4).

By suggesting the coordination of activities, it also touched upon the upcoming challenge for SEM: UNASUR and its plans for a South American project in HE. I will approach these alternative spatial projects to Mercosur below.

#### 8.4.2 UNASUR

SEM's representation in the region met with a new project, the Union of South American Nations (Unasur). Launched in 2008<sup>216</sup> with an important push from Brazil, Unasur proposed a space for intergovernmental political coordination with an emphasis on a collective South-American identity (Briceño Ruiz & Hoffmann, 2015; Gardini, 2015; Medeiros, Teixeira Júnior, & Reis, 2017; Meunier & Medeiros, 2013; Vigevani & Júnior, 2014). Unasur has been gradually losing its institutionality since 2016. Many of the original Unasur countries are now leaving the region<sup>217</sup>. In spite of its uncertain future, there are lessons in terms of education that can be learned in relation to Mercosur.

Mercosur and Unasur, although similar in governance model, did not share the same purpose. Unlike Mercosur, who remained interested in the economic project, Unasur's 12 members were more interested in having a cultural and political project than an economic one (Vigevani & Júnior, 2014). What they did share, however, was the understanding of the role of education in region-building.

Aware of the emergence of Unasur, and the upcoming changes a parallel regional education project might represent, in August 2007 CCR proposed to invite "a representative of Unasur to maintain a joint working session in the next CCR meeting. The idea was to exchange experiences and *make the work of SEM known*". Their prediction was correct. In 2010, Unasur created a multi-tasking South American Council for Culture, Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (COSECCTI). They planned to launch South American Agency for the Improvement and Certification of HE Quality. Council's subgroup in HE invited SEM representatives to do a presentation about accreditation in June 2010 in Ecuador.

The news generated discomfort within CHE. They agreed that Unasur "should have included the work of SEM, avoiding duplication of efforts and actions in the region" (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR/CRCES, 2010, p. 4). Upon learning about Unasur's plans, CCR

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<sup>216</sup> While the Unasur Treaty was signed in 2008, the discussion for the region started in 2005.

<sup>217</sup> Colombia left Unasur in 2008, and 5 countries, including Brazil and Chile, have declared suspension. Media outlets have reported that porting ('Chile considera que Unasur "no conduce a nada"', 2018; 'Colombia y cuatro países más no participarán más en Unasur', 2018; Montenegro, 2016; Nolte & Mijares, 2018).

not only approved the CHE representative's trip to attend the Unasur meeting, but also invited CONSECTI representatives to join the next CCR meeting in Brazil in September 2010. The trip yielded results. Unasur participated in the CCR meeting as a guest and changed its ideas. Their goal was now to present an accreditation project that would complement the work Arcusur had been doing, rather than compete with the Mercosur HE project. Figure 8.3 shows the slide with Unasur's projects as they were archived with the CCR meeting minutes. The title 'Complementary' offer a hint of how Unasur aims to 'strengthen ARCUSUR' and 'create a programme for Evaluators and Accreditors (PROCAES)' to support with the accreditation process.

Figure 8.3 UNASUR: Proposal for regional HE project in 2010

# COSECCTI



UNASUR

- **Complementariedad**
  - **Educación Superior**
    - Fortalecimiento de la Educación Superior
      - Fortalecimiento de los programas de equivalencias y homologación ARCUSUR
      - Programa de formación para evaluadores y acreditadores (PROCAES) (propuesta CONEA - Ecuador)
    - Pertinencia y desarrollo.
      - Diagnóstico regional de oferta y demanda profesional
    - Equidad y libre movilidad
    - Programa suramericano de becas e intercambio
      - Inclusión de temáticas transversales (ciudadanía y valores) en los programas educativos (equidad, medio ambiente, tecnologías sociales y TIC's)





Source: Annex 12, LXXIV CCR Meeting minutes (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 2010b)

Other SEM members understood there was something to be gained:

... There was some sort of fascination with the field of education in which Unasur somehow wanted to take what Mercosur was doing to expand it. And Mercosur had no problem with this happening because in a way [this expansion] helped [Mercosur]. And I think that, to a large extent, this fascination allowed Arcusur to expand beyond

the Mercosur countries<sup>218</sup> (Senior Manager 3, personal communication, 18 May, 2017).

In 2012, a South American Education Council (CSE) emerged<sup>219</sup>. The relationship soon evolved to one of power dispute when Unasur proposed a different accreditation project. It was perceived as an instrument that overlooked the work done in Mercosur's accreditation activities. Within SEM, there was a consensus that Unasur was duplicating efforts. SM2 gives details of the differences between the two regions, with highlights to Mercosur's pioneer work in HE in the region:

SM 2: [with the emergence of Unasur, there were] those who bet that the role of constituting a regional political actor would fall on UNASUR, instead of Mercosur. And that in a sense is very good and from there many things were achieved, but the truth is that SEM was *the one who had the greatest accumulation of joint work was Mercosur*, to such an extent that, also participating in Mercosur Education in *almost all of South America*, and even as an observer, Mexico and some other countries as well. Therefore, it's as if there was not much clarity - moreover, when trying to do something about UNASUR it was to repeat the same things [SEM had done]: they spoke again about evaluation and accreditation; the rectors held a conference of rectors - as if they returned to what was already there<sup>220</sup> (SM 2, personal communication, April 10, 2017).

Two participants disclosed their radical perception of Unasur. When I asked participants what they would change in SEM if in possession of a magical wand, one response was very direct: "I would erase Unasur". The reasons detailed hint to a matter of recognition of Mercosur's pioneering foregoing work in South America:

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<sup>218</sup> In the original: "Había como un enamoramiento en el ámbito de la educación en donde Unasur como que de alguna manera quería tomar lo que Mercosur venía haciendo para ponerlo en una cuestión más amplia. Y Mercosur no tenía problema que eso pasara porque de alguna manera le ayudaba. Y yo creo que, en buena medida, ese enamoramiento fue el que permitió que el Arcusur se expandiera más allá de los países del Mercosur".

<sup>219</sup> The CSE's goals were: 1. To ensure and promote the right to education for all by strengthening regional educational integration, 2. To finalize the development of policies for the improvement of equity, quality, relevance and access to education at all levels and modalities, and 3. To promote the full exercise of human rights through the reduction of regional and sub-regional asymmetries.

<sup>220</sup> In the original: "... apareció la UNASUR, [había] quienes apostaron en que la parte de constitución del actor político regional estuviera en la UNASUR, en vez de en el Mercosur. Y eso en un sentido está muy bien y desde ahí se lograron muchas cosas, pero la verdad es que en el Sector Educativo quien tenía mayor acumulación de trabajo común realizado era el Mercosur, a tal punto que, también participando del Mercosur Educativo casi en toda Sudamérica, e inclusive como observador, México y algunos otros países también. Entonces, como que no había mucha claridad - es más, cuando se intentó hacer alguna cosa de UNASUR era repetir las mismas cosas: volvieron a hablar de evaluación y acreditación; los rectores hicieron una conferencia de rectores - como que volvieron a lo mismo que ya estaba."

SM 17: [Unasur] conspired against everything... in addition, the proposals they made were copied from [us].

SM 30: They talked about accreditation... they talked about projects of this and that, everything that we... that had been worked on many years ago... There has even a moment when Mercosur said: ‘Well, [if] everything will be repeated, no. If it is new, yes, but don't ignore the road Mercosur travelled<sup>221</sup> (SM 17, 30, personal communication, May 20, 2017).

In sum, in terms of education, Unasur posed a political rivalry to the leadership of SEM in South America. A new continental project forced SEM to position itself as a regional actor on behalf of Mercosur. I inferred that the message conveyed to Unasur was that new (higher) education regional project would have to consider and assimilate the trajectory of SEM. The steps to reach a consensus on this matter included welcoming Unasur into Mercosur, to share knowledge and to attend Unasur meetings. I leave this subsection curious about many aspects of the Mercosur/SEM and Unasur/CSE relationship, such as the role of actors in Unasur in shaping the HE agenda, and the features of Unasur's actorness to negotiate with SEM. These questions are added to the remaining questions and research problems this project has generated.

### 8.4.3 The EU

Throughout this thesis the role of the EU and the European HE projects was often cited as a key aspect in the shaping of SEM and its HE project. The story of the inter-relationship in matters of HE starts in 2001, after the regions signed an agreement for Mercosur – EU relations. Here it is necessary to keep sight of the contexts in which this event happened. On the one side of the Atlantic, the EU set out its overarching goal: to become the ‘largest knowledge economy in the world’, a competition agenda (Lisbon Strategy) against the US. On the other side, Mercosur set out a new path with the 2001 Relaunch, privileging a new political dimension.

The evidence in the meeting minutes indicate that whereas the EU might have started as an inspiration, imitating the EU and its HE policies was not a goal for SEM. As suggested in my interviews, SEM was interested in maintaining relations with the EU mostly for its own

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<sup>221</sup> In the original: “SM 17: ... Unasur porque conspiró contra todo... además, las propuestas que hacía eran copiad[as] de [nosotros]. SM 30: Hablaban en acreditación... hablaban de proyectos de esto y de aquello, todo lo que nosotros... de que se había trabajado hace muchos años. Hasta llegó un momento que Mercosur dijo ‘bueno, todo lo que se va a repetir, no. Si es nuevo, sí, pero ya no desconozcan el camino transitado dentro de Mercosur’.”

benefit, for it was a matter of resources and even of learning from its experiences. There was an interest in developing SEM's own ideas:

With regards to what the needs to redefine the objectives according to perception of Mercosur, considering the priorities of the bloc and reaffirming the regional identity (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR/CRCES, 2007, p. 3).

The issue of imitation appeared in the interviews, too, such as the one presented below:

I believe that imitating for the sake of imitating always tends to fail because when you imitate you don't create anything new, you don't appropriate of things, you only imitate. I believe that Latin America or the [Mercosur] region in particular, what little you have done you have done with originality and appropriated that, you appropriated Mercosur, took over Mercosur's education sector, took over some of the projects we had there and somehow navigate even with the catastrophes of Mercosur and have continued to grow and have continued to expand there, that's a good sign, that's to say *it's almost a separate Mercosur*<sup>222</sup> (SM 3, personal communication, May 18, 2017).

Having established a lack of interest in imitation did not make the relationship with the EU any easier. In fact, a study by Nora Krawczyk and Salvador Sandoval (2012) suggest the negotiations were tense, both in the definition of the agenda in the inter-regional negotiations, and in the negotiation to shape the project:

the imposing stance of the EU teams, both in the proposals they bring and in the logic of negotiation. It seemed that the EU had a very aggressive attitude of promoting its cultural and educational influence in the process of regional integration in Latin America. Mercosur's decision to accept the EU's presence through mobility programs ...and training forces SEM to a constantly cautious negotiation (Krawczyk & Sandoval, 2012, p. 656).

To elucidate this point, I will resort to an example of the shaping of an inter-regional mobility project. The EU's office in Uruguay invited Mercosur to propose a joint mobility project in 2004. Argentina put forward two proposals (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR/CRCES, 2004). The first one was an inter-regional programme where European students could study in the Mercosur. The second was a proposal for an intra-regional mobility in Mercosur, which

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<sup>222</sup> In the original: "Yo creo que el digamos la imitación por imitación siempre tiende al fracaso porque uno cuando imita no crea nada nuevo, no se apropia de las cosas, solamente imita. Yo creo que Latinoamérica o la región en particular, lo poco que ha hecho, lo ha hecho con originalidad y se apropió de eso. Se apropió del Mercosur, se apropió del Sector Educativo del Mercosur, se apropió de algunos de los proyectos que allí teníamos y de alguna manera navegan aún con las catástrofes del Mercosur, y han seguido creciendo y ahí se han seguido expandiendo. Eso es una buena señal, es decir, casi que es un Mercosur aparte".

ended up being approved<sup>223</sup>. The programme became known as the PMM – Mercosur Mobility Programme. It was a co-funded project with the EU contribution on the order of 3 million Euros. It foresaw the mobility of students in degrees that were not accredited<sup>224</sup>, therefore could not take part in MARCA. For the record, this is now the third modality in the mobility project, after MARCA and the Teacher Mobility programme, both of which are discussed above.

In describing the term of the PMM negotiations, SM27 echoes the difficulties that Krawczyk and Sandoval reported in their research:

SM27: ... we [SEM] have this position and they [EU] that one: [acting the negotiation in the meeting] ‘We don't want funding for this, we want funding for this’. If they can give it to us, it suits us very well and we need it and we are interested in it. We did not want consultants or assistants to explain to us what their model was like. Let us look for our own model, an idea to be developed that is from the region, that is, copying models is not useful for integration processes; each people or each nation, each territory, has to create their integration model. In order to create their own integration model, a discussion must happen between the beneficiaries or recipients of this project and must reflect the ideas, principles, needs and customs of this collective group and reflect realistically the totality of these actors in order to be able to shape that project. Let's say, the external can assist you by telling you what they failed at, showing you what difficulties they had, but you can't copy a model and try to incorporate it because the idiosyncrasy, customs, cultural diversity is different from every point of view, training is different<sup>225</sup> (SM 27, Personal communication, April 12, 2017).

CHE's frustration emerged out of EU's frequent changes to the criteria for funding, on the one hand, and the dissatisfaction with the terms of the project, on the other, such as the number of mobilities and the type of training to be offered for HE staff in the participating institutions. At one point, CHE decided they had had enough:

Considering that the XXX RME, in its moment, in response to the European Union, decided to maintain the initial conditions of the project, and taking into account the

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<sup>223</sup> There would be a second inter-regional project, Support Programme for SEM (PASEM) which started to be discussed in 2007, with a focus on Teacher Training. For matters of space and focus, I will explore this project in a later research project.

<sup>224</sup> By 2005, the accreditation Project analysed degrees in the areas of Engineering and Medicine.

<sup>225</sup> In the original: “SM27: ... nosotros [SEM] tenemos esta posición y ellos [EU] esta, no queremos financiamiento para esto, queremos financiamiento para esto, si pueden dar nos viene muy bien y lo necesitamos y nos interesa. No queríamos consultores o asistentes que nos explicaran como era su modelo. Busquemos un modelo propio, una idea a desarrollar que sea de la región, o sea, copiar modelos no sirve para los procesos de integración; cada pueblo o cada nación, cada territorio, tiene que hacer su propio modelo de integración. Para poder hacer su propio modelo de integración la discusión tiene que estar dada por los beneficiarios o los receptores de este proyecto y debe reflejar las ideas, principios, necesidades y costumbres de este grupo colectivo y ser un reflejo real de la totalidad de estos actores para poder conformar ese proyecto. Digamos, lo externo te puede asistir diciéndote en qué fracasaron, mostrándote cuáles fueron las dificultades que tuvieron, pero vos no podés copiar un modelo y tratar de incorporarlo porque la idiosincrasia, las costumbres, la diversidad cultural es diferente desde toda óptica, la formación es diferente”.

European offer of a previously unanticipated alternative, as well as the advances included in the current version, [CHE] asks CCR for support so that the PMM can have continuity, provided that the current bases are effectively respected by the European Union. Similarly, it also asks CCR, in the event of any change to in the structure of the current version of the project by the European Union, the SEM will inform the even *your automatic withdrawal from the Program*. (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR/CRCES, 2006b, p. 5)

More than the analysis of power relations, as a citizen of the region, I recognise the attitude: a resolution via a cheque-mate move. This fact was used in the context of an official negotiation between two regions reveals so much of the level of cohesion in the HE Sector. And because it is the EU, it is impossible to forget that this is a relationship built on relations between the metropole and a periphery (Connell, 2013), rooted in the colonial past.

## **8.5 Contradictions: when regional actorness meets national actorness**

How to manage regional actorness in an inter-governmental regional organisation? After looking at these cases I ask myself about the contradictions such developments also pose, particularly in relation to other territorial projects, such as nationalisms and nation building. The main indication of national interests within SEM came from the ‘bi-polar’ dispute between Argentina and Brazil. As from the start of SEM, Argentina continued to be a leader in leading the HE Sector. Its regional vocation was emphasised after Brazil created a regional university out of a regional idea for an institution, started in 2006. The Brazilian institution became the Federal University of Latin America Integration (UNILA) (Bertolleti, 2017). In addition, in 2011, Brazil launched a whole scholarship programme as a national actor, without including the Mercosur partners (Science Without Borders). Argentina, nonetheless, has also demonstrated actorness of its own within Latin America. Its target was the Ibero-American space.

To illustrate Argentina’s efforts for national actorness in the regional context, I will draw upon tools from critical discourse analysis, in particular that of intertextuality (Fairclough, 2013), and use it to shed light on the 2011-2015 Plan. The Plan cites a regional Ibero-American policy named “Goals 2021: the education we want for the generation of the Bicentenary”. Ironically, given that Spain is part of the Ibero-American Region, the Bicentenary refers to a series of celebrations of 200 years of Independence of Spanish Colonies in Latin America. The argument that this is a case for regional leadership (and

power) is further supported by the fact that no reference to the Ibero-American proposal is made in the CCR minutes of the first semester of 2008. This is the period when Argentina made official its proposal to the Ibero-American countries. Coincidentally, Argentina had the PPTA in Mercosur. The fact that Argentina presented a national offer for a regional region is useful to elucidate clearly that spaces are, indeed, made up out of power relations.

Examples of national actorness do not undermine the increased efforts of the region to see and be seen as a coherent project and entity. Among the participants there remain a recognition that the region is an actor, but it is also a little more than the sum of its parts, as the discussion below reveals in that they also converged on a common agenda:

AB: During all this time of thinking about a [HE] project, was Mercosur seen as a region?

SM 4: That's a good question, too. Let's see: The [Member States] were and continue to be countries...

AB: Yes, in other words, everyone had their own national strategy and got there...

SM 4: There you go. What happened? Somehow the proposals linked to [SEM] were somewhat useful to everyone, and that also made it easier to think of Mercosur as a region. It was like that, something like that... We didn't stop thinking like Paraguayan, like Uruguayan, no... but it facilitated convergence, convergence at the regional level because there were convergent interests.

AB: Everyone had their own interests, but at the same time they converged.

SM 4: Yes... of course, everyone had their national interests, but there was convergence and that is why it facilitated the regional. It was like that, really, and I can't say that it was like that from the beginning. I think that... what I did notice [is that] as they were taking shape, emerging, it was more and more region and less thinking [nationally]... it was... I mean, let's see if you understand me, because what I'm going to say because... it was more comfortable to advance regionally and we do it, we take this out at a national level that as it was before, suddenly people thought nationally how to take out the region.

AB: that they can report, right? for us.

SM: it was a bit like that too, neither good nor bad, it's a process and national interests remain, of course<sup>226</sup> (SM 4, Personal communication, May 15, 2017).

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<sup>226</sup> In the original: "AB: ¿Durante todo este tiempo de pensar un proyecto de educación superior, se miraba el Mercosur como una región? SM: Está buena esa pregunta también. A ver: los países eran y siguen siendo países... AB: Sí, o sea cada uno tenía su estrategia nacional y llegaba ahí... SM 4: Ahí va. ¿qué es lo que pasa? que de alguna forma las propuestas vinculadas al Mercosur Educativo de alguna forma servían a todos, y eso facilitaba también que se pensara en Mercosur como región. Fue así, una cosa así... No se dejó de pensar como paraguayo, como uruguayo no... pero facilitó la convergencia, la convergencia a nivel regional porque había intereses convergentes. AB: Todos tenían sus intereses, pero a la vez se convergían. SM 4: Si... claro, todos tenían sus intereses nacionales, pero había convergencia y por eso facilitaba lo

The relevance of an emergent, albeit ‘thin’ regional actorness cannot be underestimated. Compared to the results in Chapter 7, these acts also demonstrate an increased sense of institutionality, in spite of the continuation of little political support. The perception of the role of SEM, as having its own identity even, is an important step for the region. In the words of SM 8:

The fact that one of these countries, if it does not want to participate, or cannot, or is suspended, does not destroy the institutionality of Mercosur [Education Sector]. It already has an identity, like, almost independent from national identities. I hope, at least.<sup>227</sup> (SM 8, personal communication, March 17, 2017).

## 8.6 Conclusion

The central focus of this Chapter has been an interest in the emergence of, and positioning, of SEM as a regional actor. It began by looking at the relationship of SEM to internal and external dimensions. In also acknowledging the actorness of SEM in the building of a region through, for example, of programmes and projects. From 2001, the analysis of the data reveals instances when the HE Sector conducted events as *an actor of its own with a joint political voice*. In doing so, it gained a degree of political agency as a region.

A reflection on the classification of these events as critical junctures (CJ) seems pertinent in comparison to the previous Chapters. In this historical period, the HE Sector experienced what might be called a quantitative leap in regional activity: an increase in the volume of projects, activities, actors engaged and expected ‘goals, actions and indicators’ in the Strategic Plans. Moreover, and as an antecedent condition, it required for a political commitment to regional agency (SEM as one) – in opposition to the national agencies that led SEM (a sum of parts, where Argentina and Brazil have the biggest share, as presented in Chapter 6). The increased togetherness (or *regionness*, if thinking with Hettne and

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regional. Fue así, realmente y no puedo decir que fue así desde el comienzo. Yo creo que... lo que sí noté en la medida que se iban plasmando, iban saliendo, era cada vez más región y menos pensando... era... es decir, a ver si me entiendes, porque lo que voy a decir porque... era más cómodo avanzarnos regionalmente y lo hacemos, sacamos esto a nivel nacional que como era antes, de repente se pensaba nacionalmente como sacarnos lo de la región. AB: que pueden reportar ¿no? para nosotros. SM: Fue un poco así también, ni mal ni bien, es un proceso y los intereses nacionales siguen estando, claro”.

<sup>227</sup> In the original: “O fato que um deles países, se não quer participar, ou não pode, ou é suspenso, não descontró a institucionalidade do Mercosul [Educativo]. Já tem uma identidade, assim, quase independente, das identidades nacionais. Eu espero, pelo menos”.

colleagues), resulted in new regional mechanisms: outputs that are direct results of the HE projects. Because I am more interested in analysing the outcomes rather than the outputs the HE projects generate – which is to say what the changes *mean* rather than what the changes *are* - I therefore claim that this CJ emerges out of, and shapes, new social relations of HE which in turn produce new possibilities for positioning and autonomy which produce this regional HE space. I suggest as a counterfactual explanation the deterioration of the relationship with external organisations, in particular the EU and UNASUR. The crises in the negotiations led to a joint positioning ensured EU's funding to support a SEM project. In turn, UNASUR's project to replace ARCUSUR for a South American accreditation project would result in a divisive political crisis in the Education Sector in the region.

When acting like a regional entity, CHE embedded a new role as a region *for itself*, even if with a thin degree of social relations and institutionality, as discussed in Chapter 7. Yet at the same times these were also 'thin' manifestations. This variation in the shape of the regional HE space, as compared to Europe's Higher Education Area, can be understood as a feature of the Global South and can be explained by its concerns to hold onto national sovereignty (a post-colonial stance) whilst at the same time wanting to access status and resources that might come the way of nascent regional activity. Retrieving the discussion about the relationship between space and time from Chapter 2, Milton Santos explained that spaces are the 'mosaic of different eras' with a double function: synthesising the past and explain the present (Santos, 1985) When it comes to what we now understand as the Global South, its double function is met with an extra feature: the framings, purposes and role of social relations – be them cultural, political and economic - are influenced by variables that are external to the local conditions; to which Santos named "the global matrix of modernizing forces" (Santos, 1985, p. 36).

## 9 CHANGING PLACE, SPACE AND ACTORS: ASSYMETRICAL POWER RELATIONS AND INTERNAL VARIEGATION

### 9.1 An introduction and a reflection

The final Chapter explores the changes in the most recent period of the temporal borders in my analysis of the production of Mercosur's higher education (HE)<sup>228</sup> space. To define one critical juncture (CJ) for the period was challenging because of the combination of two factors. Why? For the first time, Mercosur suspended one of its Member States: Paraguay, in 2012. The unfolding of this important political event was accompanied by the ascension of Venezuela as a Full member state to Mercosur. This new geometry of Mercosur as a regional project impacted in the decision-making of SEM, as the processes had to be reordered to accommodate one absence and one addition; the latter with crucially the power to vote<sup>229</sup>.

It was also a period of intense HE activity in Mercosur. For instance, there were nine different mobility programmes happening in parallel, and over 150 accreditations on seven disciplines<sup>230</sup> in five countries under the new Accreditation System (Arcusur). It was therefore also easy to focus on the HE outputs. What to bring to the foreground in the face of this level of intensity, on the one hand, and the increased politics surrounding SEM's membership, on the other?

To make the task clearer for myself I revisited the goals of the research and its ontological and epistemological positioning. I reminded myself of my main purpose; to trace those structuring mechanisms in specific sociocultural and political contexts that might generate both short-term and longer lasting outcomes for the shape of Mercosur HE. As explained in Chapter 4, a critical theory approach questions the wider context in which the social phenomenon (in this case, Mercosur HE) is occurring. It puts into question the frameworks that allow its existence, including those dynamics in interaction with each other which are assumed to generate new outcomes, and form the explanatory basis of this thesis.

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<sup>228</sup> As a reminder of section 4.3.1.1, the temporal boundaries of the case are from 1991 until 2016.

<sup>229</sup> Full Mercosur Member States get to vote to make decisions about the region. Associate Members "have a voice, but not a vote", as one participant eloquently explained.

<sup>230</sup> In 2011, Arcusur evaluated the following programmes: Agronomy, Medicine, Engineering, Architecture, Nursing, Odontology, and Veterinary Sciences.

This reflexive exercise encouraged me reach for, and continually recalibrate, my analytical lenses. I concentrated (again) on those elements and dynamics central to shaping, and thus producing, the HE space in Mercosur in this specific period, rather than focusing solely on the empirical manifestation of those processes.

Viewed through such a lens, I was able to identify changes in the places and actors in Mercosur HE. The document analysis shows important power asymmetries in SEM whose outcome was a change in the place of Mercosur HE within the Education Sector. The 2011 Plan alters the mandate and structure of SEM. How much of this change will affect the region's HE?

In addition, after tracing key processes through hundreds of documents, I reflected on the fact that I rarely came across actors other than those leading the region as representatives of the National Ministries of Education (Chapter 3), plus a handful of international organisations (IOs). I began to visualise the HE Sector as if having a *border*, a line drawn to make visible different actors engaging with SEM. It led me to ask: how is this *bordering*<sup>231</sup> being done, and who gets to do them, with that criteria, and set of outcomes? In spite of its relevance for the changing players in SEM, to analyse them I would have to diverge from the thesis's research design (process tracing). To maintain the coherence in the inquiry, I moved to problematise these issues in Annex 17 – 'Who gets to play?'.

Similar to previous Chapters, this section will follow the historical context of different scales that interact with Mercosur HE. I first explore the power dynamics that led to changes in the place of HE in Mercosur. Finally, I present the case of Brazil as a controversial, yet hegemonic, partner in the shaping of HE. With Brazil I close the visit to the four national HE systems selected to explain the variegated nature of the internal relationships within Mercosur as a result of the asymmetries between the regional and these differently positioned and resourced national levels.

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<sup>231</sup> The field of education has also engaged with borders in different forms. Robertson (2011) has taken interest in the process of symbolic bordering(s) within education processes by opening up a debate about the relationship between 'bordering' and 'ordering'. While *bordering* gets defined as the process of establishing the limits of a border, *ordering* relates to the exercise of dealing with the consequences of such change. To Robertson, a critical analysis of the bordering work gives way to the understanding of current social orders, relations and identities as they are realised through the reshaping of educational spaces.

## 9.2 Events in context that generate events

From 2012, Mercosur faced two challenges, perhaps the greatest in its history. For the first time the region was retracting instead of expanding. Paraguay and Venezuela were suspended for failing to observe the region's "democratic clause" laid out in the Protocol of Ushuaia (MERCOSUR, 1998b). While suspended, a state loses voting rights and is prevented from attending Mercosur meetings. Paraguay was suspended from June 2012 to August 2013 as a result of the impeachment of President Fernando Lugo (Vidigal, 2013). The Paraguay crisis in 2012 was resolved after new elections took place in 2013. Paraguay, in its defence, alleged that the suspension was a result of Venezuela's 'manoeuvre' to gain full membership – which, in fact, took place while Paraguay was suspended. Paraguay was the main opponent of Venezuela's ascension to full membership. Paraguay's suspension was a surprise for SEM members. SM 7, for instance, mentioned that although the country was suspended, "there was a lot of solidarity [which was] undeclared, nongovernmental, but there were always contacts, contacts with the referent bodies of HE<sup>232</sup>, (SM7, personal communication, April 26, 2017).

The crisis with Venezuela was an outcome of the country's social and political crisis which started in 2014. In Mercosur there was disagreement over the country's capacity to hold its turn as Pro-Tempore President in 2016. Paraguay claimed that President Maduro's ruling is undemocratic; hence, the country should be subjected to Protocol of Ushuaia as well. Venezuela was eventually suspended in August 2017 for not observing the Ushuaia Protocol and remains suspended as of March 2019.

The last of the political crises happened in Brazil during 2015-2016. President Dilma Rousseff suffered an impeachment process in 2016 and ended up being ousted from office in August 2016. She was accused of illegally manoeuvring government accounts. Rousseff's account of the allegations, that the process was a manoeuvre from her former coalition to take her out of the office in a coup d'état against her, were not enough to generate an official positioning from the Mercosur states.

In spite of these ongoing political crises, the interest in Education activities continued to grow. In June 2010, for instance, a total of 37 participants attended the CCR meeting

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<sup>232</sup> In the original: "Lo nuevo para mí ha sido toda la incidencia de la política de los gobiernos que llevó a la suspensión del país, del Paraguay como estado pleno, que tuvo casi un año y medio o dos totalmente paralizado. ... aunque nosotros si seguíamos todo lo que seguía haciendo y había mucha solidaridad - no gubernamental, no declarada - pero siempre había contactos, contactos con los órganos referentes de la educación superior".

(02/2010) when the expected was three per SEM member state, plus associates. Equally popular were the CHE meetings with 14 participants in the June 2012 edition (the average was 10 per meeting). These led to at least six parallel calls for mobility programmes, a new regional project on knowledge production, and the accreditation project becoming a system. How might we explain these high levels of activity? One option is to acknowledge there were resources available to do so - not only financial, but also capacity building. However, the busy HE Sector requested CCR institutional support to manage the programmes. This 'call for help' demonstrates that, firstly there was interest in HE projects and that, secondly, the countries had exhausted their capacities to run regional projects.

### **9.2.1 Replacing the role of international organisations: resourcing from within**

Meanwhile the HE sector was busy with planning and implementing activities. As noted above, a persistent matter was the lack of resources to run the many activities planned. Yet there was a decreased level of participation of IOs in the meetings for two reasons. On the one hand, some SEM members showed scepticism towards external funding for SEM. In the 2008 CCR meeting, Venezuela showed reservations against having funding from IOs, and suggested the region to find its own funding mechanisms. This was also reported in the interviews (Senior Manager 8). On the other hand, the 2008 crisis impacted on the level of international organisations (IO) involvement in SEM. By June 2009, only the OEI attended the June CCR meeting. By the end of 2010, the only IO mentioned in meeting minutes in CCR and CHE was the EU, with the goal to follow up on the existing projects<sup>233</sup>.

In fact, a third reason for the absence of IOs was the expectation generated by the approval of the Mercosur Education Fund (FEM). Created in 2004, FEM had collected yearly contributions from full Member States since 2006<sup>234</sup>. FEM's 'capital' contains contributions from the Member States, extraordinary contributions from third countries, organisations and the private sector (MERCOSUR/CMC, 2008, p. 2). It was (and still is) managed by the Development Bank of Latin America (CAF) since 2004<sup>235</sup>. Even today (March 2019) there is

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<sup>233</sup> Apart from the Mobility Programme (PMM), a new project targeting teacher training was in the making: the Programme for the Support of Mercosur Activities (PASEM). I will not discuss PASEM in this thesis because it was not managed under the HE Sector.

<sup>234</sup> Each Member State should deposit the following amount: a basic contribution of US\$ 30.000, plus a proportional sum of US\$ 2.200 US\$ per every million students in school age (5-24 years old). Countries have been contributing since 2006 (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR/CAFEM, 2015). The total amount of funds available until Dec 2015 was in the order of US\$ 2.2 million.

<sup>235</sup> CAF is a development bank owned by 19 countries in Latin America, Spain and Portugal. It was established in 1970 and has offices in all countries. SEM and CAF signed the first agreement for the management of FEM in 2005.

no indication SEM was able to access FEM funds, apart from a small sum of less than US\$ 5.000 which had been spent on a consultancy for Arcusur. This means that HE activities continued but by national co-funding from the national budgets.

### **9.2.2 Inter-sectoral dialogue in HE**

In addition to the array of activities in HE, an inter-sectoral dialogue took shape in two instances. One of them was the Mercosur Social Institute through the framework of the ‘Strategic Plan of Social Action’ framework (PEAS<sup>236</sup>). A “tool for inter-sectorial action among the areas of Health, Work,/ Labour, Social Development and Culture”, PEAS offered an “integral look over the bloc’s regional integration process” (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 2016). Apart from instigating inter-sectoral work, PEAS was aligned with the United Nation’s Millennium Development Goals<sup>237</sup> (MDS). Such is the influence of PEAS in the Education Sector that its latest Strategic Planning (2016-2020) is also made to match the Framework’s goals. Nonetheless, the terms of the integration in HE were convenient for SEM. The two objectives: to strengthen Arcusur, and to promote and strengthen mobility programs (MERCOSUR, 2011), are familiar activities carried out in the everyday work of SEM. Having them in the PEAS was indeed a strategic move, for it conferred on the Education Sector a level of visibility within other Mercosur Sectors.

The Second cooperation is the dialogue with Mercosur’s Health Sector. The meetings ultimately aimed to find instruments so as to allow the mobility of health professionals. These discussions have reignited the debate over the recognition of degrees abandoned in 1997 (Chapter 6) and contribute to the debates for the recognition of diplomas of accredited degrees under ARCUSUR.

## **9.3 Reframing the place of HE in SEM**

After learning that since 2001 the Commission for HE was the place of HE, 2011 represents a period of changes for the work of this aspect. First is the design of a new five-

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<sup>236</sup> PEAS stands for ‘Plano Estratégico de Ação Social’ in Portuguese.

<sup>237</sup> The UN’s Millennium Development Goals comprised a list of eight targets to reduce global poverty (UNDP, 2019) set to be implemented during a time span of 15 years (2000-2015). MDGs were substituted by the Sustainable Development goals in 2015.

year strategy (2011 Plan). Second, is that SEM's structure was to be reviewed. It resulted in subtle but important changes for the autonomy of the Sector.

The expectations for the design for the 2011 Plan were high. These expectations were also pushed forward by the lack of funds to run the many HE activities on the horizon: "CHE insisted in the need to have adequate and stable levels of funding to follow up on the actions' quantitative and qualitative growth" (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 2010a, p. 2).

The tracing of the negotiation for the Plan is confusing. In November 2010, the Ministerial meeting broke the news that Ministers "**(r)ecognised the need** to promote structural changes in the Sector" (MERCOSUR/RME, 2010, p. 1) (highlights in the original). This would appear to be a surprise given that there was little indication of structural pressures or possible conflict in the meeting minutes or the interviews. A hint of an internal conflict appeared in the October 2010 CCR meeting when Argentina volunteered to produce a document to reveal 'the critical areas' impacting on CCR's work. However, there is no information in the meeting minutes (or in their annexes) about what happened or who was engaged in this conflict. If produced, the document Argentina volunteered for was not made public. There is, however, a suggestion in the 2011 CCR meeting to 'improve communication' by holding meetings between CCR and the Area Committees. The strategy for improving communication between CCR and the Committees might be read as a strategy to increase control and oversight over their work, and therefore of SEM activities.

Further indication of the repositioning of the CCR appears in the 2011-2015 Plan. It opened with CCR's reflections about the development of SEM. The text reveals aspects already mentioned in this thesis: the need to ensure stable sources of funding, an increased yet still small level of visibility, and the need to increase the reach of SEM to other areas of society. Furthermore, the text indicates the awareness of an 'institutional deficit' affecting the work of SEM thus resulting in processes that lack dynamism and efficacy:

The last five years of [SEM] diversified the themes with the objective of addressing education themes more broadly. This diversification led to the creation of several groups, commissions and work areas, even though they did not always have clear and defined definitions (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 2010c, p. 8).

A closer analysis of the discourse points to absences in the text of how these themes emerged, why and why these definitions remained unsolved, for how long, and who was responsible to avoiding this to happen. As I mentioned above, there was close to no

indication of tensions or an impending crisis in the governance of the Sector. The solution for the ‘deficit’ was to revise the structure of the Education Sector.

The 2011 Structure adopted three solutions to the institutional deficit presented above (MERCOSUR/RME, 2011)<sup>238</sup>. The first was to expand the Sector’s structure by transforming current working groups (WG) from temporary arrangements into permanent ones. The second was to create a new Area Committee concerned with Teacher Training; a Sector that would deal with the cooperation with the EU in a new inter-regional project (PASEM). The third solution, and directly related to the work of the HE Sector, was to alter the mandate of Area Committees. As a result, they lost the mandate to create their own instances. In 2001, these Committees were ‘a support tool for CCR’ which were required to ‘suggest instruments for the implementation of SEM’s strategic goals’. In the 2011 restructuring, Article 9 defined them to be ‘instances *dependent* on CCR’ that *collaborate* in the proposal of mechanisms of implementation (MERCOSUR/RME, 2011) (my highlights).

The move from support to dependency indicates a new political relationship within SEM. The political role of the Regional Committee centralised the coordination and defined the mandate for the sectors. As a consequence, the Area Committees also lost the autonomy to define sub-groups. In the new context, CHE must now propose CCR specific instances for the elaboration of projects.

As I have detailed in Chapter 3, this exercise of ‘governing’ regional HE is embedded in power relations that shape their structures and practices. As Robertson and Dale reminds us, “education involves an array of actors and others institutions beyond the obvious or our common sense understandings whose logics, interest and forms of authority generate tensions and contradictions within the ensemble” (Robertson & Dale, 2015, p. 155). The norms, rules and practices developed within CHE emanate from the social relations that are central to as well as produced and reproduced both during the meetings as well as from the communication outside these encounters – the relationships that remain central in the outputs of the meetings.

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<sup>238</sup> The final version of the 2011 Plan did not present these changes. Such a change cannot be understood as a lapse in the review of the text. My experience with observing the CCR meeting left me with the perception of the careful scrutiny in which every joint decision was made. With an important document such as the Plan, it would not be an overlook. If the decisions are carefully made, it indicates a new political positioning, and even a sign of power struggle between CHE and CCR.

In the meeting minutes, conflict is rarely reported, as I showed above. One of the participants indicated how the negotiation strategies between the Member States changed to a much better ways of dealing with differences in order to reach consensus:

SM 7: ... And deep down it feels like there's more maturity already in these discussion teams. The first meetings were extremely hostile.

AB: Really? And why the hostility?

SM 7: It was a hostility to preserve, to maintain their country's position [in the negotiations].

AB: And how were they handled?

SM 7: With tolerance, with debates and there were many years... and, well, this whole process was quite difficult. Each country tried to impose its own criteria and, perhaps, I could say, even with a certain aggressiveness.

AB: And how was this hostility handled (...)? Because there is a consensus, I understand that there is a consensus. Is it real or imaginary?

SM 7: Consensus actually means that the approval system does not exist without voting. A project can only be viable if there is consensus from all parties.

AB: Then the consensus is real.

SM 7: It is real. If, you can't move forward, you postpone it for the other semester or you discuss it, or you ask for a recess in between and then you appoint an emissary to talk to people, show them well and do all the political management to be able to understand.

AB: And the negotiation is planned until progress is made.

SM 7: Yes<sup>239</sup> (SM 7, personal communication, April 18, 2017).

The 2011 Structure suggests that CCR was CHE's most important political relationship. These changes can be understood as the *reframing* of the HE Sector. If

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<sup>239</sup> In the original: "SM 7: ... Y en el fondo se siente que hay más madurez ya en estos equipos de discusión. Las primeras reuniones eran reuniones extremadamente hostiles. AB: ¿ah sí? ... y ¿por qué la hostilidad? SM 7: Era hostilidad por preservar, por mantener su postura país. AB: Y ¿cómo se manejaban? SM 7: Con tolerancia, con debates y hubo muchos años... y, bueno, todo este proceso fue bastante difícil. Cada uno de los países intentaba imponer su criterio y hasta yo podría decir hasta con cierta agresividad. AB: y ¿cómo se manejaba esta hostilidad (...)? Porque hay un consenso, yo entiendo que existe un consenso... ¿Es real o teórico? SM 7: El consenso es de hecho que el sistema de aprobación no existe sin la votación. Solamente un proyecto puede tener viabilidad si existe consenso de todas las partes. AB: Entonces el consenso es real. SM 7: Es real. [Si], no se puede avanzar, se tira para el otro semestre o se discute, o se pide un cuarto intermedio y entonces se nombra emisario para hablar con las personas, mostrarle bien y realizar toda la gestión política para poder comprender. AB: Y se planea la negociación hasta que se avance. SM 7: Sí."

expanding Bernstein's concept of framing from the space of a classroom to the space of a regional HE sector, we can argue that this indicates how discourses are "contingent upon the activities within the arenas and the relative autonomies within and between the arenas" (B. Bernstein & Solomon, 1999, p. 269). In the texts I have analysed for CHE, the action of framing defines what is presented as HE projects, the detail of the reasons behind it, and how the terms of the interaction amongst the actors in the HE Sector get to be defined. To Bernstein, above all, framing indicates the potential for exercising control within a social sphere (B. B. Bernstein, 2000; McLean, Abbas, & Ashwin, 2013). Control, therefore, indicates the modalities available, and the limits to the realisation of particular kinds of social relations. Framing works as a device for the production of the *moment of politics of education* because they shape the ways in which actors are to interpret the 'rules of the game' (Chapter 3).

Control and power are inter-related. Paulo Singh, when thinking with Bernstein, defines power relations as being "articulated in the strength of the insulation boundaries demarcating symbolic categories" rather than invested in individual actors (P. Singh, 2017, p. 149). Control shapes the realisation of identities and desires, and is a matter of interest for those in, or wanting, power (Bernstein & Solomon, 1999). Now that I look back in the development of this thesis, it becomes clear to me how the ideas contained in Action Plans become, in fact, symbolic categories that frame the work of the Mercosur HE Sector. What gets done in the name of the shaping of the categories also then determines the direction of and the meanings involved in what is produced within SEM and by implication what is left out. They are, in a sense, *bordered*. A struggle for power, as revealed in the analyses of SEM, creates what Bernstein called a 'dislocation' so as to "produce punctuations in social space" (B. B. Bernstein, 2000).

This reframing is not only political; it is also material. The 2011 Plan proposed a series of changes, one of which was to reframe this SEM/ meetings-Ministries relationship with the addition of a new place. For the first time, and *only in the area of HE*, was there a demand to create a centralised instance in SEM that would allow for a different modality of governing that is not based on consensus. This is a radical change in the work of SEM – and therefore the last critical juncture of this thesis: a new place for HE was held outside the realm of SEM Meetings.

Place is a geographical reference to where social life ‘happens’ (Massey, 2004). It has three features: a geographical location, a material form, and a meaningfulness (Gieryn, 2000), which combines to mediate social life. Up to this point in the development of the region, the shaping of SEM had happened predominantly in one place: the meetings. Even if the geographical location would rotate every six months depending on which Member State hosted the Pro-Tempore Presidency, there is a material representation of the region that takes place in the encounter. The ritual of the meeting’s meaningfulness results from values socially constructed by its members. “Places are made as people ascribed qualities to the material and social stuff gathered there”, but the meanings created are flexible, malleable over time, and inevitably contested (Gieryn, 2000, pp. 465; 472). As I came to learn during the unstructured observations I carried out in 2017 (Chapter 4), such is the relevance of the face-to-face meetings that the Mercosur Secretariat does not archive meeting minutes from videoconferences.

The impact of this ‘moving place’ in shaping Mercosur HE is twofold. On the one hand, the meetings represent the place for region-building in SEM, including CHE, per excellence. The coordinating work happening at that place and time mobilises the Ministries to implement the projects, another defining place for HE projects, but not as important for they also do many other things, not only region-building. The exception is Argentina, who has a Sector with four full-time staff dedicated only for Regional Integration. As such, SEM is negotiation has been built relationally since 1991. The Ministries of Education and associate organisations therefore construct the region directly relationally with SEM, and without a third party.

The concession for the need of a permanent regional unit came from the CCR:

It is necessary to institutionalise in [the SEM members] permanent structures specialised in the management of SEM programs, which collaborate with the Presidency pro Tempore, relate to their counterparts ... and perform the tasks of linking, advising, monitoring and disseminating the activities, as demanded by CCR (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR, 2010c, pp. 12–13).

In 2012, the recently installed Network of Accreditation Agencies (RANA) voiced the need for a *permanent secretariat* to centralise the information and manage the accreditation project (Meeting in June 2012). With confidence this plan would be materialised, and they declared that “until such Permanent Secretariat is created, CONEAU (The Argentinean

Accreditation Agency) would take charge of the roles of centralisation and coordination of the [accreditation] system” (p. 10).

A similar request came to support the implementation of the Mobility programme, which became a Mobility system in 2012 (SIMercosur)<sup>240</sup>. By the end of 2012, CHE estimated a quantitative increase in the number of students in exchange programmes: 1500 students enrolled in accredited programmes (Marca) and 500 for non-accredited programmes, plus increase from 100 to 500 places for postgraduate students, and finally 500 teaching staff and Researchers (then 200). The approval of the SIMercosur was justified as necessary to manage the number of mobility. As a result, the Ministers of Education requested the possibility for the UTE to support mobility (not accreditation) in 2012 and got approval in December 2013. The arguments used for UTE reflect the perceived limitations that CHE faces to run the programme:

SEM does not have a regional unit with the capacity to centralise the actions for coordination and management. These tasks fall on the national governmental agencies, where moreover there are asymmetries in the capacity to respond to these requirements. It constitutes a clear structural deficit which prevents to deepen the integration processes in the extent it limits the management of the mobility of student, staff, researchers that impulse the free circulation in the region, the solidary cooperation, the exchange of experience and knowledges, as well as the construction of a regional citizenship (MERCOSUR/RME, 2013, p. 12).

The UTE, when operative, will depend on CHE. Delay in the hiring process for the three full time staff dragged the process into its sixth year. The plan was to place the staff Mercosur Headquarters in Montevideo. As such, Montevideo would be a permanent reference for HE mobility. Funding to cover the mobility costs and UTE's expenses would come from the Mercosur's Structural Convergence Fund (FOCEM). FOCEM, as the name suggests, aiming to reduce the asymmetries in the region. SEM's goal was to have FOCEM funding UTE, with the argument it would strengthen the institutional structure for integration. From the vantage point of March 2019, it would seem that there is no indication the funding was granted because it is not listed in FOCEM's website<sup>241</sup>.

In my understanding, this was to cause a profound change in the nature of the HE Sector because it changed the place of where HE spaces happened. For the first time in 20

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<sup>240</sup> SIMercosur oversees five modalities of mobility: MARCA for students; MARCA for staff (both targeted to accredited programmes), student and staff mobility for non-accredited programmes, and joint research networks between postgraduate programmes. (MERCOSUR/CMC, 2012).

<sup>241</sup> FOCEM website: <https://focem.mercosur.int/es/>. Access on 28 March 2019.

years, there was a possibility of transmitting some of SEM's objectives to a party outside the actors within Mercosur's Ministries of Education. For a sector that showed interest in control, it would seem to be a rather contradictory move to give up control altogether.

#### 9.4 Let's talk about Brazil

To conclude this work with Brazil is a challenge. Brazil is, by and large, a destabilising factor in Mercosur and contributes in important ways to asymmetries in the space of Mercosur. Efforts to develop an incipient HE space are particularly challenging, given its continental proportions and the size of its population. The differences are evident in its gigantic proportions compared to other SEM countries. As Table 3.3 (Chapter 3) shows, the number of students in HE in Brazil are the equivalent to the sum of all HE students in the remaining members of SEM combined.

The Brazilian HE system is today composed of over 2.400 HE institutions. These institutions are broadly split between a research-intensive public university sector and a teaching-oriented private sector, in which not all of them get to be called 'universities'. The 1996 National Law for Education (LDB) defines universities to be "pluridisciplinary institutions, public or private, for the formation of professional labour force of superior level, which develop regular activities of teaching, researching and extension"(Brasil, 1996). 'Only' 295 of those 2400 get to be classified as such. Out of these universities, 42 took part in the Arcosur, 12 of which are private (Annex 18). As I have come to learn in this study, in addition to the region's weak institutionalality, the data from Brazil also dilutes the impact of the region in the national HE systems. Proportionally to the total number of institutions, 60% of Argentinean public universities took part in the accreditation project, whereas 10% of the Brazilian public universities did. This contributes to the variegation within Mercosur as well as between the region and the different national spaces.

In addition, Brazil's HE has a different background to the other SEM members. The first university in Brazil – in the sense of research, teaching and '*extensão*', dates from 1920, whereas in Argentina, the University of Cordoba dates from 1613, the Uruguayan University of the Republic from 1849, and the National University of Asunción from 1889. Brazil also went through a series of reforms to arrive a US style university model in the Brazilian 1968

university reform (Barichello & Barlete, 2005). SM 15 indicated this difference during the interview:

SM 15: The Brazilian [HE model] is more dissimilar because the Rioplatense [HE systems], that is, we have more things in common than different things. [This is] because the Argentine model, which is the Rioplatense model, had a lot of influence in the constitution of both the Uruguayan university and in the Paraguayan. While Brazil appears in another way, it is later and more active and more international from the beginning – it gives more weight to research and gives more weight to other criteria that do not exist in the Rioplatense model<sup>242</sup> (SM 15, personal communication, March 27, 2017).

These particular histories account for the reasons the systems grew like distinctly different parallel ones. Today, Brazilian HE is overwhelmed with private providers; they make up 86% of the HE system. This highly differentiated system accounts for why the 1918 Cordoba Reforms (Chapter 5) did not have impact in the Brazilian HE (Azevedo, Braggio, & Catani, 2018).

SM 10 suggested that the historical differences has also penetrated into the imaginary of academic cooperation:

Brazil has always had a historical difficulty in relating to its neighbours in Latin America. I don't know if the geographical component has any influence, because we have in front of us the Atlantic Ocean, and on our coasts, the Andes Mountains. So, historically, Brazil has always had a lot of difficulty, a lot of difficulty - it turns to Europe, and after the turn of the 19th century to the 20th century, to the USA - which would be another great reference. But, with Latin America, a lot of difficulty. So, it was difficult to alert the Brazilian academic community the need and the feasibility of this. Exception made to the states in the South [of Brazil]. And then, there is, I think, a geographical component... There is a difficulty of integration within the country itself, imagine with those from outside. And this difficulty is present in the academic world itself<sup>243</sup> (SM 10, personal communication, March 10, 2017).

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<sup>242</sup> In the original: “[El modelo brasileiro] es más disímil porque los Rioplatense, o sea, tenemos más cosas en común que cosas distintas. Por que el modelo Argentino, que es el modelo Rioplatense, tuvo muchísima influencia tanto en la constitución de la universidad Uruguayana como en la Paraguaya. Mientras que Brasil se genera de otra manera, y es más tardío y es más activo y es más internacional de partida - tiene más fuerza la investigación y tiene más fuerza otros criterios que en el modelo Rioplatense no existen”.

<sup>243</sup> SM 10: “O Brasil sempre teve uma dificuldade histórica de se relacionar com os seus vizinhos na América Latina. Eu não sei se o componente geográfico tem alguma influência, porque nós temos a nossa frente o Oceano Atlântico, e nas nossas costas, a Cordilheira dos Andes. Então, historicamente, o Brasil sempre teve muita dificuldade, muita dificuldade - ele se volta pra Europa, e depois da virada do século XIX pro século XX, pros EUA - que seria outra grande referência. Mas, com a América Latina, muita dificuldade. Então, foi difícil sensibilizar a comunidade acadêmica brasileira para a necessidade e pra viabilidade dessa integração. Exceção feita aos estados no Sul. E aí, há, eu acho, um componente geográfico... Há dificuldade de integração dentro do próprio país, o que se dirá de fora. E essa dificuldade tá presente no próprio mundo acadêmico”.

In a discussion about the regional identity, SM 16 suggests a similar understanding to SM 10. For Brazil as much as for the others, taking part in Mercosur activities was an opportunity to look into LA with different eyes:

SM 16 - It's... a bit of building a sense of belonging, I think it was a bit along these lines. Especially in Brazil, this was a little diluted. I think the Brazilians saw [Mercosur] as very new, because Brazil was a little... always felt a little outsider from Latin America. So, this thing of feeling part of that Cono Sur; of having something in common with those countries, was kind of new to Brazilians. So, it was a way of feeling this belonging to a region that was more than Brazil, and that was something that united us all. This... this place in the world that united us all<sup>244</sup> (SM 16, personal communication, March 30, 2018).

A similar discourse, yet with a different political intention, pushed Brazil to invest into the launch of the Federal University for Latin American Integration (Unila). The main goal was to acquire regional leadership (Bertolleti, 2017). Unila is tuition-free institution that reserves 50% of its places to Latin American citizens. According to Motter and Gandin (2016), Unila emerged out of a failed attempt to establish a Mercosur University in 2006. Here the authors refer to the projects presented for the ‘HE Space’, as discussed in Chapter 8. I was unable to trace in the data I collected the evidence to claim this was the case. Differently to the claim of the authors, the process tracing reveals no evidence in the meeting minutes that SEM wanted to establish a Mercosur University in the format of Unila: a physical institution – and here the idea of the European Institute in Florence comes to mind. From the data, the ideas collected, inclusive of the one that Brazil proposed, was to interconnect institutions through a series of Mercosur-related programmes - as if in a network. Any other informal discussions did not get recorded in the debates in the meetings.

There is not only history to account for Brazil’s difficulty in regional integration in LA. In addition to this historical disconnection, Brazilian regulations have restricted the assimilation of regional projects. One example discussed in Chapter 6 was the amendments to the 1996 Protocol for Academic Activities (Chapter 6). It emerged out of the impossibility of a central organisation to recognise those diplomas issued by Brazilian public universities

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<sup>244</sup> SM 16 – “É... um pouco de construir um sentimento de pertencimento, eu acho que era um pouco nessa linha. Principalmente no Brasil, isso era um pouco diluído. Eu acho que os brasileiros viam isso como muito novo, por que o Brasil era um pouco... sempre se sentiu pouco outsider da América Latina. Então, essa coisa de se sentir parte daquele conjunto mesmo do Cone Sul; de ter uma coisa em comum com aqueles países, era meio novidade pros brasileiros. Então era meio nessa linha de sentir esse pertencimento de uma região que era mais do que o Brasil, e que era uma coisa que nos unia a todos. Essa... esse lugar no mundo que nos unia a todos.”

following the 1996 Education Law (the careful reader will notice that the 1996 Law was approved *after* the Education Sector already existed).

There is also a disconnection to Regional activities in new national policies. For instance, the recent 2014 National Education Plan neither refers to the context of the region nor to Mercosur at any point (Brasil, 2014). This is in spite of similar goals and the influence of the same discourses - such as the Education for All - often cited in SEM documentation (Chapter 5). Such a significant oversight is even more notable because the Plan was produced during the years of the period where progressive governments in LA formed the 'Pink Tide'; this was supposedly a period of political interest in the region. More interesting is to learn, as I revealed earlier in this Chapter, that the years of 2011-2012 were ones of intense regional activity in which Brazil was a key actor.

The significant level of participation of Brazil also has to do with the role of its HE agencies. We might note, for instance, that of CAPES, the Foundation that regulates and funds higher level training. It is a unique agency in the world; its regulatory and autonomy functions allow CAPES to control and approve a vast array of internationalisation of HE projects, such as mobility, cooperation, accreditation of post-graduation programmes and teacher training. In sum, this is all of the projects that the Mercosur HE does. The Foundation has the autonomy to fund and manage a budget of US\$ 1 billion (in 2017). This is why CAPES has been highly involved in the work of SEM. It has the flexibility to design, approve and implement international cooperation programmes under the demands of the Ministry of Education. This might confer on Brazil the ability to fund projects in a responsive way without having to depend on National Laws to approve the budget.

In spite of this engagement with Mercosur and the involvement in building the accreditation programme, Brazil has shown that SEM countries are its first choice when it comes to the HE internationalisation programmes. The launch of the Science Without Borders project in 2011 privileged the training of undergraduate, postgraduate and researchers around the world – and particularly the Global North. Between 2014 and 2016, when the last call for funding was published, the Programme paid 92.880 scholarships. The large majority was for Brazilians going abroad (27.000 to the US, only), but it also funded international researchers going to Brazil. The only Mercosur universities taking part in the

Programme were from Chile (12 in total)<sup>245</sup>. I was unable to find any discussions about the Science Without Borders in the SEM documentation I analysed – although it is difficult to conclude to think it did not generate any.

In sum, Brazil has been historically disconnected to the evolution of HE in the region. And although its giant proportions seem to paradoxically overshadow and thin the accomplishments of the region, out of this paradox it has been able to provide flexible solutions for the difficulties in finding resources for the work of Mercosur as a regional higher education project.

## 9.5 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the last period of changes in SEM. It looked at how the emergence of power imbalances and the increased workload led to a change of the place of Mercosur HE with the advent of a structure outside the meetings. To close the review of Mercosur's HE systems, the Chapter introduced the most contradictory HE system in the region: Brazil. While 'standing out in the (SEM) crowd' due to historical, geographical and political differences, Brazil is an essential part of the shaping of the HE Sector, for its resources and capacity for action, i.e. through the work of CAPES. Both these elements support SEM in the quest for legitimacy. However, Brazil typifies the reasons for the asymmetries within the region, as well as highlights the variegation between actors within as well as into its national space.

The period indicates an important shift in the governance of the sector as its main critical juncture: there is an (ongoing) attempt to reframe the role HE in the Education Sector. Despite having done an intense data analysis, my analysis of this CJ is careful because this is a fresh historical event. Pinpointing its legacies may be too soon. Nonetheless, a review of CJ elements allows me to put together arguments to make case for the CJ. The antecedent conditions indicate the materialisation of SEM projects (Chapter 7) implied in the need for better capacity to manage HE projects. What is more, the success in creating new programmes overloaded CHE's capacity to run programmes. Both the accreditation and mobility projects need help to manage the instruments they put in place. It would not be

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<sup>245</sup> Details about the grants in Science Without Borders are available in: <http://www.cienciasemfronteiras.gov.br/web/csf/painel-de-controle>.

surprising that an increase in activities without the increase in staff could generate a loss in the quality of the implementation. As this Chapter reveals, this antecedent generated a power imbalance over control and monitoring of activities – the crisis. Here the authority role of CCR surfaces with the intention to centralise the Sector’s governance. This was done by adjusting the mandates and holding accountability meetings with each Area. At the same, and perhaps contradictorily, CCR sought to approve a Technical Unit, to manage HE programmes.

The launch of a regional unit (UTE) is potentially one of the most important legacies of SEM. But it may not be a legacy just yet. As the history of SEM has shown, changes happen in a different pace in a region with ‘explosive’ politics, such as Mercosur. The difficulties in implementing the much-anticipated Education Technical Unit to support CHE are an indication of the defining role of the context in defining its outcomes.

## **Conclusion of Section II**

The combination of the process tracing and the critical junctures (CJ) methodology indicated five moments of change in 25 years of Mercosur HE. These junctures are based on the wider transformation of the Sector's governance, rather than on a particular output, such as the launch of a specific programme or the launch of a new Strategic Plan. The CJs pinpointed, for instance, how and why the Mercosur Education Sector (SEM) emerged, how its first projects in HE developed and how the Sector acquired actorness for itself. The Section concluded with the radical decision of implementing an organism external to SEM to manage HE activities.

The final Chapter will explore what do these legacies mean for the region-building work of Mercosur HE Sector and conclude the Thesis.

## 10 CONCLUSION

### 10.1 Restatement of purpose

This thesis analysed the rise of the higher education (HE) sector within the regional agreement of the Common Market of the South (Mercosur) from 1991 until 2016. Placing the region within the context of Latin American (LA) regionalisms, the study aimed to shed new insight on the changing place, players and space of HE in region-making by means of a diachronic analysis of Mercosur HE projects over time. To do so, I conducted a process tracing analysis of the development of the HE Sector in Mercosur from the inception of the Mercosur Education Sector (SEM) in 1991 using primary and secondary data I collected in two fieldwork missions to Latin America.

This thesis suggested that understanding the Mercosur's HE sectoral regionalism could only be done if in relation to the broader development of Mercosur as a region, as well as to the different scales of rule that shape its social relations. It built from the understanding that HE sectoral projects are also spatial projects of governance at a regional scale with economic, cultural and political dynamics (Robertson et al., 2016). Inspired by the ideas of HE as a relational spatial project of governance (Harvey, 2006), I argued that the dynamics that shape the regional HE project in Mercosur and the Mercosur as a region are, in fact, relational: both the region (Mercosur) and its HE project can only exist when in relationship to one another, and in a process of construction across external and internal influences and temporalities.

To approach the data, I borrowed from several disciplines in social sciences to explain the multiple events in Mercosur HE in the period 1991-2016. I was interested in questioning the historical constructs that allowed (or prevented) change to happen in Mercosur HE. In line with Critical Theory (Chapter 4), the research's critical dimension meant to "stand apart from the prevailing order of the world and asks how that order came about" and "directed toward an appraisal of the very framework for action, or problematic, which problem-solving theory accepts as its parameters" (R. W. Cox, 1996, pp. 88–89). A critical realist ontology approach positioned me to look for explanations by analysing the relationship between the outcomes and the action of mechanisms in context (Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Sayer, 1992, 2000). This research, therefore, was not interested in providing solutions for visible outputs, but, rather, to understand how these problems came about, why, under what circumstances

and by whose actions or inactions. As a consequence, I did not analyse one HE project in particular, but the whole of the HE space. Third, the study does not propose a comparative study with any other region, or between the Member States of Mercosur and their education ensembles.

Ultimately, this multi-disciplinary analysis of the dynamics of the regional project aimed to discover the nature of Mercosur HE and answer the question: what is Mercosur HE a case of?

## 10.2 Recap

To answer the research question, the research set out a journey through exploring Mercosur as a case of sectoral regionalism in eight chapters.

Section I (Chapters 2-4) laid out the theoretical and empirical pillars that shaped the development of this thesis. Chapter 2 established the theoretical constructs to understand region-building and LA regionalisms. As expressions of global governance processes, I defined regions as territorially-based dynamic social organisations that shape and are shaped by the historical context within which they are inserted. I concluded that regions cannot be ‘sensibly squeezed’ into a unique model, hence rejecting a ‘one size fits all’ approach to analyse region-building (Cammack, 2016). In addition, I accepted Haimeiri (2013)’s proposal to approach the spatiality of region-making as part of its political project to establish specific forms of political rule. In sum, I approached Mercosur HE as a form of sectoral regionalism built in relation to the dynamics of its spatial, cultural, economic and political dimensions at any point in time. Its outcomes, however, are essentially variegated given that different processes can have different outcomes (Robertson, 2014, 2018).

Chapter 2 also dealt with the complexity of LA Regionalisms. The use of the plural – regionalisms – was deliberate to clarify the many approaches of region-making in LA (Gardini, 2015). I identified three aspects common to most of LA regions. The first is a *history of power struggles in relation to hegemonic rule*, visible in the participation in economic projects, or in the use of terminology such as ‘post’- and ‘counter-hegemonic’ accounts of regionalism. Second, many LA regions built on a *historical collective imaginary for regional integration*. I built on Appadurai’s concept of ‘community of sentiment’

(Appadurai, 1996) as a framework to think about of how societies are capable of moving from shared imagination to collective action. Third, regions have a dynamic where ‘*shifting geometries*’ *shape new spaces* and therefore redefines the social relations within them.

Chapter 3 looked at the shape of HE as a driver of knowledge societies and as a broker for regional identities. It explained how decision-making in HE is fundamentally spatial: it depends on the relationship between the different scales of power and ideas. These constructs supported by argument that Mercosur HE must be examined with regards to the type of outcomes, mechanisms and strategies developed in time, as well as the scalar dynamics external to the region.

The main purpose of Chapter 4 was to elucidate the methodological choices to conduct the study. It detailed – almost to a fault - my decision-making process to collect, process and analyse data. At the core of the analysis was process tracing: the inductive decomposition of the events revealed the causal chains of a process (Trampusch & Palier, 2016). The use of the critical junctures (CJ) framework was an essential tool in the development of this study: their search for legacies kept me focused during the vast textual analysis and refined the choice of participants invited for the 33 semi-structured interviews.

Section II presented the results of the empirical analysis. Its five chapters provided evidence and explanations of how Mercosur’s Education Sector came about and how the HE policy process were shaped, and reshaped, throughout time, under which conditions, by whom and for whom.

Chapter 5 presented how key Education actors in the four Mercosur members states (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay) launched a process that continues to be active in the region until today. It highlighted the role of *actors*, the path of *discovery* of their own and their neighbours’ education systems (looking ‘inward’ and ‘sideways’), and *looking outward to experiences of regional integration* outside Mercosur and the Members States’ realm, of which the European integration will be the most relevant one. In the field of HE, the data analysed showed how the ideas were shaped around the possibilities for mobility.

Chapter 6 showed how the accreditation project gave SEM the legitimacy it needed to start acting as a region (Cammack, 2006). Moreover, the Chapter explores how two projects changed the nature of the HE sectoral region: the launch of a second Triennial Plan (1998-2000) and the first shift of the project’s geometry with the adhesion of Chile and Bolivia to

SEM (1997). It was the first time SEM actors had to explain the region – for themselves and for others. The consequence was an exercise of self-recognition to develop a new identity to be shared with others. The legacy was a change in the nature of HE regionalisation in Mercosur: the shift from a politics of homogenisation to the harmonisation of ideas through the recognition of differences.

Chapter 7 introduced key legacies for Mercosur HE. In 2000-2001, the Regional Committee revised SEM's structure, reviewing mandates, and defining roles and norms in order to increase its legitimacy. SEM needed increased resources to improve their capacity for action. The lack of political support and resources consistently undermined SEM's actorness and authority. The solution was to make internal changes. These changes affected the nature of the HE Sector. They altered the ways the HE actors would relate to each other, their priorities, ways of negotiating internally and externally, and the pace of the projects – from being an ideational project into a material project.

As a consequence of the changes in Chapter 7, the HE Sector acquires a stronger institutionality. This increased coherence as a space is the object of analysis in Chapters 8 and 9. The central focus of Chapter 8 was in the emergence and positioning of the HE Sector as regional actor. The analysis of the data reveals instances when the CHE conducted events as an actor of its own with a joint political voice. In doing so, it gained a degree of political agency as a region. I conclude that when acting like a regional entity, CHE embedded a new role as a region *for itself*, even if presenting a thin degree of institutionality.

Closing the empirical analysis, Chapter 9 looked at how the emergence of power imbalances within SEM led to the change of the place of Mercosur HE. The 2011 Plan alters once again the mandate and structure of SEM. It generated an unprecedented change in the nature of the HE Sector: for the first time in 20 years, there was a possibility of transmitting some of SEM's mandate to a party outside the actors within SEM and the Mercosur's Ministries of Education, with the approval of a centralised Technical Secretariat (UTE). Furthermore, the section also explores how the borderings of the regional HE policies have largely privileged a portion of the HE sectors in the region - namely the public university sector, and in some of the nations of the region, only a handful of public institutions located in the main urban centres.

In the course of the Chapters, the analysis gradually shifted from looking at the entire Education Sector (SEM) to concentrating onto the HE Sector. This shift was gradual and induced by the level of institutionalisation the HE Sector had obtained. The focus on HE meant that the analysis did not consider the other Area Committees in SEM. As such, it limited the conclusions to the HE Sector, rather than to the work of SEM as a whole.

### **10.3 Toward a cultural political economy of Mercosur HE regionalism: findings**

With the results of the analysis I am now able to recover the research question: What is Mercosur HE a case of? At the end of this research, it became clear that Mercosur HE is a region for itself (Chapter 2): it is a social construction following the projects and imaginary of its actors. The main actors in this case are the technical staff from the SEM Member States who take part in the decision-making processes of SEM. Institutions and academics have a largely passive role in the development of Mercosur HE. Therefore, they contribute to shaping the region indirectly.

The HE Sector dialogues with three other scales: the Member States (national), other regions, such as UNASUR and the EU (regional) and global (international organisations). The dialogue with Mercosur has been incipient until the launch of PEAS in 2012 (Chapter 8). Finally, a key aspect to impulse the legitimacy of Mercosur HE is to fulfil its primary role: to promote regional integration by strengthening its relationship with Mercosur's economic and political project. If following the argument that Mercosur HE region is conditioned by the specificities of the contexts and events in which the Mercosur as a region, it is important to acknowledge the role of Mercosur in promoting a weak institutionality.

Mercosur also presents contradictions. On the one hand, its weak institutionality prevents an efficient shift from ideational to material, yet awareness of its deficit does not alter the regularity in the meetings (encounters). On the other, the screaming diversity among its Member States was not a hindrance to creating outputs. The change in the outlook of homogenisation until the harmonising of differences indicates a way out, even if not fully accomplished.

*What has been the role of the Member States in shaping its nature, form and scope?* Member States have a key role in shaping SEM. Whereas a large portion of it is inherited from the intergovernmental mode of governance, the constant participation of the Full members (when not suspended, that is) is fundamental for setting the frames of the region. Because of the nature of Mercosur, their position is always dual: they meet the ambition to achieve regional goals with their national interests in the pocket. “Countries continue to be countries”. In the case of the HE Sector, Member States not only mean the technical body at the Ministries of education, but increasingly the participants of HE programmes. Member States have also been the main providers of resources (funding and capacity building) for the HE Sector to function, together with the international organisations.

*What policies and practices in Mercosur operate to enable SEM to happen?* Student mobility was the main motivator for the launch of the HE Sector (Chapter 5). It was not, however, the first project. The development of the accreditation project in 1997 triggered cooperation in other areas. It is framed under the discourse of quality assurance, one that was embraced by all members, and in turn generated HE reforms in Paraguay and Uruguay (Chapters 6, 7). Accreditation is not only the most successful but also the most visible project in Mercosur HE because it provided benefits to the Member States at system level.

This study shows that it is unlikely that the regional HE project be possible without the framework of the trade agreement. The framework of Mercosur guaranteed the continued commitment of Member States. This was elucidated in Chapter 5, when a participant mentioned his country ‘had to play the game’ and engage in the sectoral debates in Mercosur. The relationship with the region, as well as its institutional framework, provide a framework of accountability and commitment to the project which kept all the Member States working towards the regional project independently of its contribution, interest or even capacity to do so. Nonetheless, both in the interviews and the documents the little reference to the economic project (Mercosur as a trade agreement). As such, Mercosur’ Education Sector seems to lag behind its primary goal: promote regional integration by strengthening its relationship with Mercosur’s economic and political project. This absence indicates a key aspect to impulse the legitimacy of Mercosur HE before the broader Mercosur agreement. Given the relational framework of this thesis, I argue that one can only exist in relation to the other. If Mercosur lacks in legitimacy, so will its HE project, and vice-versa.

However, the analysis shows there are external factors to HE region that go beyond the mandate of SEM, such as the political instability of its Member States. The only exception to these both arguments is Argentina. The country has shown deep commitment to the region even when crossing an important political-economic crisis in 2001. In addition to the hegemonic dispute for power in the region, already mentioned above, Argentina has the national structure to conduct regional projects is at the top of the country's agenda (Interview 3). What does it mean for the region? It gives them three features of institutionalisation that are unseen anywhere else in the Education Sector: time, resources and capacity. A subsequent question to this finding is: what does this mean for Argentina? It indicates that the shape of the region, and regional integration, remained a priority for the country and particularly for its Ministry of Education across time. In the realm of this research I am unable to know why is that the case, and who got to decide this is so – therefore opening a new and interesting avenue for future research.

The empirical analysis made use of a process tracing research strategy which was combined with the framework of critical junctures. The five CJs that guided the empirical analysis in Section II (Table 10.1, below) ended up providing more than temporal markers to this historical research. In combination with the research design of process tracing and the critical realist ontology, the CJ framework was key in revealing the events, mechanisms and outcomes that shaped the path of Mercosur HE. The framework's categories of antecedent conditions, crises, legacy and counter-factual analysis proved to be a useful tool for unpicking the historical events in region-making, independently of the theory of regional integration the researcher abides to.

Table 10.1 Summary of Critical Junctures

Critical juncture	Title	Period	Legacy (output)
<b>CJ 1</b>	Discovery and self-discovery: the emergence of a regional education project	1991-1993	Education Sector and HE Sector
<b>CJ 2</b>	From a politics of homogenisation to harmonisation through the recognition of differences	1996-1998	HE Accreditation project; new members, Chile and Bolivia; acceptance of the region's diversity
<b>CJ 3</b>	New structures, new meanings: institutionalising the region and the production of a new common sense	2001-2002	New Mandate for HE as a result of new SEM structure
<b>CJ 4</b>	Actorness in the HE Sector: positioning and autonomy	2006-2008	HE as actor in negotiations with internal and external actors
<b>CJ 5</b>	The changing place, space and actors: asymmetrical power relations and internal variegation	2011-2012	A new place for HE Sector outside the realm of SEM Meetings

Source: Elaborated by the author.

Concerned with the robustness of the CJ analysis (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007), I set out to understand what produced those changes that ultimately produced legacies. To explain these changes, I will apply retroduction as a mode of inference (Chapter 4). Retroduction aims to reveal the events' hypothetical generative mechanisms (Mingers & Standing, 2017) that offer the basic conditions for social relationships, people's actions, reasoning and knowledge, by moving from empirical observation of phenomena to the conceptualisation of the action of the mechanisms. Put it simply, it asks *what had to happen for X to happen*.

Building on the conclusions from the CJ framework, I lay out on Table 10.2 the result of the retroduction. Because retroduction shows the exercise of abstraction, when reading the Table *horizontally*, each row in Table 10.2 must be read from right to left (←). Columns 2 to 4 bring the results of Section II's chapters observing the three elements of Pawson and Tilley (1997)'s model: outcomes, mechanisms and context, as they suggested in the equation 'O = f(M + C)'<sup>246</sup>. When looking at the Table *vertically*, it reveals a historical dimension, from the

<sup>246</sup> As a reminder from Chapter 4, Pawson and Tilley's explanatory model claims that the emergence of events can be explained by identifying how mechanisms get activated in relation to the historical context they are inserted in. Because

earliest historical context at the top until the most recent one in the bottom. The visualisation of the Table covers all five CJs analysed in Section II.

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mechanisms pursue particular properties or causal powers, model can account for why the same mechanisms produce different outcomes in different contexts.

Table 10.2 Retroduction: Mercosur HE's mechanisms in context

<b>Critical juncture</b>	<b>Outcomes (level of the empirical)</b>	<b>Mechanisms (level of the real)</b>	<b>(Events in) Context (level of the actual)</b>
<b>CJ 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Launch of SEM (1991)</li> <li>- Creates HE Sector (1993)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Political Articulation</li> <li>- Senior Education actors</li> <li>- EU as an example</li> <li>- Shared HE history (excl. Brazil)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Launch Mercosur (1991)</li> <li>- EU's Erasmus programme (1987)</li> </ul>
<b>CJ 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chile and Bolivia join SEM (1996)</li> <li>- HE accreditation project (MEXA) (1997)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- influence of quality assurance discourse in Argentina and Brazil</li> <li>- Mistrust of other systems' qualifications</li> <li>- Mobility as a goal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Argentina launches Quality Assurance agency (CONEAU)</li> <li>- Chile and Bolivia join Mercosur as Associates</li> <li>- Homogenisation of region is problematised</li> <li>- Uruguay new University Law creates a HE System</li> </ul>
<b>CJ 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New mandate for Area Committees (incl. HE Sector)</li> <li>- New SEM structure</li> <li>- HE governance based on projects</li> <li>- CCR to centralise funding</li> <li>- Space as a mission</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quest for legitimacy</li> <li>- Discourse of social inclusion</li> <li>- Intention to build institutionalisation</li> <li>- Bologna Process</li> <li>- New regional model (Philips, 2001)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2000 Reflexive Seminar (CCR)</li> <li>- Crises in Mercosur countries</li> <li>- Relaunch of Mercosur</li> <li>- Buenos Aires Letter (Social inclusion)</li> <li>- EU's Bologna Process</li> <li>- Brazil in EU-LAC/ALCUE Follow up Committee</li> <li>- GATTs education discussion</li> <li>- Paraguay's new University Law</li> </ul>

<p><b>CJ 4</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- HE performing as Sector at CRES 2008</li> <li>- ARCUSUR becomes a System</li> <li>- Mushrooming of projects: HE Research Project (NEIES), mobility projects (MARCA, linked to accreditation, teacher mobility)</li> <li>- Launch of Education Fund (SEM)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Favourable attitude to LA regionalism (Presidential)</li> <li>- Strong integrationist</li> <li>- Ministers committed to continue investing in SEM</li> <li>- Continued search for resources</li> <li>- Critical view of International organisations</li> <li>- Competing with UNASUR for regional hegemony in HE</li> <li>- Need for stable funding source</li> <li>- Political reframing</li> <li>- Monitoring and evaluation programmes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ‘Pink Tide’</li> <li>- Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador as Mercosur Associates</li> <li>- Positive MEXA results</li> <li>- 2008 global economic crises</li> <li>- UNASUR</li> <li>- CRES 2008</li> <li>- Negotiation with the EU for Mobility project (PMM)</li> </ul>
<p><b>CJ 5</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Centralised Technical Unit for managing HE activities (Accreditation, mobility)</li> <li>- New SEM structure</li> <li>- Less IOs participation</li> <li>Plans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increased visibility for HE projects, resulting in participation</li> <li>- lack of capacity to manage new projects</li> <li>- Conflict within Power imbalance</li> <li>- Control of education activities</li> <li>- Good economic situation for Mercosur, Brazil and Argentina coveting costs for regional HE activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Paraguay suspended (2012-2013)</li> <li>- Venezuela becomes full member</li> <li>- Brazil launches UNILA (without Mercosur)</li> </ul>

Given how the findings of the retrodution above are in line with elements discovered through CJ analysis, it is useful to think how the three main analytical tools I employed in this thesis complemented each other. First of all, Process tracing, as the research design, offered the backbone for the research as a historical analysis of SEM. CJ served as the analytical framework which allowed a better periodisation of the historical evolution of SEM. It indicated the phases of the development and the elements that led to changes (antecedent conditions, crises, legacy, counter-factual explanations, role of actors). Retrodution, as the mode of inference, completed the analytical process initiated with the CJ: it explained the causal relations between the CJ elements in generating change.

Although each CJ presents its own causal mechanisms that were activated in different historical moments, I have also discovered four causal mechanisms which were transversal across the contexts:

- *Central role of CCR in shaping SEM.* CCR is the most important actor in CCR because it has the authority to induce change. All major legacies result from the action of CCR (see table above). The 2000 Reflexive Seminar 2000 is a good example of the role of CCR (Chapter 7).
- *Weak institutionality of the HE Sector, despite being the most successful project in SEM.* Throughout the years, there are constant requests for resources, especially funding, to enable the work of the HE sector. I attribute this feature to a thin level of legitimacy of the sector before Mercosur and the Member States (with the exception of Argentina). The consequent weak institutionality result in reduced political commitment from the Member States to provide resources, requiring SEM to reach out to international organisations (IOs) (Chapter 7).
- *The meetings – encounters – as a mechanism setting the pace of the changes.* The events of the meetings (usually twice a semester, Chapter 3) had a role in driving changes for the region. The frequency of the encounters contributed to the delay in having the projects done. It is also my understanding that the anticipation for meeting motivated members to prepare information. This can be explained by the notions of accountability and the logic of appropriateness (Chapter 8). An important consequence of building the region ‘encounter by

encounter' is the slower timing of changes in the HE Space. This can explain why activities take so long to happen: with the exception of Argentina, Mercosur HE becomes one extra task in the to do list of the actors shaping HE Education. It is in the embodiment of the regional self – the 'hats' of region, and the 'hats' of the nation-state, that allows meanings get validated. This idea would explain why the bearer of the Pro- Tempore Presidency works more for the region – because it must, it is its *turn* to do it. However, it does not devote the same time to the region when they are not PPT. This concept might also illuminate why some countries get more involved in the others.

- *The role of Argentina and Brazil in leading the HE Sector.* Argentina and Brazil acted in two fronts: funding and ideas. From the articulated agenda in quality assurance (Solanas, 2009)(Chapter 6), until the funding and management of most HE programmes, they shaped the HE region. Whereas Argentina and Brazil and region-makers, Paraguay and Uruguay are region-takers (Chapter 8). This feature reflects and perpetuates the regional dynamics of the hegemonic poles (Arocena & Caetano, 2011).

Finally, the visible external influences over the Mercosur education project were the EU and the OEI. The EU provided funding, although not straightforwardly (see Chapter 8). The OEI was regarded as a friend because of personal connections. This relationship changed from 2006, when Venezuela arrived. These OIs made themselves visible by attending meetings, producing support, and in a way providing external legitimacy to a thin-institutionalised project.

At the start of this work I also posed three hypotheses, to which I now turn.

1. *The decision-making of Mercosur HE is bound to the actorness of the political actors that led the regional in a certain period of time.* I assumed that the members of the Ministry of education involved in SEM are the most powerful actors in shaping the region.

One important finding of this study is the revelation of the internal power dynamics in the HE Sector. As such, the hypothesis does not hold given that not all members of the Ministries of Education have the same decision-making

power. Argentina and Brazil, in order, are not only the most powerful actors in the shape of the region, but also the most visible ones.

2. The *HE project has had little impact to region building for it is not institutionalised and legitimated to a degree that is useful to increasing regionness*. (Hettne & Söderbaum, 2000). In line with the hypothesis above, I posit that the slow visibility, scarce funding and slow development of Mercosur HE happens because *there is little political interest in the education project*.

After tracing the project for 25 years, there was evidence of how the lack of recourses affected SEM. The implementation of HE policies depended on key actors working at the ministries of education, especially from Argentina, as well as on external funding. Despite these actors' efforts to gain authority and legitimacy for the Education Sector, Mercosur HE had little legitimacy within the Member States' governments and the HE community.

## **10.4 Final findings - substantive and methodological**

### **10.4.1 Theoretical**

This study made use of an interdisciplinary approach in the social sciences to explore the complex dynamic of regionalism in Latin America. It built on theories of education, political geography, governance, international relations, and, of course, sociology. I favoured a sociological approach when meeting all of them, as I was interested in the social relations and their role in shaping Mercosur HE. Looking back, there were advantages and risks associated with it. To start with the risks, I found them to be on my perceived ability to make sure these theories spoke to each other. My angle to approach the case were – ironically – based on the theoretical mechanisms I encountered in the context of my doctoral studies. As for the benefits, I agree with Milton Santos when he says that “the greatest merit of a well understood interdisciplinarity is that, at the same time it disciplines the interior working to each particular science, it always opens new ways thanks to the fruitful contact with other compartments of knowledge” (Santos, 2012, p. 148). However, finding meeting points between my focus on HE structures and projects, its multi-spatiality dynamics,

and its governance as an international organisation was challenging, to say the least. It will remain a challenge for development as an academic. I find there are gains to be had from making these theories speak to each other.

In the literature produced in Latin America, in particular, I felt an important lack of methodological considerations that can support explanations for region-building based on empirical accounts. Whereas I am convinced that there is no shortage of critical and theoretical understandings about the regionalisms in Latin America, even less in Mercosur, I encountered difficulties in finding analytical models that allowed different explanations for the changes taking place at the regional level in different points in time which were developed in the region. I am not suggesting that there should be a specific epistemology or techniques for accessing or analysing Latin American regionalisms data, or a positivist-like approach to regions, but that having explanatory frameworks could aid scholars in analysing the diversity of regional projects in LA.

#### **10.4.2 Methodological**

The extensive empirical work of this research proved to be a challenge. My fieldwork notes often showed a sense of incompleteness: *'I leave Paraguay the same way I leave Brazil - with a feeling so many was unfinished.'* This sensation was fed mostly by the political situation in the Mercosur countries. In the case of Brazil and Paraguay, to expand on the note above, the countries were going through important political crisis. From September 2015 when I started this research until now, Brazil started with a centre-left wing government whose President went through an impeachment process in 2016 and elected a far-right government in November 2018. Paraguay's changes were not as dramatic, but provoked social unrest: protests against a Constitutional amendment to allow Presidential re-election ended up with the Congress set on fire. The protests took pace in March 2017, while I was in Asunción collecting data. The outcome of these changes for this research meant not many actors were interested in talking about Mercosur, understandably.

In spite of this, empirically both the 2016 pilot study and the 2017 fieldwork resulted in fundamental learnings in terms of research methods and managing data. As mentioned in chapter 4, Ethics, it was revealing for me to realise the negotiation between my membership of insider or outsider – or the hyphens. As an early career

researcher, I was unprepared for those were challenges. As I said, the opportunity to attend a CCR meeting was a ‘a research blessing and an ethical curse’ in the sense of observing how the regions gets shaped, and spend time with the actors, yet at the same time, I did not have the activity formalised (Chapter 4). The fact that my decision to take the risk to accept the invitation resulted from my cultural knowledge of the region rather than with regulations – has shown the importance to understand the differences between procedural ethics x ethics in practice (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). I was preoccupied in returning with gratitude the trust that the interviewee-turned-gatekeeper gently thrust on me. I could not say no. It was, as I said, one of the most fulfilling moments in my PhD journey.

Last but not least, I would like to reflect on the use of the CJ framework in the analysis of regional sectoral projects. While I admit my choice for CJ started out of practical matters – to pinpoint the main moments of change over time -, the framework offered much more than that. It evolved into a key aspect in the thesis: it unveiled critical elements for changes in the Sector – mechanisms, events, antecedent conditions, crises, counterfactual explanations. In addition, as explained above, I was able to incorporate the CJ framework into the research design (process tracing) and mode of inference (retroduction) straightforwardly. There is not to say I ignored the events outside these five moments I identified as legacies. They became antecedents (CJ)/events (CR) or consequences/outcomes of. Their vocabulary might be distinct, but the categories of analysis are compatible. Nonetheless, the use of CJ was a laborious process given the theoretical framework adopted in this thesis. It demanded a continuous handling of the data in order to connect the scalar features of the study in terms of its cultural, economic and political aspects. Finally, by defining the most relevant moments of SEM, to so say, I was able to narrow down the focus of data collection and participants, improving the feasibility of my project.

## **10.5 Significance and contribution to knowledge**

The study filled in many gaps that are theoretical, ontological and methodological:

- It offered a theoretical and conceptual contribution for thinking about HE in Mercosur as a spatial project constructed by social relations embedded in historical, economic, political and cultural contexts;
- It offered a pioneer explanatory account of HE in Mercosur as a sectoral region;
- In that, it enabled the establishment of causal relationships and in identifying the structuring mechanisms that might help explain why the HE Sector became what it is today, how it happened, under what circumstances, and with that consequences, for whom, at the different levels of decision-making;
- It analysed the actorness aspects of the region – whether the HE Sector was an actor in, or for, itself that built its own social relations, rather than a sum of its individual Member State parts;
- It contributed to increase the knowledge base about Mercosur HE;
- It conducted an ontologically distinct analysis of Mercosur HE with the use of critical realism as the meta-theory to uncover the underlying structuring mechanisms of changes in a very specific set of spatial and historical contexts;
- It contributed to a theoretical gap in the analysis of regional HE, as suggested by Robertson and colleagues (2016);
- In terms of methodological significance, it is the first inquiry to address the entire HE Sector, not only one specific project. The use of process tracing as a research design is also pioneer in the study of Mercosur HE.
- It considered the use of the CJ framework as a conceptual and methodological tool for the analysis of regional development.

## **10.6 The way ahead**

Thinking of Mercosur as a region can cause a raised eyebrow to many these days. The internal crisis with the suspension of Venezuela, added to the national

crises of its Member States can result in adverse, and yet again, changing conditions for sectoral projects.

An important gap remains open: there is very little knowledge produced about the actors outside the circle of governance at SEM. The exercise I proposed in Annex 18 only offered a small entry into this aspect. As mentioned in Chapter 4, I had the intention to analyse the institutional level, but the emergence of the new themes (external influence and projection of SEM to the rest of the region) took precedence. It remains as a gap in the study of Mercosur HE.

I leave the field with many questions unanswered, for they would require a new thesis. The contradictions of the discourse and the actions of the region-making actors raise important expectations of how each member state received these changes. Knowing the perceptions of the national members of SEM on these changes can indicate new mechanisms of change (or the lack of).

## **10.7 Closing words: reflexivity and positionality**

There is a strange feeling when you get to research about you own place, from outside. Although this is not the main conclusion of this thesis, my positioning before this work has been one of the greatest challenges.

Change was the name of this project. From September 2015 to March 2019, only Uruguay remains the same politically Member State in Mercosur. Argentina changed with Mauricio Macri's victory in late 2015; in addition, the country faces another economic crisis. Brazil faced an impeachment process against Dilma Rousseff in 2016, and the election of a far-right president in Jair Bolsonaro. I witnessed the day the Paraguayan Congress was burned down in 31 March 2017 in Asunción, which cascaded into series of social political problems. And finally, I believe mentioning that Venezuela faces the largest crises in the country's history and has been suspended from Mercosur in early 2017. That HE projects would survive this turbulence is

Second, it is indeed contradictory that one goes so far (geographically) to analyse something back 'home' – as many people have asked me about my decision

to study higher education in LA from Europe – or the Global North. It is also an irony that I am so much interested in space, too. My own region, the one I was born and bred in, and sites at the heart of the *Cono Sur*, has meant very little to me as a Mercosur citizen until very recently. And the main reason is my new ‘Mercosur’ passport which decided that my family name is now composed of two surnames (Lazzari Barlete, ‘mother-father’). Finding my name in a role call is a lottery. My Spanish-speaking Mercosur neighbours did not face changes, because their last name comes first in the order (‘father-mother’). Even the (best) porters (in the world) were upset at Wolfson College in Cambridge. There was no one registered under Barlete, my family name.

My relationship with the region gets more interesting when the aspect is research. A couple of times I was asked about why to study Mercosur from the UK, or whether I really had to go this far to analyse the region I came from. Sometimes the tone indicated a concern of the practicality to carry out the study; yet at times I felt some scepticism of whether Mercosur was a topic worthy of analysis at all, given the region’s political instability. Whichever the intention behind the question, it was a difficult one to answer. I often was unsure of what to say, and still am. I look at the Education Sector differently now that I understand what it took to build it.

Conducting an interdisciplinary study across time, borders and space(s) has been, in many ways, a quest. To conduct this research, I explored almost 18.000km of South America by bus, car and ferry. My admiration for the actors involved in the process grew proportionally to the number of new questions that emerged during the data collection. Mercosur’s HE references and hundreds of documents were constantly spread across Wolfson College. Their quantity meant I often lost sight of what I was looking for.

The careful reader will notice my efforts to do justice to the knowledge about and from region written by Latin American authors. Although I have been advised it would be ‘risky’ and that I should ‘check with my supervisor’, or worse, that ‘some journals will not even look at your paper without known US/ European authors’, I felt a responsibility to bring that to life. My aim was never to ‘substitute one for the other – ‘northern’ by ‘southern’, to think with Raewyn Connell – but to sum them up to help me to answer my research questions. It was not easy, especially the theoretical

Chapters. But I am happy I did and feel that my work is stronger and closer to the reality of LA regionalisms.

Last but not least, this thesis was also a journey into sociological thinking about HE. It enabled me to put names to ‘things’ I had been thing about for over a decade. For instance, that HE must be thought in its relationship to society. As such, HE must be analysed in relation to a society’s cultural, political and economic contexts. Also, that the dichotomy ‘competition – cooperation/ solidary’ does not offer much theoretical resource to build an understanding of its dynamics in internationalisation of HE – and yet, it is recurrent in the research about HE. I have learned about power; about social justice. Because of this injection of sociological thinking, I leave the research aware of the conditions that enabled it exist, as well as the role of the context. I see now the key role of some actors, the impact of regulations, the role of power relations, and happens when meanings are idealised and then material - at least in the HE Sector. However, the political climate in which the Mercosur States find themselves lit a spark. It is *explosive*, to say the least.

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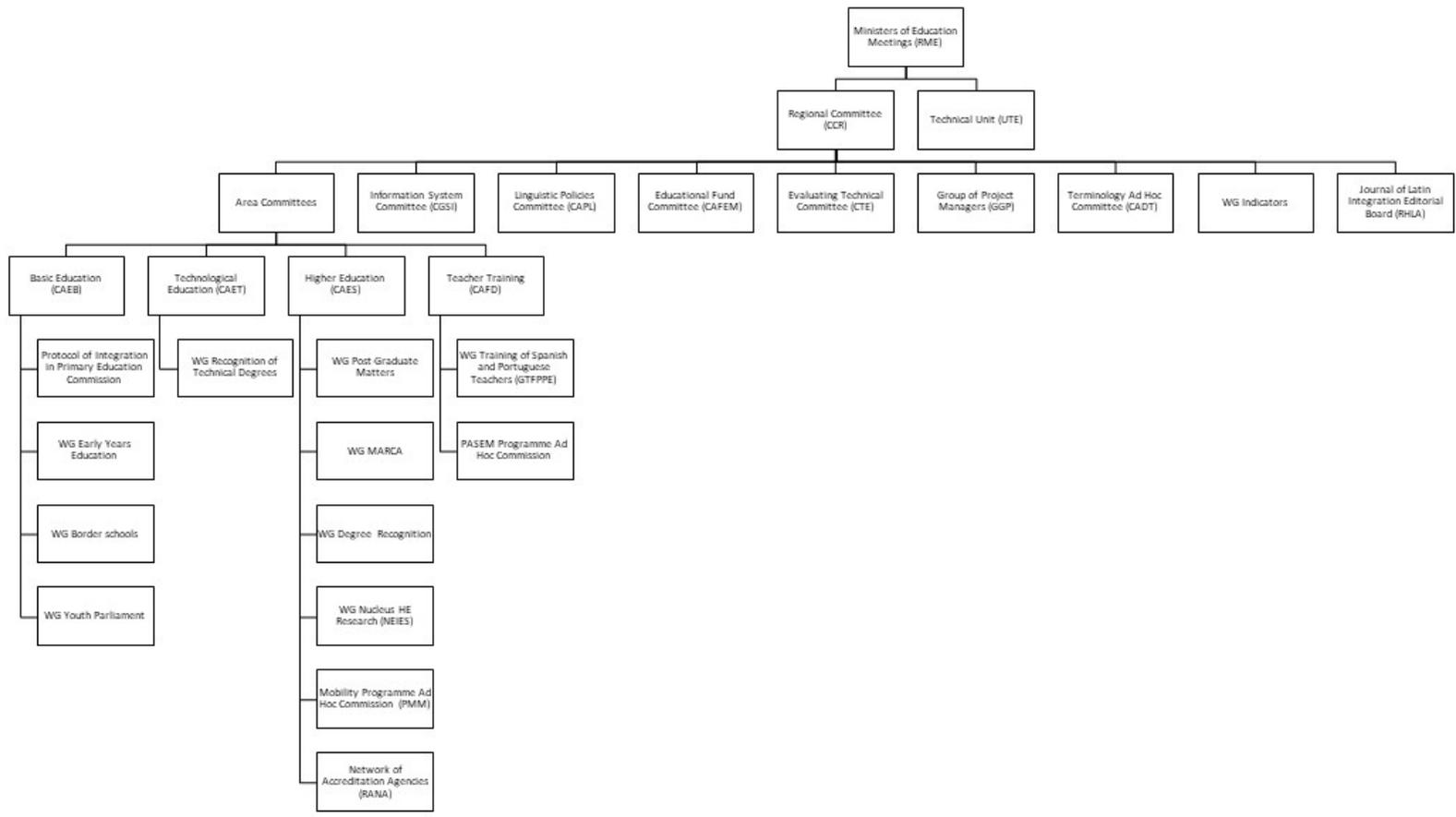
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## 12 ANNEXES

### Annex 1: List of interviews

#	CODE	Country	Length
1	SM 1	Paraguay	40 min
2	SM 2	Argentina	1h 14min
3	SM 3	Uruguay	1h
4	SM 4	Uruguay	1h 3min
5	SM 5	Argentina	19 min
6	SM 6	Paraguay	58min
7	SM 7	Paraguay	1h 33min
8	SM 8	Brazil	1h 14min
9	SM 9	Uruguay	22min
10	SM 10	Brazil	51m 19s
11	SM 11	Uruguay	22min
12	SM 12	Argentina	19 min
13	SM 13	Uruguay	1h 26 min
14	SM 14	Brazil	11m 06 s
15	SM 15	Paraguay	1h 04min
16	SM 16	Brazil	29m 01s
17	SM 17	Uruguay	1h 27min
18	SM 18	Paraguay	not recorded
19	SM 19	Paraguay	38min
20	SM 20	Uruguay	1h 40min
21	SM 21	Argentina	1h 10 min
22	SM 22	Argentina	1h 08min
23	SM 23	Chile	45min
24	SM 24	Uruguay	40 min
25	SM 25	Brazil	1h07min
26	SM 26	Paraguay	29 min
27	SM 27	Argentina	1h 08min
28	SM 28	Paraguay	not recorded
29	SM 29	Brazil	50min
30	SM 30	Uruguay	1h 27min
31	SM 31	Uruguay	57 min
32	SM 32	Brazil	40 min
33	SM 33	Paraguay	58 min

**Annex 2: Mercosur Education Sector: Structure (2018)**



### Annex 3: Summary of RME Meetings

#	Date	Place	Full name in original language
1	17/12/1991	Brazil (Brasília)	Signature of Protocol of Intentions (no name)
2	01/06/1992	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	Ata da II Reunião de Ministros de Educação da República da Argentina, República Federativa do Brasil, República do Paraguai e República Oriental do Uruguai
3	27/11/1992	Brazil (Brasília)	Acta de la Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países signatarios del Tratado del Mercado Común del Sur - MERCOSUR (III)
4	30/06/1993	Paraguay (Asunción)	Ata da IV Reunião de Ministros de Educação dos Países signatários do Tratado do Mercado Comum do Sul - MERCOSUL
5	21/12/1993	Uruguay (Montevideo)	Ata da V Reunião de Ministros de Educação dos Países signatários do Tratado do Mercado Comum do Sul
6	04/08/1994	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	Ata da VI Reunião de Ministros de Educação dos Países signatarios do Tratado do Mercado Comum do Sul (MERCOSUL)
7	09/12/1994	Brazil (Ouro Preto)	Ata da VII Reunião de Ministros de Educação dos Países signatários do Tratado do Mercado Comum do Sul
8	28/07/1995	Paraguay (Asunción)	Acta de la Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países signatarios del Tratado del Mercado Común del Sur (VIII)
9	30/11/1995	Uruguay (Montevideo)	Ata da IX Reunião de Ministros de Educação dos Países signatários do Tratado do Mercado Comum do Sul
10	20/06/1996	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	Acta de la Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países signatarios del Tratado del Mercado Común del Sur (X)
11	29/11/1996	Brazil (Gramado)	Acta de la Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países signatarios del Tratado del Mercado Común del Sur (XI)
12	11/06/1997	Paraguay (Asunción)	Acta de la XII Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países signatarios del Tratado del Mercado Común del Sur
13	01/12/1997	Uruguay (Montevideo)	Ata da XIII Reunião de Ministros de Educação dos Países signatarios do Tratado do Mercado Comum do Sul
14	19/06/1998	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	Ata da XIV Reunião de Ministros de Educação dos Países signatarios do Tratado do Mercado Comum do Sul
15	20/11/1998	Brazil (Brasília)	XV Reunião de Ministros de Educação dos Países membros do Mercosul
16	28/05/1999	Paraguay (Asunción)	XVI Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países signatarios del Tratado del Mercado Común del Sur
17	26/11/1999	Uruguay (Montevideo)	XVII Reunião de Ministros de Educação dos Países signatários do Tratado do Mercado Comum do Sul
18	15/06/2000	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	XVIII Reunião de Ministros de Educação dos Países signatários do Tratado do Mercado Comum do Sul
19	01/12/2000	Brazil (Gramado)	Ata da XIX Reunião de Ministros de Educação dos Países signatários do Tratado do Mercado Comum do Sul
20	28/06/2001	Paraguay (Asunción)	Acta de la XX Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países signatarios del Tratado del Mercado Común del Sur

21	23/09/2001	Uruguay (Punta del Este)	Acta de la XXI Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países signatarios del Tratado del Mercado Común del Sur
22	14/06/2002	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	Acta de la XXII Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países del Mercosur, Bolivia y Chile
23	22/11/2002	Brazil (Rio de Janeiro)	Acta de la XXIII Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países del Mercosur, Bolivia y Chile
24	06/06/2003	Paraguay (Asunción)	XXIV Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países del Mercosur, Bolivia y Chile (RME)
25	20/11/2003	Uruguay (Montevideo)	XXV Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países del Mercosur, Bolivia y Chile
26	10/06/2004	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	XXVI Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países del Mercosur, Bolivia y Chile (RME)
27	19/11/2004	Brazil (Porto Alegre)	XXVII Reunião dos Ministros de Educação dos Países do Mercosur, Bolivia e Chile
28	10/06/2005	Paraguay (Asunción)	XXVIII Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países del Mercosur, Bolivia y Chile (RME)
29	10/11/2005	Uruguay (Montevideo)	XXIX Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países del Mercosur, Bolivia, Chile y Venezuela
30	02/06/2006	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	XXX Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países del Mercosur
31	24/11/2006	Brazil (Belo Horizonte)	XXXI Reunião dos Ministros da Educação dos Países do MERCOSUL
32	01/06/2007	Paraguay (Asunción)	XXXII Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países del Mercosur
33	09/11/2007	Uruguay (Montevideo)	XXXIII Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países del Mercosur
34	13/06/2008	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	XXXIV Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países del Mercosur
35	21/11/2008	Brazil (Foz do Iguaçu)	XXXV Reunião dos Ministros da Educação dos Países do MERCOSUL
36	04/06/2009	Paraguay (Asunción)	XXXVI Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países del Mercosur
37	20/11/2009	Uruguay (Montevideo)	XXXVII Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países del Mercosur
38	09/06/2010	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	XXXVIII Reunión de Ministros de Educación del Mercosur
39	26/11/2010	Brazil (Rio de Janeiro)	XXXIX Reunião de Ministros de Educação do MERCOSUL
40	10/06/2011	Paraguay (Asunción)	XL Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países del Mercosur
41	18/11/2011	Uruguay (Montevideo)	XLI Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países del Mercosur
42	07/06/2012	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	Acta de la XLII Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países del Mercosur
43	23/11/2012	Brazil (Brasília)	Ata da XLIII Reunião de Ministros de Educação do Mercosul
44	14/06/2013	Uruguay (Montevideo)	Acta de la XLIV Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países del Mercosur

<b>45</b>	22/11/2013	Venezuela (Caracas)	Acta de la XLV Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países del Mercosur
<b>46</b>	21/11/2014	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	Acta de la XLVI Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países del Mercosur
<b>47</b>	12/06/2015	Brazil (Brasília)	Ata da XLVII Reunião de Ministros de Educação do Mercosul
<b>48</b>	27/11/2015	Paraguay (Asunción)	Acta de la XLVIII Reunión de Ministros de Educación del Mercosur
<b>49</b>	24/06/2016	Uruguay (Montevideo)	Acta de la XLIX Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países del Mercosur
<b>50</b>	16/06/2017	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	Acta de la L Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países del Mercosur
<b>51</b>	07/12/2017	Brazil (Brasília)	Ata da LI Reunião de Ministros de Educação do Mercosul
<b>52</b>	15/06/2018	Paraguay (Asunción)	Acta de la LII Reunión de Ministros de Educación de los Países del Mercosur

## Annex 4: Summary of CCR Meetings

#	Date	Place	Full name
1	17-19/02/1992	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Sector Educación en el Contexto del Mercado Común del Sur. Líneas Generales de acción.
2	8-10/09/1992	Brazil (Salvador)	Reunião de Ministros de Educação - IV Reunião do Comitê Coordenador Regional - Ajuda-memória
3	25-27/11/1992	Brazil (Brasilia)	Informe del Comité Coordinador Regional a los Señores Ministros de Educación de los Países del Mercosur, correspondiente al segundo semestre de 1992. V Reunión.
4	11-12/02/1993	Paraguay (Assuncion)	6a. Reunión Comité Coordinador Regional de Educación
5	28-29/06/1993	Paraguay (Assuncion)	7a. Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional de Educación
6	6-7/09/1993	Uruguay (Montevideo)	8a. Reunión Comité Coordinador Regional
7	23-24/11/1993	Uruguay (Montevideo)	IX Reunión de Coordinadores Regionales
8	19-20/12/1993	Uruguay (Montevideo)	10a. Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional
9	19-21/04/1994	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	XI Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Sector Educación en el Contexto del Mercosur.
10	1-3/08/1994	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	XII Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Sector Educación en el Contexto del Mercosur. Relatorio.
11	6-8/12/1994	Brazil (Ouro Preto)	XIII Reunião do Comitê Coordenador Regional do Mercosul Educacional
12	25-27/04/1995	Paraguay (Asunción)	XIV Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Sector Educación en el Contexto del Mercosur
13	24-28/07/1995	Paraguay (Asunción)	XV Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Sector Educación en el Contexto del Mercosur
14	5-6/10/1995	Uruguay (Montevideo)	Relatorio de la XVI Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Sector Educativo en el Contexto del Mercosur
15	28-30/11/1995	Uruguay (Montevideo)	Relatorio de la XVII Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Sector Educativo en el Contexto del Mercosur
16	25-27/03/1996	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	Relatorio de la XVIII Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Sector Educativo en el Contexto del Mercosur
17	18-19/06/1996	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	Relatorio de la XIX Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Sector Educativo en el Contexto del Mercosur
18	4-6/09/1996	Brazil (Natal)	XIX Reunião do Comitê Coordenador Regional do Mercosul Educacional
19	26-28/11/1996	Brazil (Gramado)	XX Reunião do Comitê Coordenador Regional do Mercosul Educacional
20	9-10/06/1997	Paraguay (Asunción)	XXIII Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo

21	2-4/09/1998	Brazil (Salvador )	XVIII Reunião do Comitê Coordenador Regional do Setor Educacional do Mercosul
22	17/19/11/1998	Brazil (Brasilia)	XIX Reunião do Comitê Coordenador Regional do Setor Educacional do Mercosul
23	21-24/08/2000	Uruguay (Florida)	Seminario de Reflexion Estrategica del Sector Educativo del Mercosur. Marco referencial para la formulacion de un nuevo Plan Trienal.
24	4-6/10/2000	Brazil (Brasilia)	XXXV Reunião do Comitê Coordenador Regional do Setor Educacional do Mercosul
25	19-22/09/2001	Uruguay (Montevideo)	XXXIX Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
26	11-13/06/2002	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	XLI Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
27	1-3/10/2002	Brazil (Fortaleza)	XLII Reunião do Comitê Coordenador Regional do Setor Educacional do Mercosul
28	19-21/11/2002	Brazil (Rio de Janeiro)	XLII Reunião do Comitê Coordenador Regional do Setor Educacional do Mercosul
29	12-13/03/2003	Paraguay (Asunción)	XLIV Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
30	6-7/06/2003	Paraguay (Asunción)	XLV Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
31	16-17/09/2003	Uruguay (Montevideo)	XLVI Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
32	17-19/11/2003	Uruguay (Montevideo)	XLVII Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
33	28-29/04/2004	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	XLVIII Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
34	7-9/06/2004	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	XLIX Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
35	15-17/09/2004	Brazil (Florianopolis)	L Reunião do Comitê Coordenador Regional do Setor Educacional do Mercosul
36	17-18/11/2004	Brazil (Porto Alegre)	LI Reunião do Comitê Coordenador Regional do Setor Educacional do Mercosul
37	28-29/04/2005	Paraguay (Asunción)	LII Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
38	7-9/06/2005	Paraguay (Asunción)	LIII Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
39	30-31/08 1/09/2005	Uruguay (Montevideo)	LIV Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
40	7-9/11/2005	Uruguay (Montevideo)	LV Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
41	19-21/04/2006	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	LVI Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
42	18-19/05/2006	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	LVII Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur

43	4-6/09/2006	Brazil (Curitiba)	LVIII Reunião do Comitê Coordenador Regional do Setor Educacional do Mercosul
44	20-22/11/2006	Brazil (Belo Horizonte)	LIX Reunião do Comitê Coordenador Regional do Setor Educacional do Mercosul
45	25-27/04/2007	Paraguay (Asunción)	LX Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
46	29-31/05/2007	Paraguay (Asunción)	LXI Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
47	22-24/08/2007	Uruguay (Montevideo)	LXII Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
48	6-8/11/2007	Uruguay (Montevideo)	LXIII Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
49	23-25/04/2008	Argentina (Mar del Plata)	LXIV Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
50	9-12/06/2008	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	LXV Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
51	22-25/09/2008	Brazil (Foz do Iguacu)	LXVI Reunião do Comitê Coordenador Regional do Setor Educacional do Mercosul
52	18-20/11/2008	Brazil (Foz do Iguacu)	LXVII Reunião do Comitê Coordenador Regional do Setor Educacional do Mercosul
53	15-17/04/2009	Paraguay (Asunción)	LXVIII Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
54	1-3/06/2009	Paraguay (Asunción)	LXIX Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
55	9-11/09/2009	Uruguay (Montevideo)	LXX Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
56	16-19/11/2009	Uruguay (Montevideo)	LXXI Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
57	13-16/04/2010	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	LXXII Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
58	7-8/06/2010	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	LXXIII Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
59	20-23/09/2010	Brazil (Salvador)	LXXIV Reunião do Comitê Coordenador Regional do Setor Educacional do Mercosul
60	19-20/10/2010	Uruguay (Montevideo)	LXXV Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
61	22-25/11/2010	Brazil (Rio de Janeiro)	LXXVI Reunião do Comitê Coordenador Regional do Setor Educacional do Mercosul
62	11-14/04/2011	Paraguay (Asunción)	LXXVII Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
63	17-18/05/2011	Paraguay (Asunción)	LXXVIII Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
64	6-9/06/2011	Paraguay (Asunción)	LXXIX Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur

65	14-16/09/2011	Uruguay (Montevideo)	LXXX Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
66	14-17/11/2011	Uruguay (Montevideo)	LXXXI Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
67	10-13/04/2012	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	LXXXII Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
68	4-6/06/2012	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	LXXXIII Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
69	19-21/09/2012	Brazil (Brasilia)	LXXXIV Reunião do Comitê Coordenador Regional do Setor Educacional do Mercosul
70	19-22/22/2012	Brazil (Brasilia)	LXXXV Reunião do Comitê Coordenador Regional do Setor Educacional do Mercosul
71	24-26/04/2013	Paraguay (Asunción)	LXXXVI Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
72	10-13/06/2013	Paraguay (Asunción)	LXXXVII Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
73	30/09 - 1-3/10/2013	Venezuela (Caracas)	LXXXVIII Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
74	18-21/11/2013	Venezuela (Caracas)	LXXXIX Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
75	1-3/10/2014	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	XC Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
76	17-20/11/2014	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	XCI Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
77	15-17/04/2015	Brazil (Brasilia)	XCII Reunião do Comitê Coordenador Regional do Setor Educacional do Mercosul
78	8-11/06/2015	Brazil (Brasilia)	XCIII Reunião do Comitê Coordenador Regional do Setor Educacional do Mercosul
79	22-25/09/2015	Paraguay (Asunción)	XCIV Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
80	23-26/11/2015	Paraguay (Asunción)	XCV Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
81	24/02/2016	Uruguay	XCVI Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur (VC)
82	05/04/2016	Uruguay	XCVII Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur
84	30/01/2017	Argentina	XCIX Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur (VC)
85	14/02/2017	Argentina	C Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur (VC)
86	02/03/2017	Argentina	CI Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional del Mercosur Educativo del Mercosur (VC)

## Annex 5: Summary of CHE Meetings

#	Date	Place	Full name
1	6-8/09/1993	Uruguay (Montevideo)	8a Reunión del Comité Coordinador Regional (WG in HE - I HE meeting)
2	23-25/11/1993	Uruguay (Montevideo)	IX Reunión de Coordinadores Regionales. Grupo: Area Educación Superior
3	4-5/04/1994	Brazil (Rio de Janeiro)	Reunião da Comissão Mercosul. Estudo do Reconhecimento de Títulos e Diplomas
4	27-28/10/1994	Paraguay (Asunción)	Reunión de la Comisión Técnica de Educación Superior del Mercosur. Reconocimiento de Estudios, Títulos y Diplomas
5	4-5/10/1995	Uruguay (Montevideo)	III Reunión de la Comisión Técnica de Educación Superior para el Reconocimiento de Estudios, Títulos y Diplomas del Mercosur
6	19-20/08/1996	Unspecified	[IV] Relatorio de la Reunión de la Comisión Técnica de Educación Superior del 19 y 20 de Agosto
7	24/11/1996	Brazil (Gramado)	V Reunião da Comissão Técnica Regional de Educação Superior
8	14-15/04/1997	Paraguay (Ciudad del Este)	VI Reunión de la Comisión Técnica Regional de Educación Superior
9	08/06/1997	Paraguay (Asunción)	VII Reunión de la Comisión Técnica Regional de Educación Superior
10	15/09/1997	Uruguay (Montevideo)	Acta de la VIII Reunión de la Comisión Técnica Regional Ad-Hoc de Educación Superior
11	25/11/1997	Uruguay (Montevideo)	Acta de la IX Reunión de la Comisión Técnica Regional Ad-Hoc de Educación Superior
12	1-2/04/1998	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	Acta de la X Reunión de la Comisión Técnica Regional de Educación Superior
13	09/06/1998	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	Acta de la XI Reunión de la Comisión Técnica Regional de Educación Superior
14	31/08/1998	Brazil (Salvador)	XII Reunião da Comissão Técnica Regional de Educação Superior
15	16-17/11/1998	Brazil (Brasília)	XIII Reunião da Comissão Técnica Regional de Educação Superior
16	29-30/03/2000	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	Acta de la XVII Reunión de la Comisión Técnica Regional de Educación Superior
17	13-14/11/2000	Brazil (Porto Alegre)	Ata da XIX Reunião da Comissão Técnica Regional de Educação Superior
18	9-10/05/2001	Paraguay (Asunción)	Relatório de la I Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
23	9-10/05/2001	Paraguay (Asunción)	Plan Mercosur Educativo 2001-2005 - Educación Superior
24	22/06/2001	Chile (Santiago)	Acta de la II Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
25	26-27/11/2001	Uruguay (Montevideo)	Acta de la III Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
26	02/04/2002	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	Acta de la IV Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior (CRC-ES)
27	08/06/2002	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	Acta de la V Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior (CRC-ES)
28	13/06/2002	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	Acta de la Reunión Extraordinaria de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior (CRC-ES)
29	26-27/09/2002	Brazil (Fortaleza)	VI Reunião da Comissão Regional Coordenadora de Educação Superior do Setor Educacional do Mercosul
30	21/11/2002	Brazil (Rio de Janeiro)	VII Reunião da Comissão Regional Coordenadora de Educação Superior do Setor Educacional do Mercosul

31	07/05/2004	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	Acta de la IX Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
32	3-4/09/2004	Paraguay (Asunción)	Ata da X Reunião da Comissão Técnica Regional de Educação Superior
33	25-27/04/2005	Paraguay (Asunción)	XIII Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
34	5-6/06/2005	Paraguay (Asunción)	XIV Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
35	4-5/10/2005	Uruguay (Montevideo)	XV Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
36	7-8/11/2005	Uruguay (Montevideo)	XVI Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
37	03/05/2006	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	(XVII) Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
38	22-23/05/2006	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	XVIII Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
39	29-31/08/2006	Brazil (Brasília)	XIX Reunião da Comissão Regional Coordenadora de Educação Superior
40	19-20/10/2006	Brazil (Curitiba)	XX Reunião da Comissão Regional Coordenadora de Educação Superior
41	16-19/04/2007	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	XXI Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
42	28-29/05/2007	Paraguay (Asunción)	XXII Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
43	7-8/08/2007	Uruguay (Montevideo)	XXIII Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
44	5-6/11/2007	Uruguay (Montevideo)	XXIV Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
45	3-4/04/2008	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	XXV Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
46	21-23/05/2008	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	XXVI Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
47	21-23/05/2008	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	Documento conceitual. Espaço Regional de Educação Superior do Mercosul
48	21-23/05/2008	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	La Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior del Sector Educativo del MERCOSUR, en el marco de la Conferencia Regional de Educación Superior 2008
49	10-11/09/2008	Brazil (Foz do Iguaçu)	XXVII Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
50	10-11/09/2008	Brazil (Foz do Iguaçu)	Propuesta: Prueba Piloto (Proposta Argentina para o Espaço Regional de Educação Superior).
51	12/11/2008	Brazil (Foz do Iguaçu)	XXVIII Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
52	24-25/03/2009	Paraguay (Asunción)	XXIX Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
53	26-27/05/2009	Paraguay (Asunción)	XXX Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
54	26-27/05/2009	Paraguay (Asunción)	Un aporte de la Universidad de la Republica para el desarrollo del Espacio Regional de Educación Superior
55	1-3/09/2009	Uruguay (Montevideo)	XXXI Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
56	4-6/11/2009	Uruguay (Montevideo)	XXXII Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
57	7-9/04/2010	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	XXXIII Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
58	18-20/05/2010	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	XXXIV Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
59	2-3/08/2010	Brazil (not clear where)	Reunião Extraordinária da Comissão Regional Coordenadora de Educação Superior para o Plano Estratégico 2011-2015.

60	14-17/09/2010	Brazil (Salvador)	XXXV Reunião da Comissão Regional Coordenadora de Educação Superior
61	25-26/10/2010	Brazil (Brasília)	II Reunião Extraordinária da Comissão Regional Coordenadora de Educação Superior para o Plano Estratégico 2011-2015.
62	16-18/11/2010	Brazil (Rio de Janeiro)	XXXVI Reunião da Comissão Regional Coordenadora de Educação Superior
63	4-6/04/2011	Paraguay (Asunción)	XXXVII Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
64	6-9/06/2011	Paraguay (Asunción)	XXXVIII Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
65	30/08-01/09/2011	Uruguay (Montevideo)	XXXIX Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior del Sector Educativo del Mercosur
66	14-16/11/2011	Uruguay (Montevideo)	XL Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
67	28-30/03/2012	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	XLI Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
68	4-6/06/2012	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	XLII Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
69	3-5/09/2012	Brazil (Brasília)	XLIII Reunião da Comissão Regional Coordenadora de Educação Superior
70	12-14/11/2012	Brazil (Brasília)	XLIV Reunião da Comissão Regional Coordenadora de Educação Superior
71	18-19/03/2013	Uruguay (Montevideo)	XLV Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
72	11-13/06/2013	Uruguay (Montevideo)	XLVI Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
73	30/09-02/10/2013	Venezuela (Caracas)	XLVII Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
74	18-20/11/2013	Venezuela (Caracas)	XLVIII Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
75	17-19/09/2014	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	XLIX Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
76	17-19/11/2014	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	L Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior
77	18-20/03/2015	Brazil (Brasília)	LI Reunião da Comissão Regional Coordenadora de Educação Superior
78	1-2/06/2015	Brazil (Brasília)	LII Reunião da Comissão Regional Coordenadora de Educação Superior
79	10-13/11/2015	Paraguay (Asunción)	LIII Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior (CRC-ES) del Mercosur
80	16-18/03/2016	Uruguay (Montevideo)	(LIV) Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior (CRC-ES)
81	16-18/03/2016	Uruguay (Montevideo)	Plan SEM 2016-2020
82	07/06/2016	Videoconference	Acta de la Videoconferencia de la [LV Reunión de la] Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior (CRC-ES) del Mercosur
83	15/03/2017	Videoconference	Acta de la LVI Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior (CRC-ES)
84	19-20/04/2017	Argentina (Buenos Aires)	Acta de la LVII Reunión de la Comisión Regional Coordinadora de Educación Superior

## Annex 6: 2016 Pilot Study Ethics Form, University of Bristol

### GSoE RESEARCH ETHICS FORM

It is important for members of the Graduate School of Education, as a community of researchers, to consider the ethical issues that arise, or may arise, in any research they propose to conduct. Increasingly, we are also accountable to external bodies to demonstrate that research proposals have had a degree of scrutiny. *This form must therefore be completed for each piece of research carried out by members of the School, both staff and students*

The GSoE's process is designed to be supportive and educative. If you are preparing to submit a research proposal, you need to do the following:

- 1. Arrange a meeting with a fellow researcher**  
The purpose of the meeting is to discuss ethical aspects of your proposed research, so you need to meet with someone with relevant research experience. A list of prompts for your discussion is given below. Not all these headings will be relevant for any particular proposal.
- 2. Complete the form on the back of this sheet**  
The form is designed to act as a record of your discussion and any decisions you make.
- 3. Upload a copy of this form and any other documents (e.g. information sheets, consent forms) to the online ethics tool at :** <https://dbms.ilrt.bris.ac.uk/red/ethics-online-tool/applications>.

**Please note: Following the upload you will need to answer ALL the questions on the ethics online survey and submit for approval by your supervisor (see the flowchart and user guides on the GSoE Ethics Homepage).**

If you have any questions or queries, please contact the ethics co-ordinators at: [gsoe-ethics@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:gsoe-ethics@bristol.ac.uk)

**Please ensure that you allow time before any submission deadlines to complete this process.**

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#### Prompts for discussion

You are invited to consider the issues highlighted below and note any decisions made. You may wish to refer to relevant published ethical guidelines to prepare for your meeting. See <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/education/research/networks/ethicnet> for links to several such sets of guidelines.

1. Researcher access/ exit
2. Information given to participants
3. Participants right of withdrawal
4. Informed consent
5. Complaints procedure
6. Safety and well-being of participants/ researchers
7. Anonymity/ confidentiality
8. Data collection
9. Data analysis
10. Data storage
11. Data Protection Act
12. Feedback
13. Responsibilities to colleagues/ academic community
14. Reporting of research

Be aware that ethical responsibility continues throughout the research process. If further issues arise as your research progresses, it may be appropriate to cycle again through the above process.

Name(s): Aliandra Lazzari Barlete

Proposed research project: Analysis of the cultural political economy dynamics of higher education regional integration in Mercosur (pilot study)

Proposed funder(s): Santander Travel Grant

Discussant for the ethics meeting: [xxx]

Name of supervisor: Susan Robertson

Has your supervisor seen this submitted draft of your ethics application?

Please include an outline of the project or append a short (1 page) summary:

Summary:

I will be conducting a pilot study to collect preliminary data for a doctoral research that will investigate the efforts of regional integration in higher education within Latin America. The main objective of the study is to demonstrate how the symbolic and material dynamics in higher education are developed through the relationship between higher education systems in the context of constant changes of Mercosur by examining the changing nature, circumstances and consequences of regional integration carried out under the Mercosur agreements, as they are reflected in, and mediated by, Mercosur as a regional organisation.

Anchored in the theoretical approach of cultural political economy to explore region-building, I propose the use of critical realist ontological stance to build a historical investigation through the retroductive logic of explanation (Danermark et al, 2002; Sayer, 2010). By means of an intensive research design (Danermark et al, 2002; Sayer, 1992; 2000),

My research questions are: (1) In what ways and with what consequences has higher education been used as a tool to promote regional integration between the Mercosur Member States in Latin America? (2) How and in what ways have the different histories of the Member States' cultural politics and ongoing relations between members of Mercosur mediated the nature, form and scope of what comes to constitute Mercosur higher education? (3) In what ways and with what consequences have the structures, forms and practices of higher education systems of Mercosur members been constructed and mediated through Mercosur higher education?

Methodology: As a case study of the context of a regional organisation, this study will be guided by the critical realism as a meta-theory and ontological stance. Retroduction will be used as the mode of inference to draw conclusions from the data collected. I will look at Mercosur as a case study of the context of a regional organisation. I will employ documental analysis, policy tracing method, observation of meetings and semi-structured interviews (face-to-face, via Skype or telephone calls) to collect data and relational-dialectical CDA approach (Fairclough, 1989, 2003) to analyse the context of shifting dynamics of Mercosur higher education in three levels: national, regional and intra-regional.

**Ethical issues discussed and decisions taken (see list of prompts overleaf):**

1. Researcher access/ exit: Participants will be contacted by email. If necessary, follow up with telephone calls.

2. Information given to participants – Presentation e-mail in which the Information Sheet will be attached.
3. Participants right of withdrawal – Participants will be given up to 2 months after the interview date to give up taking part of the study.
4. Informed consent – For face to face interviews, participants will receive a hard copy of the Informed Consent to sign in the day of the interview. For Skype interviews or telephone calls, the Informed consent will be sent by email. Participants will be requested to reply in writing to the email.
5. Complaints procedure – Participants can contact the researcher should they wish to make any complaints. The contact details will be made available in the Information Sheet.
6. Safety and well-being of participants/ researchers. Meetings will take place in public places to ensure the participants and researcher will feel safe.
7. Anonymity/ confidentiality – All participants will be made anonymous in the interviews. Codes such as “senior managers”, “academics” will be used. However, it is essential in my study to identify the participants’ country of origin.
8. Data collection: Documents will be collected from official and open sources, such as websites. All sources will be clearly identified in the List of bibliography. If/when further documentation is requested to the participants during the interview, I will negotiate with participants whether the sources can be cited. If not allowed, they will not be used in any report or publications.
9. Data analysis: Data will be transformed into text and analysed using CDA, following Fairclough’s relational-dialectical approach.
10. Data storage: Interviews will be safely stored at the University of Bristol’s filing system and encrypted. Interviews will be coded by number.
11. Data Protection Act: Reassure participants that their personal information will not be shared.
12. Feedback – Offer email for feedback from participants.
13. Responsibilities to colleagues/ academic community: Make sure the data analysis and conclusions are obtained as clearly and transparent as possible.
14. Reporting of research: maintain agreed confidentiality and anonymity (see item, n. 7) when discussing results in progression report.

If you feel you need to discuss any issue further, or to highlight difficulties, please contact the GSoE’s ethics co-ordinators who will suggest possible ways forward.

(Signatures)

## **Annex 7: 2016 Pilot Study Information Sheet (in English, Portuguese and Spanish)**

### **English version:**

#### **Information sheet**

Project: Analysis of the cultural political economy dynamics of higher education regional integration in Mercosur.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this project.

This preliminary study is part of my doctoral research that will investigate the efforts of regional integration in higher education within Latin America. The research's main objective is to demonstrate how the symbolic and material dynamics in higher education are developed through the relationship between higher education systems in the context of constant changes of Mercosur by examining the changing nature, circumstances and consequences of regional integration carried out under the Mercosur agreements, as they are reflected in, and mediated by, Mercosur as a regional organisation.

Anchored in the theoretical approach of cultural political economy to explore region-building, I propose the use of critical realist ontological stance to build a historical investigation through the retroductory logic of explanation (Danermark et al, 2002; Sayer, 2010). By means of an intensive research design (Danermark et al, 2002; Sayer, 1992; 2000), I will look at Mercosur as a case study of the context of a regional organisation. I will employ documental analysis, policy tracing method and semi-structured interviews to collect data and relational-dialectical CDA approach (Fairclough, 1989, 2003) to analyse the context of shifting dynamics of Mercosur higher education in three levels: national, regional and intra-regional.

My doctoral study's research questions are: (1) In what ways and with what consequences has higher education been used as a tool to promote regional integration between the Mercosur Member States in Latin America? (2) How and in what ways have the different histories of the Member States' cultural politics and ongoing relations between members of Mercosur mediated the nature, form and scope of what comes to constitute Mercosur higher education? (3) In what ways and with what consequences have the structures, forms and practices of higher education systems of Mercosur members been constructed and mediated through Mercosur higher education?

Planned outputs for this study are: a progression report, presentations in academic conferences, and articles to be published in peer-review journals. The preliminary study will also inform my thesis.

The research follows the ethical procedures from the University of Bristol's Graduate School of Education. I am committed to aspects of anonymity and confidentiality throughout the study. Your name will not be used in any output of the study. In any citation, you will be referenced either as an "academic" or as a "senior manager".

The participation in this study is voluntary. Should you wish to withdraw your participation at any time please do let me know and the material will not be used in any part of the outputs listed above generated by this project.

Please contact the investigator in the contact details below, should you have any questions or concerns about your participation in the research.

Thank you very much again for your time.

Ms. Aliandra Barlete

Doctoral Researcher, Graduate School of Education

University of Bristol

[email address]

#### **14.8.2. Portuguese version**

Descrição do projeto

Título: Analysis of the cultural political economy dynamics of higher education regional integration in Mercosur.

Obrigada pelo interesse em participar neste projeto.

Este estudo preliminar faz parte da minha pesquisa de doutorado que irá investigar os esforços de integração regional no setor de educação superior na América Latina. O objetivo principal da pesquisa é demonstrar como as dinâmicas simbólicas e materiais da educação superior são desenvolvidos através da relação entre os sistemas de educação no contexto de mudanças constantes do Mercosul. Pretendo examinar a natureza das mudanças, as circunstâncias e as consequências da integração regional realizadas no âmbito do acordo do Mercosul, como essas mudanças se refletem e são mediados pelo Mercosul como uma organização regional.

Ancorado na abordagem teórica da economia política e cultural para explorar a construção de regiões, o estudo propõe o uso da abordagem ontológica do realismo crítico para construir uma investigação histórica, usando a retrodução como lógica de inferência (Danermark et al, 2002; Sayer, 2010). Por meio de uma pesquisa intensiva (Danermark et al, 2002; Sayer, 1992; 2000), o Mercosul será considerado como um estudo de caso do contexto de uma organização regional. Pesquisa documental, método de rastreamento de processos (process tracing), e entrevistas semi-estruturadas comporão o corpus de dados que serão transformados em texto e submetidos a análise crítica de discurso (CDA) (Fairclough, 1989, 2003), a fim de buscar os mecanismos causais das mudanças na educação superior no Mercosur em três níveis: nacional, regional e intra-regional.

As perguntas de pesquisa são: (1) De que forma e com quais consequências a educação superior foi usada como ferramenta para promover a integração regional entre os Estados membros do Mercosul? (2) Como e de que forma as diferentes histórias das políticas culturais dos estados-membro do Mercosul mediam a natureza, a forma e o escopo do que vem a constituir a educação superior no Mercosul? (3) De que forma e com que consequências as estruturas, formas e práticas dos sistemas de educação superior dos estados-membro do Mercosul foram construídas e mediadas através do Mercosul Educativo?

Os resultados previstos para este estudo preliminar são: um relatório de qualificação de tese, apresentações em conferências acadêmicas e artigos a serem publicados em revistas acadêmicas. O estudo preliminar também irá informar o conteúdo da minha tese doutoral, que será concluída na Universidade de Cambridge.

A pesquisa segue os procedimentos éticos da Graduate School of Education, Universidade de Bristol. Serão respeitados o anonimato e confidencialidade dos dados recolhidos durante todo o estudo. O seu nome não vai ser usado em nenhuma publicação ou apresentação em nenhuma etapa da pesquisa. No caso de citações, você será referenciado ou como "acadêmico", ou como "gerente sênior" (*senior manager*).

A participação neste estudo é voluntária. Se deseja retirar sua participação a qualquer momento, por favor, deixe-me saber e o material não será usado em qualquer parte dos resultados listados acima.

Entre em contato com o investigador nos detalhes de contato abaixo, se tiver quaisquer dúvidas ou preocupações sobre a sua participação na pesquisa.

Muito obrigada mais uma vez pelo seu tempo.

Ms. Aliandra Barlete

Doctoral Researcher, Graduate School of Education

University of Bristol

[email address]

Telefone: (deleted)

### **14.8.3. Spanish version**

Descripción del Proyecto

Título: Analysis of the cultural political economy dynamics of higher education regional integration in Mercosur.

Gracias por su interés en participar en este proyecto.

Este estudio preliminar es parte de mi investigación doctoral acerca de los esfuerzos de integración regional en la educación superior en América Latina. El objetivo principal de la investigación es demostrar cómo las dinámicas simbólica y material de la educación superior se desarrollan a través de la relación entre los sistemas de educación superior en el contexto de los cambios constantes del Mercosur. Se examinarán la naturaleza cambiante, las circunstancias y las consecuencias de la integración regional llevadas a cabo bajo los acuerdos del Mercosur Educativo.

Anclado en el enfoque teórico de la economía política y cultural para explorar la construcción de regiones, el estudio propone el uso del abordaje ontológico del realismo crítico para construir una investigación histórica, utilizando la retroducción como lógica de inferencia

(Danermark et al, 2002; Sayer, 2010). Por medio de un diseño de investigación intensiva (Danermark et al, 2002; Sayer, 1992; 2000), se adoptará el Mercosur como un estudio de caso en el contexto de una organización regional. Se utilizará de investigación documental, método de rastreo de procesos (*process tracing*) y las entrevistas semi-estructuradas para recopilar datos y análisis de discurso (CDA) (Fairclough, 1989, 2003) para analizar el contexto del cambio de la dinámica de la educación superior el Mercosur en tres niveles: nacional, regional e intra -regional.

Las preguntas de investigación son: (1) ¿De qué manera y con qué consecuencias la educación superior ha sido utilizada como una herramienta para promover la integración regional entre los estados miembros del Mercosur? (2) ¿Cómo y de qué forma las diferentes historias de la política cultural de los Estados miembros han sido mediadas por la naturaleza, la forma y el alcance de lo que viene a constituir la educación superior del Mercosur? (3) ¿De qué manera y con qué consecuencias las estructuras, formas y prácticas de los sistemas de educación superior de los miembros del Mercosur han sido construidas y mediadas por los proyectos regionales del Mercosur Educativo?

Los resultados previstos en este estudio preliminar son: un informe de progresión académica, presentaciones en conferencias académicas y artículos que se publicarán en revistas académicas de revisión por pares. El estudio preliminar también informará a mi tesis doctoral, que será concluida en la Universidad de Cambridge.

La investigación sigue los procedimientos éticos de la Graduate School of Education de la Universidad de Bristol. Se respetarán los aspectos del anonimato y la confidencialidad durante todo el estudio. Su nombre no será utilizado en cualquier publicación del estudio. En cualquier citación, se le hace referencia, como un "académico" o como un "alto directivo" (*senior manager*).

La participación en este estudio es voluntaria. Si desea retirar su participación en cualquier momento por favor hágamelo saber y el material no se puede utilizar en cualquier parte de los resultados mencionados anteriormente.

Por favor, póngase en contacto con el investigador en los detalles de contacto a continuación, en caso de tener alguna pregunta o inquietud acerca de su participación en el estudio.

Muchas gracias de nuevo por su interés.

Ms. Aliandra Barlete

Doctoral Researcher, Graduate School of Education

University of Bristol

Email address: (deleted)

Tel: (deleted)

## **Annex 8: 2016 Pilot Study Informed Consent (in English, Portuguese and Spanish)**

### **English version**

#### **Informed consent**

Project: Analysis of the cultural political economy dynamics of higher education regional integration in Mercosur.

Researcher: Ms. Aliandra Barlete, Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol, 35 Berkeley Square, BS8 1JA, Bristol, UK. E-mail [email address]

I hereby fully and freely consent to my participation in this study.

I understand the nature and purpose of the procedures involved in this study. These have been communicated to me on the information sheet accompanying this form.

I understand and acknowledge that the investigation is designed to promote scientific knowledge and that the University of Bristol will use the data I provide for no purpose other than research.

I understand the data I provide will be kept confidential. My name or other identifying information will not be disclosed in any presentation or publication of the research.

I understand that the University of Bristol may use the data collected for this project in a future research project but that the conditions on this form under which I have provided the data will still apply.

Participant's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name in BLOCK Letters: \_\_\_\_\_

### **14.8.2. Portuguese version**

#### **Termo de Consentimento Livre e Esclarecido**

Projeto: *Analysis of the cultural political economy dynamics of higher education regional integration in Mercosur.* (Análise da dinâmica de economia política cultural de integração regional da educação superior no Mercosul).

Pesquisadora: Aliandra Barlete, Graduate School of Education, Universidade de Bristol, 35 Berkeley Square, BS8 1JA, Bristol, Reino Unido. E-mail: a.barlete@bristol.ac.uk.

Manifesto meu livre consentimento em participar deste estudo de forma voluntária.

Eu entendo a natureza e a finalidade dos procedimentos envolvidos neste estudo. Esses foram Comunicados a mim na descrição do projeto que acompanha esse formulário.

Eu entendo e reconheço que a pesquisa se destina a promover conhecimento científico e que a Universidade de Bristol vai usar os dados que eu prever sem nenhum outro propósito do que a pesquisa acadêmica.

Eu entendo os dados que fornecerei serão mantidos confidenciais e sigilosos. Meu nome ou outras informações de identificação não serão divulgados em quaisquer apresentações ou publicações da pesquisa.

Eu entendo que a Universidade de Bristol pode utilizar os dados recolhidos para este projeto num projeto de investigação futuro, mas que as mesmas condições sob as quais eu forneci os dados ainda serão aplicadas.

Assinatura do participante: \_\_\_\_\_ Data: \_\_\_\_\_

Nome em letras maiúsculas: \_\_\_\_\_

### 14.8.3 Spanish version

#### Documento de consentimiento informado

Proyecto: *Analysis of the cultural political economy dynamics of higher education regional integration in Mercosur*

Investigadora: Aliandra Barlete, Graduate School of Education, Universidad de Bristol, 35 Berkeley Square, BS8 1JA, Bristol, Reino Unido. E-mail: a.barlete@bristol.ac.uk.

Por la presente, acepto participar de forma libre y voluntaria de este estudio

Entiendo la naturaleza y finalidad de los procedimientos involucrados en este estudio. Estos han sido comunicados a mí en la Descripción del Proyecto que acompaña a este formulario.

Entiendo y reconozco que la investigación está diseñada para promover el conocimiento científico y que la Universidad de Bristol utilizará los datos que proporcione para ningún propósito que no sea la investigación.

Entiendo que los datos que proporcione serán tratados de forma confidencial y sigilosa. Mi nombre u otra información de identificación no serán revelados en cualquier presentación o publicación de la investigación.

Yo entiendo que la Universidad de Bristol puede utilizar los datos recogidos para este proyecto en un proyecto de investigación futura, pero que aún se aplicarán las condiciones de esta forma bajo la cual he proporcionado los datos.

La firma del participante: \_\_\_\_\_ Fecha: \_\_\_\_\_

Nombre en letras mayúsculas: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Annex 9: 2016 Pilot Study Questions for semi-structured interviews**

### **Pilot study data collection**

#### **Semi-structured questions for academics**

Research: Analysis of the cultural political economy dynamics of higher education regional integration in Mercosur.

- Can you tell me about your background in researching about education in the Mercosur?
- Can you tell me about your background in working with the Mercosur?
- What do you see as the main changes implemented?
- What were the conditions for this change to happen? Why did this change happen?
- What should have been in place for this to be avoided?
- What are the likely outcomes of these changes?
- What do you see the contribution of the academic cooperation to the Common Area?
- As far as I was able to understand, the change in the governance of the process would imply a better result. Would you agree?

Why/ why not?

### **Pilot study data collection**

#### **Semi-structured questions for Mercosur Staff**

Research: Analysis of the cultural political economy dynamics of higher education regional integration in Mercosur.

- Can you tell me about your background in researching about education in the Mercosur?
- Can you tell me about your background in working with the Mercosur?
- What do you see as the main changes implemented?
- What were the conditions for this change to happen? Why did this change happen?
- What should have been in place for this to be avoided?
- What are the likely outcomes of these changes?
- What do you see the contribution of the academic cooperation to the Common Area?
- As far as I was able to understand, the change in the governance of the process would imply a better result. Would you agree?

Why/ why not?

## Annex 10: 2017 Fieldwork Ethics Form, University of Cambridge

### RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW CHECKLIST FOR FACULTY OF EDUCATION

#### The Faculty's Three Stages of Ethical Clearance

**Stage 1** involves you in completion of this Ethics Review Checklist. This is the first stage of three. It will help you (and others) decide to what extent you need to become involved in the second and third stages. When you have completed it you (and the Faculty) will be in a position to make this judgement.

**Stage 2** will involve you in discussing any ethical dimensions of your research in some depth with your another 'knowledgeable person of standing'; this is a very likely outcome of completing the checklist. Further details are provided in Section C.

**Stage 3** will involve you in obtaining formal 'ethical clearance' through the Faculty of Education's procedures; some projects will need to proceed to this stage. Further details are provided in Section C.

**Most of the questions on this checklist deliberately offer you just two answers ('yes' or 'no'). You will probably find that you can answer many of the questions unequivocally one way or the other. However, sometimes you may wish there was an 'it depends' response category. If you find yourself in this position, please give the answer which suggests that, at this preliminary stage, there might be an ethical issue requiring more discussion at Stage 2.**

### RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW CHECKLIST FOR FACULTY OF EDUCATION

#### Section A: Details of the Project

<b>Student Name</b>	Aliandra Lazzari Barlete
<b>Email</b>	(deleted)
<b>Supervisor</b>	Prof. Susan Lee Robertson
<b>Supervisor email</b>	(deleted)
<b>Registration Report Title</b>	The changing place, players and space of higher education in the regional project of Mercosur 1991 – 2016.

#### Section B: Checklist

Code of Practice relating to Educational Research		
1a	Have you read the <i>Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research</i> (2011) of the British Educational Research Association (BERA)? (if you have not read it, the latest version is available at <a href="http://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/bera-ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2011">http://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/bera-ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2011</a> )	Yes
1b	Is this Code relevant to the conduct of your research? If you have answered 'no', please briefly explain why:	Yes
1c	Do you agree to subscribe to the Code in carrying out your own research?	Yes

2	Are there any aspects of your proposed research which, in the context of BERA's Code of Practice, might give rise to concern amongst other educational researchers?	No
<b>If you have answered 'yes', please briefly list possible causes for concern below:</b>		
a		
b		
c		
3a	Will you be analysing an existing data set that has already been collected by someone else?	No
3b	If you answered YES: can you confirm that the data you will be using is <i>either</i>  Already available in the public domain for anyone to analyse Or You have been given permission by the owner of the data set to undertake your own analysis and results <sup>247</sup>	
4	Will you be collecting your own research data for the study (through such techniques as interviewing people, observing situations, issuing questionnaires etc)?  <b><i>nb. If you have answered NO to this question, you may proceed to Section C and need not answer any further questions in this section.</i></b>	Yes
<b>Obtaining 'Informed Consent'</b>		
5	Are you familiar with the concept of 'informed consent'? (if you are not familiar with this concept you should first consult the following source: page 5 of the BERA	Yes
6	Does your research involve securing participation from children, young people or adults where the concept of 'informed consent' might apply?  <i>Permission is likely to be needed to report any information about people or institutions that is not in the public domain, and which you have been able to obtain due to your privileged access to the research site(s) in whatever capacity</i> <sup>248</sup>	Yes
<b>If you have answered 'yes' to Question 6 above, please answer the following questions.</b>		
7a	Do you believe that you are adopting suitable safeguards with respect to obtaining 'informed consent' from participants in your research in line with the Code of Practice?	Yes
7b	Will all the information about individuals and institutions be treated on an 'in confidence' basis at all stages of your research including writing up and publication?	Yes

<sup>247</sup> this permission should only be given if the owner of the data can make it available for secondary analysis on the basis of the informed consent they obtained from their original participants

<sup>248</sup> Professional work (such as teaching) can involve the collection of evidence to better understand problems/issues and to evaluate innovative practice - leaving practitioners with the question of when these activities become formal research requiring informed consent. This comment is meant to highlight how the collection of data for public reporting beyond the institution (e.g. in a thesis) should be considered as a key criterion for deciding when informed consent is required.

7c(i)	Will all the information collected about the institution(s) where research is based be presented in ways that guarantee the institution(s) cannot be identified from information provided in the report?  <i>Note: in a thesis written by a researcher about a research context where they have a publicly acknowledged role, it is difficult to disguise the identity of the institution whilst also providing the expected detail of the researcher's relationship with the research context.<sup>249</sup></i>	Yes
7c(ii)	If not, has the appropriate responsible person given approval for the research on the understanding that the identity of the institution cannot be protected in the report of the research?	
7c(iii)	Will all the information collected about individuals be presented in ways that guarantee their anonymity?  <i>Note: a person with a named role, or having a specific set of reported characteristics that is unique in the research context, cannot be assured of the anonymity when the identity of the research site cannot be protected.</i>	It depends – This is an international study – the country of origin might be identified to allow comparison and theoretical discussion.
7c(iv)	If not, have these issues been explained to the relevant participants (and appropriate gatekeepers in the case of children or other vulnerable participants)?	Yes
<b>The Involvement of Adults in the Research</b>		
8a	Will your research involve adults?	Yes
<b>If you have answered 'yes' to Question 8a above, please answer the following questions; otherwise move to Question 9.</b>		
8b	Will these adults be provided with sufficient information <i>prior</i> to agreeing to participate in your research to enable them to exercise 'informed consent'?	Yes
8c	Will the adults involved in your research be in a position to give 'informed consent' themselves with respect to their participation?	Yes
8d	Will these adults be able to opt out of your research in its entirety if they wish to do so by, for example, declining to be interviewed or refusing to answer a questionnaire?	Yes
8e	Will these adults be able to opt out of parts of your research by, for example, declining to participate in certain activities or answer particular questions?	Yes
<b>The Involvement of Children, Young People and other potentially Vulnerable Persons in the Research</b>		

<sup>249</sup> At present the implicit assumption is that anonymity is always desirable\*, and is always achievable. In many studies these assumptions are sound. However, a practitioner (e.g. teacher) reporting research into their own practice/institution in a thesis would normally need to be explicit about their professional relationship to the research context to give an authentic account of their research. As the staff lists of many educational institutions are in the public domain and often readily found by a web search, a thesis by a named member of staff allows the institution to be readily identified from the name of the thesis author.

Given that an institution can readily be identified, this also has consequences for the degree of anonymity that can be promised to participants - for example those with named roles such as Head of Year 11, Student Voice Coordinator, Head Prefect, etc, or those identifiable from detailed reported characteristics.

\* Some institutions or participants may welcome being acknowledged by name in a thesis, and their views should be taken into account and balanced against other considerations.

9a	Will your research involve children, young people or other potentially vulnerable persons (such as those with learning disabilities or your own students).	No
<p><b>If you have answered 'yes' to Question 9a above, please answer the following questions; otherwise move to Question 10.</b></p> <p>In educational and social research 'informed consent' regarding access is often given by a 'gatekeeper' on behalf of a wider group of persons (e.g. a head or class teacher with respect to their pupils, a youth worker working with young people, another person in an 'authority' position).</p>		
9b	Who will act as the 'gatekeeper(s)' in your research? Please list their position(s) briefly below and, where this is not self-evident, describe the nature of their relationship with those on whose behalves they are giving 'informed consent'. <b>The researcher cannot act as the gatekeeper (see 9g below)</b>	
i		
ii		
iii		
9c	Will you be briefing your 'gatekeeper(s)' about the nature of the questions or activities you will be undertaking with the children, young people or other potentially vulnerable persons involved in your research?	Yes/No
9d	If another person (such as a teacher or parent of a child in your study) expressed concerns about any of the questions or activities involved in your research, would your 'gatekeeper(s)' have sufficient information to provide a brief justification for having given 'informed consent'?	Yes/No
9e	If unforeseen problems were to arise during the course of the research, would your 'gatekeeper(s)' be able to contact you at relatively short notice to seek advice, if they needed to do so?	Yes/No
9f	Could your 'gatekeeper(s)' withdraw consent during the research if, for whatever reason, they felt this to be necessary?	Yes/No
9g(i)	Are you undertaking research into your own professional context/institution (e.g. with students in a school where you work)? If you answered 'Yes' then you should identify (in 9b above) a suitable senior person who has agreed to act as an independent point of contact for participants to act as the gatekeeper, and answer the following two questions:	Yes/No
9g(ii)	Will you ensure that other people in the research context are aware of the identity of the gatekeeper?	Yes/No
9g(iii)	Will you take reasonable precautions to ensure that research participants (and where appropriate their parents/guardians) know that they should contact the gatekeeper (and not you) if they have any concerns about the research?	Yes/No
<b>Other Ethical Aspects of the Research</b>		
10	Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time? (eg covert observation of people in public)	No
11	Will the research involve the discussion of topics which some people may deem to be 'sensitive'? (e.g. sexual activity, drug use, certain matters relating to political attitudes or religious beliefs)	No
12	Does the research involve any questions or activities which might be considered inappropriate in an educational setting?	No

13	Are drugs, placebos or other substances (e.g. food substances, vitamins) to be administered to study participants or will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind? <i>If you have ticked 'Yes' it is vital to refer the matter to the Faculty Research Office for onward reference to the University Insurance Section.</i>	No
14	Will blood, tissue or other samples be taken from the bodies of participants?	No
15	Is pain or more than mild discomfort likely to result from the study?	No
16	Could the research involve psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life?	No
17	Are there any other aspects of the research which could be interpreted as infringing the norms and expectations of behaviour prevailing in educational settings?	No
18	Are there any other aspects of the research which could be to the participants'	No
19	Will the study involve prolonged or repetitive testing?	No
20	Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses or compensation for time) be offered to participants?	No

## SECTION C: Interpretation of Results

If any of your answers coincide with the response options having a coloured background, then you should assume that further discussion involving Stage 2 procedures is required because some aspect of your proposed research is likely to be 'ethically sensitive'. In practice, many issues can be resolved at this stage.

Members of staff should be especially careful about research involving their own students (question 9g).

*If you have ticked 'yes' in response to one or more of questions 10 to 20, both Stage 2 **and** Stage 3 clearance will definitely be required.*

### Stage 2 Clearance

Any 'ethically sensitive' responses identified above should be discussed with a 'knowledgeable person of standing'. In the case of students within the Faculty, this person will, in almost every case, be the person supervising your research.

**On completion of the discussion, the 'knowledgeable person of standing' is asked to choose one of the following three responses, to delete the other two and to affirm their views by adding their signature.**

a	I have discussed the ethical dimensions of this research and, as outlined to me, I do not foresee any ethical issues arising which require further clearance.
b	There may be some ethical issues arising from this research. I think it would be prudent for the researcher to seek further advice and, possibly, Stage 3 clearance.
c	Ethical issues arise in this research which require further discussion; my advice is that Stage 3 ethical clearance should be sought.

<b>Supervisor Name/ Signature</b>	Prof. Susan Robertson
<b>Date</b>	

## Annex 11: 2017 Fieldwork Risk assessment, University of Cambridge

### Cambridge University

#### Risk Assessment and Travel Authorisation Form

This form should be completed by any staff or student planning to engage in any travel or fieldwork activity, of whatever duration. If the planned location of travel is advised against by the UK's FCO website this form should be discussed with the Divisional Safety Officer prior to being submitted for approval.

Once complete, this form should be submitted to the Divisional Safety Officer for approval. Submission should occur at least 3 months before your intended travel date.

#### Section 1 - Personal Information

To be completed by all travellers

Date of Completion	05/01/2017
Family Name	Lazzari Barlete
Given Name(s)	Aliandra Raquel
Department	Education
Email	

Location(s) of Travel	Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay
Purpose of Travel	Fieldwork for doctoral research
Planned Travel Dates	
Type of Fieldwork	Qualitative research (Semi-structured interviews)

Date of Birth		College	Wolfson
Supervisor	Prof. Susan Robertson	Course	PhD Education
Gender	Female	Nationality	Brazilian

#### Contact Information

<b>Local Phone Number (include country code)</b>	
<b>Mobile Phone Number(s)<sup>250</sup></b>	
<b>Address(s)</b> <i>Please include dates of residence if multiple addresses are to be used throughout the trip</i>	
<b>Email address</b>	

#### Local Contact Person

<b>Name</b>	<b>Telephone Number</b>	<b>Email Address</b>	<b>Town/City of Residence</b>
(deleted)	(deleted)	(deleted)	(deleted)

#### Check-in Details/Emergency Contact Points

*Arrange a suitable frequency and method of check-ins with your supervisor or other designated person for the duration of the trip. It is important that the Check-in Person is able to acknowledge all check-in communications.*

<sup>250</sup> Recommend immediate access to at least 2 phone numbers at all times. This may be a local sim and a UK sim (set to roaming), or include a satellite telephone if standard GSM communications are unreliable/lack coverage

Check-in Person (primary and alternate)	Check-in Frequency	Contact details	Means of Communication	Alternative Means of Communication
Prof. Susan Robertson	weekly		email	telephone
Dr. Fabio Barlete	weekly		Whatsapp	email

#### Description of Travel/Fieldwork

What is the FCO Travel Advice<sup>251</sup> for your intended location(s)?

See our travel advice before travelling	Advise against all but essential travel	Advise against all travel
Most visits trouble free for Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay.		

***If the FCO advice advises against all but essential travel, or all travel, you will also need to complete Section 2 of this form.***

What activities will you be undertaking during your trip?

*I plan to conduct fieldwork for my doctoral research in Latin America from March 2017 until June 2017. The activity will consist of collecting primary data (semi-structured interviews) and secondary data (documents, books, meeting minutes) in the Mercosur Educativo Member States, which are: Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, and possibly Chile. Participants will be senior managers of higher education systems (ministry, higher education institutions), which have been involved in the Mercosur HE project in different historical periods. Interviews should take place in public spaces, in public, private institutions, as well as in the countries' Ministries of Education, all located in urban areas.*

Are you travelling to an existing project or are you undertaking independent travel?

*Independent travel, part of my doctoral project.*

What locations will be visited and how much travel will be involved throughout the duration of the trip?

*I plan to conduct semi-structured interviews in:*

- Brazil: Brasilia, Foz do Iguaçu, Porto Alegre, São Paulo, other cities if necessary (all urban areas)
- Argentina: Buenos Aires, Cordoba, Mendoza (all urban areas)
- Uruguay: Montevideo (Uruguay) (urban area),
- Paraguay: Asunción, Ciudad del Este (all urban areas)
- Chile: Santiago, depending on the location of participants and the opportunity to interview key informants for the project.

*Most travel will be done via bus/coach. Buses/ coach connections are reliable, safe, and roads are safe with regular police monitoring throughout the countries, due to the Mercosur regional agreement (similar to the European Union agreement). Most bus companies offer executive services and satellite monitoring.*

<sup>251</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>

Please describe any additional personal/leisure activities you expect to undertake before/during/after your work<sup>252</sup>

*Short visit to family in Brazil before returning to Cambridge in June.*

### **Itinerary, Security and Contact Information**

*(Please record each section of your proposed trip on a separate line, giving as much detail as possible. This should include any transit airports. Add rows if necessary)*

<b>Depart from</b>	<b>Travel to</b>	<b>Date of travel</b>	<b>Activities at this location</b>
<i>UK</i>	<i>Brazil (SP international airport)</i>	<i>(deleted)</i>	<i>Data collection (Interviews and documental research)</i>
<i>Brazil</i>	<i>Paraguay (via Foz do Iguacu), by bus</i>	<i>(deleted)</i>	<i>Data collection (Interviews and documental research) in Foz do Iguacu, Ciudad del Este, Asunción</i>
<i>Paraguay</i>	<i>Argentina (by bus)</i>	<i>(deleted)</i>	<i>Data collection (Interviews and documental research) in Argentina (Buenos Aires, Cordoba, Mendoza)</i>
<i>Argentina</i>	<i>Chile (by bus from Mendoza)</i>	<i>(deleted)</i>	<i>Data collection (Interviews and documental research) in Chile (Santiago, Valparaiso if suggested)</i>
<i>Chile</i>	<i>Uruguay (via Argentina, by bus)</i>	<i>(deleted)</i>	<i>Data collection (Interviews and documental research) in Uruguay</i>
<i>Uruguay</i>	<i>South Brazil (dry border)</i>	<i>(deleted)</i>	<i>Data collection (Interviews and documental research) in South Brazil</i>
<i>Brazil (Sao Paulo International Airport)</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>(deleted)</i>	<i>Return to the UK</i>

### **Passport Details**

<b>Passport Number</b>	<b>Expiry Date</b>	<b>Country of Issue</b>

<sup>252</sup> Personal activities not related to your research/field work can increase your vulnerability to threats present in the environment you are travelling to, and therefore may affect your ability to undertake the intended fieldwork

## Annex 12: 2017 Fieldwork Clearance from the University of Cambridge's Occupational Health

Aliandra Lazzari Barile [REDACTED]

**Office use only:**

**OHA discussions check list**

Health status  Vaccinations  Insurance   
 HIV PEP requirements  PEP risk assessment form  Security / accident risks   
 Post travel review / aware to visit GP if problems

**Travel discussions** (supported with written and/or website information)

	Yes	No	N/A		Yes	No	N/A
MASTA health brief	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	NsTHNec country page	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Insect bite avoidance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Traveller's diarrhoea	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Malaria signs and symptoms	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Food and water borne diseases	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chemoprophylaxis / side effects	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rabies	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
First aid kits	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Safe blood / BCF	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Personal safety	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sun protection	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Altitude	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Evaluation form provided	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Travel kit contents / requirements** (to be completed following information and discussion with traveller)

Anti-malarials  Choice: *To decide*  
 Malaria emergency treatment  Choice:  
 Hep A  Boost / course / declined Sterile kit   
 Typhoid  Boost / course / declined Ciprofloxacin   
 Hep A and Typhoid  Boost / course / declined  
 Tetanus/Diphtheria/Polio  Boost / course / declined  
 Yellow fever vaccine  Boost / course / declined  
 Rabies vaccine  Boost / course / declined  
 Hepatitis B vaccine  Boost / course / declined  
 Gloves  S / M / L  
 Safety goggles / specs  Safeview / Glasses / Goggles

Advised to see GP / travel clinic for additional vaccinations not available at OHT: Yes  N/A   
 Follow-up appointments arranged: Yes  N/A

**Comments/additional notes:**  
*Family live in Brazil - will be staying with them.  
 Will travel by bus. To see GP for further vaccinations  
 - Assessed for travel vaccines and risks. To have Hep A /  
 Typhoid. To come back for anti-malarials. Suitable to  
 travel - cleared. Follow up appointment booked re. 1/1/17.*

OHA signature: *[Signature]* Print name: RACHAEL O'BRIEN  
 Traveller signature: *[Signature]* Date: 14/12/16

RACHAEL O'BRIEN  
Occupational Health  
Advisor

## Annex 13: 2017 Fieldwork Description of Study, University of Cambridge (English, Portuguese and Spanish)

### English version

#### Information sheet

Project title: The changing place, players and space of higher education in the regional project of Mercosur - 1991 - 2016

Thank you for your interest in participating in this project.

This doctoral research project is concerned with the changing relationships between higher education and the regional organisation Mercosur, as part of a region-building project.

The study aims at shedding new insight on the changing place, players and space of higher education in regional development by looking at Mercosur's ideational and material project over time. It will focus on the main historical moments when new ideas, actors and outcomes give the regional project a different dynamic.

Drawing on a cultural political economy as a theoretical resource to explore region-building (Robertson et al., 2016), the study will employ a broadly critical stance to build a historical investigation into Mercosur's higher education region-building project. Process tracing will be employed to analyse the changing relationship between its Member States' education systems, the regional neighbours involved in Mercosur, the impact of global education policies and of the external actors in the shaping of the Mercosur higher education project.

The research questions that guide the study are:

*What are the dynamics shaping the higher education project in the Mercosur?*

*What are the dominant power dynamics in the region and how, why have these shifted over time?*

*What are the visible external influences over the Mercosur education project?*

Planned outputs for this study are: a doctoral thesis, presentations in academic conferences, conference papers and articles to be published in peer-reviewed journals.

The research follows the ethical procedures from the University of Cambridge's Faculty of Education. I am committed to aspects of anonymity and confidentiality throughout the study. In any citation, you will be referenced as a "senior manager", and your name will not be used in any output of the study. However, your country of origin will be mentioned as a way to provide conditions for comparison between Mercosur Member States.

The participation in this study is voluntary. Your contribution as a participant will be by means of semi-structured interviews, with a duration of 45-60 minutes. Interviews may be recorded, and the audio digital file will be stored in a secured password protected domain managed by the University of Cambridge. Transcriptions will be accessed only by the researcher and her supervisor, in order to conduct the analysis.

Should you wish to withdraw your participation at any time, please do let me know and the material will not be used in any part of the outputs generated by this project.

Should you have any questions or concerns about your participation in the research, please contact the researcher in the details below.

Thank you very much again for your interest.

Ms. Aliandra Lazzari Barlete  
PhD Candidate, Wolfson College

Faculty of Education  
University of Cambridge  
148 Hills Road  
Cambridge, CB2 8PQ  
Tel: (deleted)  
Email: (deleted)

#### **14.14.2. Portuguese version**

##### **Apresentação da pesquisa**

Título: Regionalismo na América Latina, Mercosul e Educação Superior: uma abordagem da Economia Política Cultural

Pesquisadora: Aliandra Lazzari Barlete, Faculdade de Educação, Universidade de Cambridge

Orientadora: Profa. Dra. Susan Lee Robertson

Obrigada pelo interesse em participar desta pesquisa.

O estudo compõe minha pesquisa de doutorado, e investiga as mudanças de espaços, atores e lugar da educação superior no projeto regional do Mercosul entre 1991 e 2016. O objetivo principal da pesquisa é analisar os principais momentos históricos da região, quando novas ideias, atores e resultados produziram uma diferente dinâmica ou ainda diferentes significados no projeto de educação superior.

Ancorado na abordagem teórica da Economia Política Cultural para explorar a construção de regiões, o projeto toma o Mercosul como um estudo de caso. Documentos regionais, como planos de ação e atas de reuniões, e entrevistas semiestruturadas comporão o corpus do estudo. Esses serão analisados segundo o método de rastreamento de processos (*process tracing*), e da análise crítica de discurso (CDA) (Fairclough, 1989, 2003), como aportes para a investigação das mudanças na dinâmica e nos significados do projeto de educação superior do Mercosul.

As perguntas de pesquisa são:

*Quais dinâmicas definem e permeiam o projeto regional de educação superior no Mercosul?*

*Quais são as influências externas visíveis na definição do projeto de educação superior do Mercosul?*

*Em que medida, e de que forma, o projeto de educação superior do Mercosul se projeta como um modelo para outras experiências de regionalismo na América Latina?*

A pesquisa segue os procedimentos éticos da Faculdade de Educação, Universidade de Cambridge. Serão respeitados o anonimato e a confidencialidade das informações recolhidas por entrevista ou comunicação escrita durante todo o estudo. O seu nome não vai ser usado em nenhuma publicação ou apresentação em nenhuma etapa da pesquisa. Os resultados do estudo serão: uma tese, apresentações em conferências especializadas e artigos em revistas acadêmicas. No caso de citações, você será referenciado como "gestor sênior" (*senior manager*). Entretanto, o seu país de origem pode ser mencionado, a fim de permitir análise comparativa entre os países membros do Mercosul.

A participação neste estudo é voluntária. Sua contribuição será na forma de entrevistas semiestruturadas com a duração prevista de 45 minutos, que poderão ser gravadas. É possível realizar entrevistas por e-mail. Os arquivos digitais de texto, de áudio e as transcrições serão guardados no domínio seguro da Universidade de Cambridge, o qual é protegido por senha. Somente terão acesso aos arquivos de texto e às transcrições a pesquisadora e sua orientadora, a fim de conduzir a análise.

Se deseja retirar sua participação a qualquer momento, por favor, deixe-me saber e nenhum material será usado em qualquer parte da análise ou dos resultados listados acima.

Por favor entrar em contato nos detalhes abaixo se tiver quaisquer dúvidas ou preocupações sobre a sua participação na pesquisa.

Muito obrigada mais uma vez pela sua participação.

Ms. Aliandra Lazzari Barlete  
PhD Candidate, Wolfson College

Faculty of Education  
University of Cambridge  
148 Hills Road  
Cambridge, CB2 8PQ  
Tel: (deleted)  
Email: (deleted)

## C) Spanish version

### Descripción del Estudio

Título: Regionalismo en Latinoamérica, Mercosur y Educación Superior: un acercamiento desde el abordaje de la Economía Política Cultural

Investigadora: Aliandra Lazzari Barlete, Facultad de Educación, Universidad de Cambridge

Directora: Prof. Dra. Susan Lee Robertson

Gracias por su interés en participar de esta investigación.

Este proyecto de investigación doctoral se ocupa de los cambios de lugar, actores y espacio de la educación superior en el proyecto regional del Mercosur entre 1991 y 2016. Se centrará en los principales momentos históricos cuando nuevas ideas resultaron en cambios en la dinámica regional. Para la colecta de datos, serán utilizados documentos del Mercosur, tales como actas de reuniones, proyectos conjuntos, bien como entrevistas semiestructuradas. Para fines de análisis, se emplearán el rastreo de procesos y análisis crítico de discurso (CDA) (Fairclough, 1989, 2003), como instrumentos para investigar tanto el contexto de las dinámicas de los cambios como el proceso de construcción de significados a lo largo de la evolución del proyecto de educación superior del Mercosur.

Las preguntas de investigación que guían el estudio son:

- ¿Cuál es la dinámica que configura el proyecto de educación superior en el Mercosur?
- ¿Cuáles son las influencias externas visibles sobre el proyecto de educación superior del Mercosur?
- ¿En qué medida y de qué manera se comprende el proyecto regional Mercosur en educación regional como modelo para el regionalismo latinoamericano en el tema de educación superior?

La investigación sigue los procedimientos éticos de la Facultad de Educación de la Universidad de Cambridge. Estoy comprometida con aspectos de anonimato y confidencialidad a lo largo del estudio. Su nombre no se utilizará en ninguna publicación resultante del estudio, por ejemplo: una tesis doctoral, presentaciones en conferencias académicas y artículos en revistas académicas. En cualquier citación, se le hará referencia como un "gerente senior" (*senior manager*). Sin embargo, se mencionará su país de origen a fin de proporcionar condiciones para la comparación entre los Estados miembros y asociados del Mercosur.

La participación en este estudio es voluntaria. Su contribución se dará a través de una entrevista semiestructurada, con una duración máxima de 45 minutos. Las entrevistas pueden ser grabadas y el archivo digital de audio, bien como su transcripción, serán almacenados en un servidor protegido con contraseña administrado por la Universidad de Cambridge. La transcripción de la entrevista será restringida a la investigadora y su directora para fin de análisis.

Si en cualquier momento desea retirar su participación del estudio, por favor hágamelo saber y el material no será utilizado en ninguna parte de las publicaciones o presentaciones resultantes de esta investigación.

Si tiene alguna inquietud o pregunta acerca de su participación, favor comunicarse a través de los datos de contacto a continuación.

Atentamente

Aliandra Lazzari Barlete  
PhD Candidate, Wolfson College

Faculty of Education  
University of Cambridge  
148 Hills Road  
Cambridge, CB2 8PQ  
Tel: (deleted)  
Email: (deleted)

## **Annex 14: 2017 Fieldwork: Informed Consent, University of Cambridge (in Portuguese and Spanish)**

### **A) Portuguese version**

#### **Termo de consentimento de pesquisa**

#### **Título: Regionalismo na América Latina, Mercosul e Educação Superior: uma abordagem da Economia Política Cultural**

Pesquisadora: Aliandra Lazzari Barlete, Faculdade de Educação, Universidade de Cambridge

Orientadora: Profa. Dra. Susan Lee Robertson

- Concordo em participar deste estudo de forma voluntária. Entendo que estou livre para me retirar do estudo a qualquer momento sem dar uma razão.
- Confirmo que li e entendi o documento de Apresentação do Projeto.
- Tive a oportunidade de fazer perguntas sobre o projeto e as respostas foram satisfatórias.
- Concordo que os dados recolhidos neste estudo sejam armazenados de forma anônima e segura. Meu nome ou outras informações de identificação pessoal não serão divulgados em quaisquer apresentações ou publicações resultantes da pesquisa.
- Os dados recolhidos podem ser utilizados para investigação futura, porém as mesmas condições sob as quais eu forneci os dados ainda serão aplicadas.

Assinatura do participante: \_\_\_\_\_ Data: \_\_\_\_\_

Nome em letras maiúsculas: \_\_\_\_\_

Assinatura do pesquisador: \_\_\_\_\_

Nome: Aliandra Lazzari Barlete

Data: \_\_\_\_\_

### **B) Spanish version**

#### Documento de consentimiento informado

Título: Regionalismo en Latinoamérica, Mercosur y Educación Superior: un acercamiento desde el abordaje

de la Economía Política Cultural.

Investigadora: Aliandra Lazzari Barlete, Faculdade de Educação, Universidade de Cambridge

Directora: Dra. Susan Lee Robertson

Por la presente, acepto participar de forma libre y voluntaria de esta investigación.

- Puedo retirar mi participación a cualquier momento sin indicar una razón.
- Confirmo que he leído el documento Descripción del Estudio.
- He tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas acerca del proyecto y recibí respuestas satisfactorias.
- Estoy de acuerdo que se almacenen los datos colectados en este estudio de forma confidencial, anónima y segura. Mi nombre u otras informaciones de identificación personal no serán divulgadas en cualquier presentación o publicación resultante de la investigación.
- Los datos colectados podrán ser utilizados para investigación futura, sin embargo se aplazarán las mismas condiciones bajo las cuales he proporcionado los datos.

La firma del/ de la participante: \_\_\_\_\_ Fecha:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_

La firma de la investigadora: \_\_\_\_\_

Nombre: Aliandra Lazzari Barlete

Fecha:

## **Annex 15: 2017 Fieldwork Questions for semi-structured interviews**

### Questions for semi-structured interviews

1. What was your participation in the development of the Mercosur (higher) education project? Please specify the period of operation and the meetings you attended.
2. During this period, how many changes did you go through? How were these discussed and implemented?

Why did the changes occur? Presidents? Concepts? Agendas? What factors influenced or induced the changes (e.g. were of an internal nature, such as changes in Mercosur, or external, such as international policies, influence from other regions, etc.)?

3. What has been your main contribution to the work of the Mercosur Education Sector?
4. In the evolution of the negotiations, is it possible to perceive a new role for SEM in the context of Latin American integration?
5. In my study, I am interested in the question of space. For some years, SEM meetings discussed the creation of a space, with a proposal from Brazil. Where could I find this proposal? Why was it decided that finally the space already existed?
6. In my analysis, I understand and conceptualize the SEM project as an education regionalism project.
7. How did this concept guide decision-making in (higher) education? Which of the SEM member countries had the greatest power of veto, or even political coordination for the implementation of ideas?
8. In which regional projects, if any, did SEM find inspiration? Was it possible to borrow ideas from other regions?
9. Throughout its 25 years, the minutes of meetings of the Mercosur Education Sector mention several international organisations that have cooperated in higher education projects. The predominant role of financing can be seen. What was sought by their participation in the meetings?
10. Which of these organizations has been the most significant in the work of the Educational Mercosur today? Have there been changes? How were the projects and financing negotiated?
11. (on actress) During the early 2000s, two regional organizations emerged: UNASUR (2008) and CELAC (2011). How did you think about the role of SEM in the relationship with these organisations? Were they relevant? What led you to them?

## Annex 16: Sample interview transcript

Extract of Interview with Senior Manager 10 (Brazil), in Portuguese, with some notes.

“(4:40 min) O MEC, naquele período, tinha uma preocupação muito grande em estimular os estudos e mecanismos de aproximação com os países do Cone Sul que formavam o Mercosul. Acho até que, a partir de 95, houve uma espécie de refrear desse processo. Quer dizer, foi um novo governo que assumiu, nós tivemos um novo ministro que ficou 8 anos. E a mim me parece - como observador - a mim me parece que a visão dele não se voltava muito pra América Latina de uma forma geral. Então, o Mercosul foi deixando de ser uma prioridade. Mas, entre fins de 1992 e até dezembro de 1994, o Mercosul esteve na primeira linha da política levada a efeito pelo MEC. O que mais você quer que eu diga sobre isso...”

(5:39 min) Nós chegamos a participar da coordenação rotativa do Mercosur Educacional, ou como dizem ‘*nuestros hermanos*’: el Mercosur Educativo (com ênfase do sotaque castelhano, risos). Participamos de todas as reuniões, algumas nós promovemos aqui. Chegamos a promover... o MEC chegou a promover reuniões de professores universitários brasileiros com professores universitários da Argentina e do Uruguai, sobretudo, mas também com o Paraguai, na tentativa de estabelecer algum tipo de projeto que pudesse estimular a integração. Eu falo especificamente de História e Geografia, que é uma área que eu considero vital, porque mexe com o eixo cultural que deve estar presente em qualquer processo integracionista. E fizemos... chegamos a fazer alguns estudos de compatibilização de programas de História nos países componentes do Mercosul. A ideia principal era fazer com o que nós chamamos aqui de Ensino Médio - que é a etapa final da Educação Básica, pudesse haver uma compatibilidade tal que os certificados de conclusão de curso pudessem ser reconhecidos [nos outros países]. Tivemos algum êxito nesse setor - sempre pequenos. Os êxitos são sempre pequenos.

(7:14)A: Porque os êxitos são...?

SM10: E as maiores dificuldades aconteceram na educação superior.

A: Porque o senhor diz que "os êxitos são sempre pequenos", e as dificuldades são sempre grandes? (risos)

SM10: Eu vou lhe dar alguma opinião que transcende o fato de eu ter sido [*sic – job post*], mas que tá muito ligada à minha formação acadêmica. Eu sou historiador. O Brasil sempre teve uma dificuldade histórica de se relacionar com os seus vizinhos na América Latina. Eu não sei se o componente geográfico tem alguma influência, por que nós temos à nossa frente o Oceano Atlântico, e nas nossas costas, a Cordilheira dos Andes. Então, historicamente, o Brasil sempre teve muita dificuldade, muita dificuldade - ele se volta pra Europa, e depois da virada do século XIX pro século XX, pros EUA - que seria outra grande referência. Mas, com a América Latina, muita dificuldade. Então, foi difícil sensibilizar a comunidade acadêmica brasileira para a necessidade e, pra viabilidade, dessa integração. Exceção feita aos estados no Sul. E aí, há, eu acho, um componente geográfico. Uma coisa é nós falarmos de um Mercosul... nós brasileiros, falarmos do Mercosul vivendo no Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina e no Paraná. A outra, é falar de Mercosul vivendo no Nordeste brasileiro, ou no extremo Norte do país. É muita dificuldade. Há dificuldade de integração dentro do próprio país, o que se dirá de fora. E essa dificuldade tá presente no próprio mundo acadêmico. Ou seja, há um sentimento, e nesse ponto - eu falo sobretudo nas ciências humanas - há um sentimento que talvez pudesse ser identificado como crença na inferioridade latino-

americana, se comparada com a capacidade acadêmica e intelectual do hemisfério norte, da Europa, dos Estados Unidos. Então, na área de ciências humanas, a Europa sempre foi a grande referência. Nos últimos anos, os Estados Unidos também têm chamado atenção. Mas é muito difícil [a integração com o Mercosul] . Só pra você ter uma ideia, o susto que eu levei agora, no ano de 2013, quando lecionando no [sic – department and institution], eu encontrei um aluno da graduação, que resolveu passar um semestre fazendo curso de [sic – degree] no Uruguai. Eu nunca tinha visto isso! Porque o comum é pedir bolsa à universidade... inclusive tem uma área de cooperação internacional, que facilita intercâmbio... um aluno passou semestre inteiro estudando [sic – degree] no Uruguai. Isso é um fato em meio a um universo, né, de gente que tem muita dificuldade de conhecer a América Latina. Tá melhorando? Está. Eu vou dizer que nos últimos 10 anos - eu falo da minha [sic - institution], não é, mas acredito que isso esteja acontecendo em várias partes do país - tem aumentado e de forma exponencial o número de pós-graduandos tanto no mestrado quanto no doutorado, fazendo dissertações e teses sobre a América Latina sobre as relações do Brasil com os vizinhos, ou sobre especificamente temas de [sic – degree ] dos próprios vizinhos. Só nos últimos 6 meses, eu participei de 5 bancas como examinador de Mestrado e de Doutorado, em que o objeto de estudo era exatamente a Argentina, Uruguai, a bacia do Prata, e por aí afora. É alguma coisa que tem acontecido no Brasil, e eu acho que talvez até de forma indireta, mas a criação do Mercosul, com todas as dificuldades de sua implantação, e de sua implementação, a criação do Mercosul de alguma forma incentivou a multiplicação de cursos de espanhol no país afora, nós tivemos até uma legislação tornando o espanhol em uma disciplina que deveria ser dada na Educação Básica. E nas universidades os cursos de espanhol vão se multiplicando. Isso já é alguma coisa, e eu acho que se reflete um pouco o esforço de se construir o Mercosul.

## Annex 17: Thought experiment: Who gets to play?

As I have noted in Chapter 9, In addition, after tracing key processes through hundreds of documents, I noticed I rarely came across actors other than those leading the region as representatives of the National Ministries of Education (Chapter 3), plus a handful of international organisations (IOs). In fact, IOs were traced mostly to CCR meetings, as SEM's place for getting resources through international cooperation. I started to visualise the HE Sector as if having a *border*, a line drawn to make visible different actors engaging with SEM. It led me to ask: how is this *bordering*<sup>253</sup> done, and who gets to do them, with that criteria, and set of outcomes? In spite of its relevance for the changing players in SEM, to analyse them I would have to diverge from the thesis's research design (process tracing). To maintain the coherence in the inquiry, I then problematise these issues in Annex 18 – 'Who gets to play?'.

I visualised the HE Sector as if having a *border*; a line drawn to make visible those who engage with the HE space and appear, those who engage but do not appear, and those who neither engage or appear (the absences). As per the analysis above, I have also established there are power elements and dynamics at play which both shape and reshape symbolic borders (Bernstein, 2000). If understanding these dynamics in lieu of the spatial relations as suggested by Lefebvre, we can see the action of the spatial politics of bordering.

To understand the power mechanisms, I draw upon two ideas: bordering as an expression of power relations (B. B. Bernstein, 2000), and how the interactions and the mechanisms resulting from power relations may result in the 're-bordering and thus the related 're-ordering' of the regional space (Robertson, 2011).

Lefebvre affirmed that any space necessarily embraces some things, and excludes other things (Lefebvre, 1991). This insight invited me to think about *who gets to be involved* in Mercosur SEM projects, and in what ways these actors also shape the regional space. An immediate follow up question to this interest is to learn how they represent the region they take part in different times, and also different spaces. The spaces they are embedded might

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<sup>253</sup> The field of education has also engaged with borders in different forms. Robertson (2011) has taken interest in the process of symbolic bordering(s) within education processes by opening up a debate about the relationship between 'bordering' and 'ordering'. While *bordering* gets defined as the process of establishing the limits of a border, *ordering* relates to the exercise of dealing with the consequences of such change. To Robertson, a critical analysis of the bordering work gives way to the understanding of current social orders, relations and identities as they are realised through the reshaping of educational spaces.

indicate how they shape the discursive frameworks that lead to choices about whether and how to engage in the region.

Lefebvre (1991) introduces the territorial and spatial strategies that agents use to experience space and place. He defines a ‘triad’ of experiences: spatial practice (perceived space), conceived space (representations of space) and lived space (representational spaces) (Brenner & Elden, 2009; Middleton, 2014). Spatial practices are the perceived spaces, or how actors see it. Representations of space indicate the abstract construction of spaces, conceived from ideology and knowledge. Lived space related to dialectical relation between the shaping of spaces, such as the built environment, and its interaction with bodies and ideas as they move through these spaces. Their combination creates social space (Torres, 2016). Verena Conley summarises the relationship when affirming that “there are those who produce space and those who are made to practice and live it according to the design of whoever is in power” (Conley, 2012, p. 12).

Actors, however, “do not create or construct social reality in the present. The structures of social reality are always pre-existing givens” (Leca & Naccache, 2006, p. 633). Their representations of spaces are historically-bound (Brenner & Elden, 2009). Their experience of space is bound to the mechanisms in context that make and remake the relation within which they exist. The way SEM actors represent the space they are in relates to aspects of their historical constitution.

To see how this dynamic played out, I will run two exercises. The first one is with a sample of SEM actors who are visible in the shaping of the HE space. To extract my conclusions, I looked into the interviews collected during pilot study and the fieldwork to explore their perceived contributions to the Sector. The second exercise looks at the participants of SEM projects whom I will define as the ‘hidden’ actors; those who are not *seen* as shaping a region even though they do by taking part in the calls. I did not collect data on the impact of SEM in the institutions in Mercosur, but I did look at institutional participation in three projects: accreditation, mobility and knowledge production. I mapped (literally) where they are in terms of *place* to understand the types of borderings they create as a *space*.

## Spatial politics of bordering

Borders are much more than the physical lines that separate territories. They can be defined, following Leung and Waters (2017, p. 1279), as being “multiple and dynamic, producing and being produced by the shifting power relationship among individuals and institutions involved, both directly and indirectly, in their formation and operation”. More importantly, borders are spaces that show intersections, networks, divides and identities<sup>254</sup>. Bordering, concluded Bernstein (2000) is the expression of power relations.

Borders are also symbols of inclusion and exclusion practices, giving rise to the construction of difference (Newman, 2003). Spaces are the product of social relations, and are constituted through interaction (Massey, 2005). Demarcation is the process of defining the criteria for setting up the borders (Massey, 2005; Newman, 2006). A border, if closed, insulates a space from ‘others’ to enter it, resulting in a matter of exclusions. Who gets to frame these borders in education? One argument is that they get demarcated by the exercise of power. Nonetheless, as Agnew reminds us, power is exercised from sites that vary in their geographical reach (Agnew, 1999, p. 501). These are beyond the territorial realm of the state, as Rumford explains:

The new spatiality of politics has also seen a shift from state-centric approaches to a concern with other, non-territorial spaces: public spheres, cosmopolitan communities, global civil societies, non-proximate or virtual communities, and transnational or global networks, none of which can be bordered in conventional ways. (Rumford, 2006, p. 160).

By asking who gets to play, there is the assumption that there is an element of possibility (*construals*<sup>255</sup>), not only of agency (otherwise it would be a question of: who *wants* to play), which can be a factor in the demarcation of the symbolic and social borders. The possibilities of engaging in this new space also depend on the authority and control of those establishing the limits of this possibility. These are met (in inter-relational style) by the power and agency of those actors aiming to be a part of this (bordered) space. It is the weakening, or even removing, of borders which allow new social orders and new identities to be produced, whilst others are made more or less visible (Robertson, 2011).

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<sup>254</sup> Delaney (2002) applies the concept of space to analyse the operation of power and the constitution of relational identities in terms of race.

<sup>255</sup> Construals are material forces with transformative effects (Sum & Jessop, 2003).

The capacity to be ‘inside’ or insulated by the borders depend on many variables which determine how strong or weak the borders are, and what kind of ordering has taken place. They differ from those at a ‘material border’ – i.e. passport control at the border, for the formalities and the bordering are normatively regulated. Finding out how these get shaped in Mercosur HE is the goal of the two exercises I present in the sequence.

### **Exercise one: the visible SEM actors**

To look into the perception of those in contact with the actors who shape SEM today has been one of the most rewarding experiences in this thesis. To me, they were *senior* for their decision-making possibilities were greater than any other actor. As such, they shared with me their representation of space – and how they constructed it from within. Their consciousness of their role was evident:

We have the serious challenge of trying to regionalise HE in a context in which regionalisation is of less and less interest to governments... and of course, if the state policy is not in the sense of favouring regional integration, or is only declarative, while the universities if we have the will and in fact we do it in spite of... In spite of national policies, we as an example of this experience and I believe that from Mercosur too, we continue trying because in reality HE has its own life, it has already generated a level of internationalization and in addition it is a world policy in which HE cannot be thought of as being linked to the geographical limits of a state, it is not possible<sup>256</sup> (Senior Manager 3, personal communication, May 18, 2017)

For them, to join the region means to combine lived space with the representational. “You cannot arrive to a meeting without having done your tasks”, explained SM 24, because a “commitment is a commitment”. That is the equivalent to explain that there are expected behaviours from the SEM members, and to a large extent, a sense of accountability. To consider the way in which actors think they should behave in an institutional setting by resorting to the concept of the logic of appropriateness (March & Olsen, 2009; J. P. Olsen, 2007) where

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<sup>256</sup> In the original: “Nosotros tenemos el grave desafío de intentar regionalizar la educación superior en un contexto en que la regionalización a los gobiernos les interesa cada vez menos... y eso claro, si la política de estado no va en sentido de favorecer la integración regional, o solamente es declarativo, mientras que las universidades si tenemos la voluntad y de hecho lo hacemos a pesar de...a pesar de las políticas nacionales nosotros como ejemplo de esta experiencia y creo que desde el Mercosur también, seguimos adelante tratando porque en realidad la educación superior tiene su vida propia, ya ha generado un nivel de internacionalización y además es una política mundial en donde la educación superior no puede pensarse vinculada a los límites geográficos de un estado, no es posible”.

...to act appropriately is to proceed according to the institutionalized practices of a collectivity and mutual understandings of what is true, reasonable, natural, right, and good. Actors seek to fulfil the obligations and duties encapsulated in a role, an identity, and a membership in a political community. Rules are followed because they are perceived to be adequate for the task at hand and to have normative validity (J. P. Olsen, 2007, p. 3).

Borrowing from institutionalist theory, we are invited to understand institutions as carriers of a set of norms that get internalised by its actors. These rules, as Olsen (ibid) explains, frames behaviour, shapes policies, and fashions individuals into following these behaviours. The combination of these structures of meaning and ways of thinking in turn legitimate these rules. As such, the rituals of SEM get reproduced and validated in line with the meanings constructed within the HE space. Those who join SEM will learn quickly how it is done.

Finally, I have also debated how the HE sector was shaped. The spaces of debate, or the spaces where the region gets made, is of utmost important. They appeared, for instance, when discussing with SM 8 about the how to shape a region:

A lot of work, a lot of discussion, flexibility, good will, but mainly, I think that this is a very important characteristic of Mercosur, it is to meet. Mercosur has meetings, periodic meetings that always take place. These meetings are very important, which can often even change the government, and there is a government that doesn't want that kind of integration anymore, but the meetings lead this government to have a different attitude. There are several positive things, so the fact that there are meetings and face-to-face meetings, also virtual, but face-to-face, is very important, I think<sup>257</sup> (SM 8, personal communication, March 23, 2017).

## **Exercise 2: The hidden**

To address the politics of bordering in the case of Mercosur HE projects, we are inspired by the set of questions Robertson (2011) proposed to identify situated practices of power in the education sector. The questions aim to address the main problem of what is at stake in bordering and ordering work by asking: ‘Who is doing the bordering? How is the

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<sup>257</sup> In the original: “Muito trabalho, muita discussão, flexibilidade, boa vontade, mas principalmente, eu acho que isso é uma característica muito importante do Mercosur, é se encontrar. O Mercosur tem reuniões, periódicas que sempre ocorrem. Essas reuniões são muito importantes, que muitas vezes pode até mudar o governo, e tem um governo que não quer mais aquele tipo de integração, mas as reuniões levam esse governo a ter uma postura diferente. [Por] que começa a ver que não é assim que funciona, tem várias coisas positivas, então o fato de existirem reuniões e encontros presenciais, também virtuais, mas presenciais, é muito importante, eu acho”.

drawing made? What kind of drawing is being made? Why is the drawing being made?’ The focus of the analysis will be on the HE *institutions* that take part in the regional initiatives in three HE projects: accreditation (ARCUSUR), undergraduate mobility of accredited programmes in different calls, and research networks (NEIES), which will be briefly detailed below.

### *Accreditation project*

Throughout this thesis I have detailed how important accreditation is for SEM. A short recap can help us to position the analysis of the project’s borderings. Together with mobility and inter-institutional cooperation, accreditation was one of the earliest HE goals in Mercosur. The accreditation project, as we know today, was not an immediate achievement – and in fact to the contrary. It emerged out of the idea of establishing mechanisms for the mutual recognition of diplomas<sup>258</sup>. The challenges in doing so led to the reorientation of the activities towards course accreditation in 1996 (Chapter 7) (Perrotta, 2012). In 1997, a Working Group (WG) received the task to design a programme which culminated in June 1998 the Ministers of Education signed a memorandum of understanding. The Memorandum gave origin to the Experimental Mechanism for Accreditation (MEXA) which became an accreditation system some 10 years later (in 2009). The accreditation of undergraduate degrees was understood to be the first step towards the recognition of diplomas and mobility within the region (MERCOSUR/RME, 1998b).<sup>259</sup> It was turned into a System, and known as Arcusur, and managed by a network of Agencies (RANA) (Barreyro, Lagoria, & Hizume, 2015). Agronomy, engineering and medicine were the first courses to go through the accreditation process. To each it was necessary to develop all indicators, the criteria, and a training material for evaluators. Most important of all it was to find a means to pay for the process as SEM did not have a central budget to enable the running of the project (and even now that it has with the FEM, the projects have not been able to access it yet).

Data from August 2018 shows that a total of 291 degrees have been accredited since 2008 (Table 1). A total of 141 HE institutions took part, and of those some 32% of the

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<sup>258</sup> Chapters 5 and 6 revealed how there was a connection between accreditation, quality assurance and recognition of diplomas: all of those were instruments expected to result in *mobility* at some point in time.

<sup>259</sup> Although the Memorandum details the workings of the programme, i.e. its internationally peer-reviewed process, a notable absence was the indication of how the Mechanism would be funded. It is important also to note that the condition for taking part in the accreditation project to have an accreditation agency. This requirement has pushed for national reforms in the Mercosur countries (Perrotta, 2013).

participating institutions were private. This distinction becomes relevant in the level of access to the activities funded by the Ministries of Education, for some of them can only transfer funds to public universities. This condition could be interpreted as a bordering exercise, in which only those eligible for accessing the funds will be eligible to take part in the SEM activities. Table 12.1 presents the total number of courses accredited in the Arcusur programme.

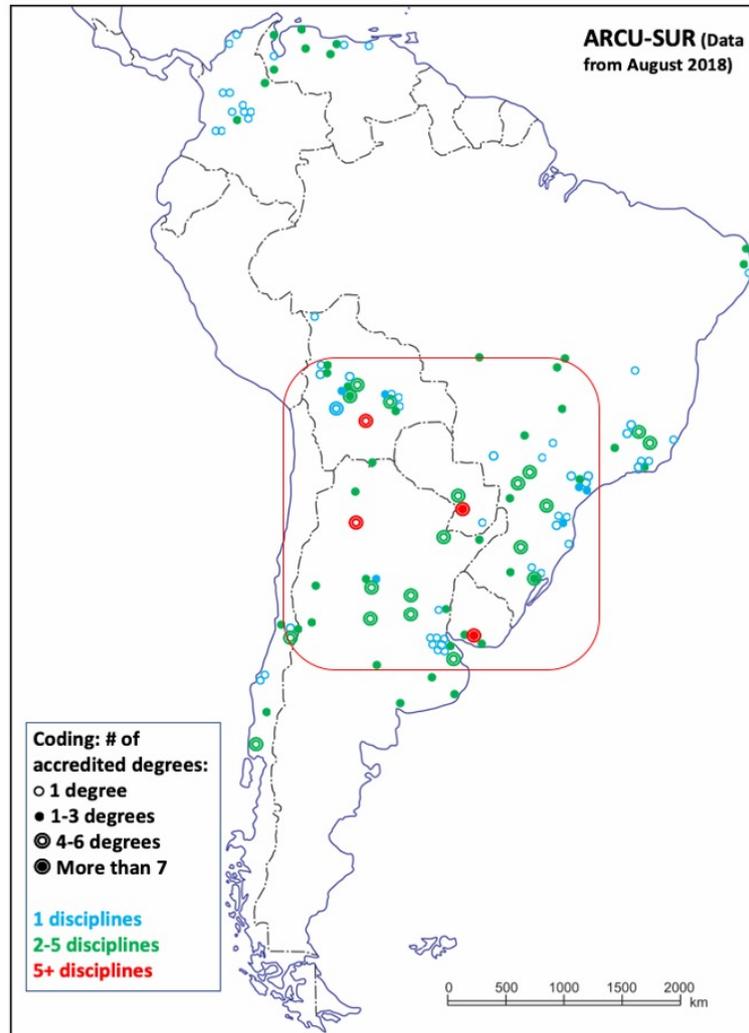
*Table 12.1 Summary of Arcusur accreditations until August 2018*

Country	HEIs	Accredited degrees	Valid accreditations	Expired accreditations
<b>Argentina</b>	28 (7)	73	57	16
<b>Bolivia</b>	19 (12)	49	0	49
<b>Brazil</b>	42 (12)	89	82	7
<b>Chile</b>	8 (5)	17	3	14
<b>Colombia</b>	13 (6)	15	9	6
<b>Paraguay</b>	3 (1)	18	0	18
<b>Uruguay</b>	3 (2)	14	4	10
<b>Venezuela</b>	9	16	0	16
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>141 (46)</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>136</b>

The inclusion processes had been mostly carried out by the CCR and CHE, who define the courses that will be credited. A second inclusion process, leading to bordering, was the list of criteria for evaluation determined by a group of academics invited by CCR and CHE. The most important bordering process seems to be the one determined by the economic situation of the countries in funding the accreditation process. As Table 2 indicates, three of the countries taking part in Arcusur have no degree with valid accreditation (Bolivia, Paraguay and Venezuela). A review of the Arcusur website reveals that none of them have opened a recent call for accreditation, leading to the hypothesis that it is not so much that they lack quality, but that the institutions in these countries have not had the chance to apply for accreditation. Many of the institutions in Bolivia had their accreditation expire in July 2018. There is no indication of current peer-review processes going on in Bolivia. At the moment all countries who do not launch calls get excluded from the process, yet its features respecting autonomy to allow for agency from the HEI leadership to decide to apply to the process or not. Informal discussions with coordinators of accredited degrees indicate that, in the case of the private universities, the competition for students is the biggest motivator for an institution to open the accreditation process.

How do these fare in terms of spatial distribution? I mapped them into the map of South America to find out (Figure 12.1):

Figure 12.1 Arcusur: Spatiality of accredited programmes (August 2018)



The data reveals there is a diversity of institutions which take part in Arcusur activities. They range from institutions located in both the urban cities and regional areas, yet they are concentrated in an area in the centre of the continent. The participating institutions are from Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, Bolivia, Colombia, Venezuela and Paraguay. It is striking to realise the large interest of Bolivian institutions in the accreditation process in the Cochabamba and Santa Cruz de la Sierra area. It is known that neighbouring countries' students, especially from Brazil, are keen to obtain a Medicine degree in Bolivia for different reasons (easier admission; lower costs). Although this demand could generate high interest from the Bolivian institutions to obtain international/ regional certification, only seven out of

the 47 accredited degrees in Bolivia were in Medicine, Interestingly, 28 were in Engineering. Such a finding suggests an interesting line of enquiry into Faculties/Schools of Engineering in the country search for accreditation within Mercosur. The consequences of not being a part of the process means that their students would not be entitled to take part in the MARCA mobility programme, for instance. There might have repercussions for those students interested in international mobility (study of work) in other Mercosur countries.

To close the sub-chapter, it seems important to highlight what makes Arcusur special. The story of the accreditation process is not only interesting for the length of time it took from being an idea (1995), to a formal intention (1998), and then to a System (2008), but for overcoming many of the novel bordering arrangements within each of these phases. First, having agencies to run accreditation would hardly make it possible to move on with the project. Yet, the agencies appeared with time. Second, and connected to the first, the lack of agencies suggests little experience with international criteria, or peer reviewing, and yet they were developed and trained based on the criteria established regionally, with the support of the academics and institutions in the region<sup>260</sup>. Third, there was no funding, and the (non-existent) national agencies had to pay for the project to exist. And yet, they did it all with the support of the other countries (Argentina and Brazil, usually), who would fund the preparatory activities and the travel of some of the evaluators.

### *Mobility project*

Mobility has been a chief objective for SEM since its early days (Chapter 3 and 5). By 2011, mobility programmes became a multi-layered activity that engaged students, academics and researchers. The different kinds of mobility programmes, PhD mobility, academic mobility, Spanish and Portuguese language mobility, researcher and networks, all inflated the work of CHE. So much that as a consequence it was necessary to request an administrative unit to manage the level of activity.

In this illustrative exercise I will focus on the Programme of Regional Academic Mobility for Accredited programmes, Marca. It was implemented in 2006 as the first of these instruments. Undergraduate students spend six months in exchange, and have all their

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<sup>260</sup> As the analysis of the meeting minutes reveal, in different moments Argentina's Accreditation agency - CONEAU - offered support to the region, i.e. to Paraguay in setting up their Accreditation Agency. Brazil's CAPES, for its experience with the quality assurance in post-graduate programmes, is also mentioned.

expenses covered, from travel to accommodation. It benefited from the trust gained in the accreditation exercise to a reciprocity scheme (one institution sends the same number of students it receives). According to the Ministry of Education in Brazil, by 2014 Marca had supported the mobility of almost 2000 students.

*Table 12.2 Marca: Number of exchanges (2006 – 2014)*

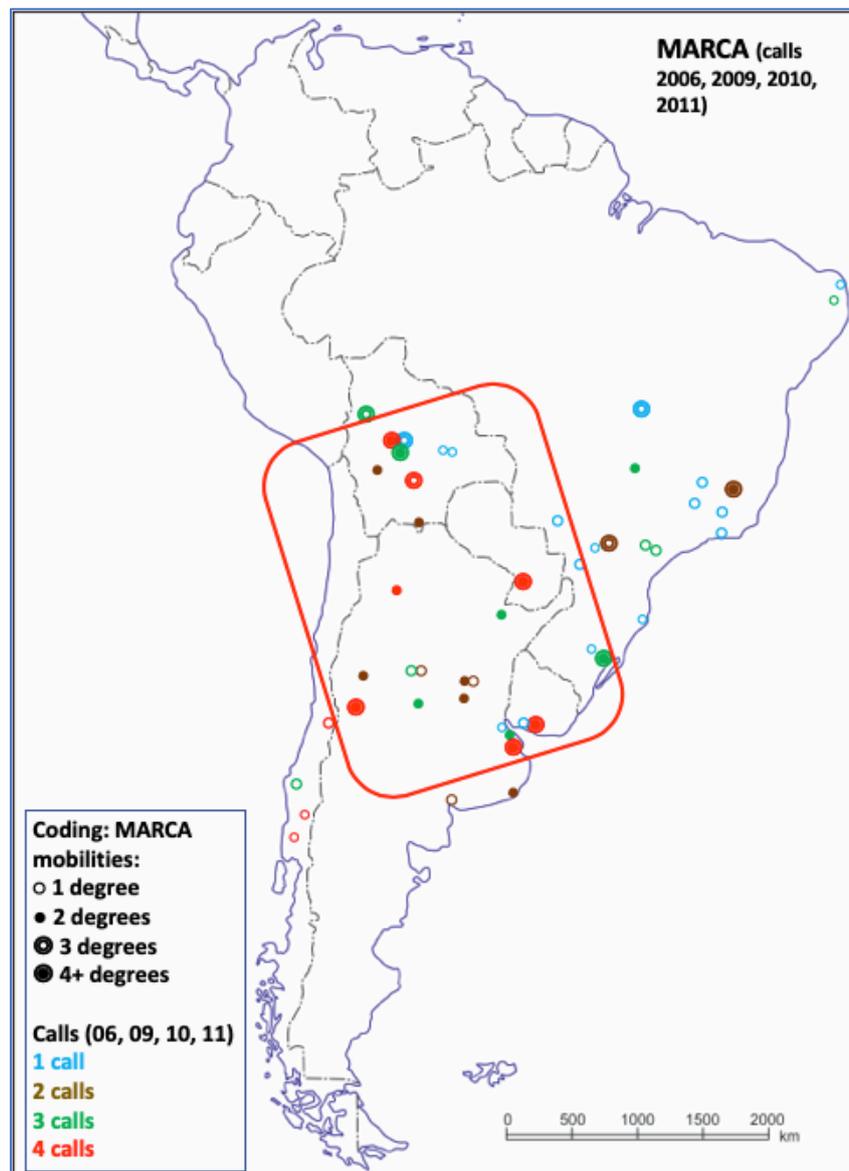
<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of students, all countries</b>
<b>2006</b>	57
<b>2008</b>	209
<b>2009</b>	137
<b>2010</b>	201
<b>2011</b>	188
<b>2012</b>	134
<b>2013</b>	407
<b>2014</b>	389
<b>Total</b>	<b>1772</b>

Source: Brazil (2014, p. 76)

I have mapped four mobility calls for undergraduate students between 2006 and 2011 using data available in the meeting minutes. They were available in different meeting minutes, though the reliability of the data is at issues as there are conflicting figures in different documents and report. The reason for stopping in 2011 is because, from 2014, Marca changed its modality to university clusters, or consortiums. The new model resembles Action 2 of the Erasmus Mundus Program suggesting a degree of intertextuality such as what might arise with the travelling of ideas. It works by a series of consortiums around a defined theme, rather than the open reciprocal model adopted before.

Although the intention of showing the spatial visualisation of the institutions engaging is the same, the rationale for coding the map is different to the one applied to the accreditation project, above. Here I look at the quality of the engagement of the institutions in two dimensions: the number of courses accredited between 2006-2011, versus the number of calls these accredited courses took part in. I was interested to see the outcome of the accreditations for the academic community, and in particular, the students.

Figure 12.2 MARCA student mobility (2006, 2009, 2010, 2011)



Source: Elaborated by author based on meeting minutes

The bordering within and around the Marca are the result of the Arcusur programme. This becomes a ‘thick’ border for it limits the opportunity for an experience abroad to these students. In this case the bordering work falls on the leaders of the accreditation project in SEM, in order of relevance: the Arcusur working group (later the Agencies’ Network, RANA), CHE and CCR. They manage and define, and thus regulate, the academic disciplines to be accredited. To a lesser extent, the institutions that follow with the accreditation process have a role in bordering work too. They decide how many students they are willing to send and receive, and how many calls they wish to take part. Finally, given that Marca is sponsored at the national level, there is also a decisive role for the national Ministries of

Education in providing budget to fund the mobilities. Finally, the reason for these bordering practices are dependent on the trust developed between the course coordinators who had their programmes accredited. Furthermore, a look in the map reveals another aspect that is beyond the work of SEM: the engagement of the institutions in large urban centres with internationalisation of HE projects and their capacity to manage them (Chapter 3). Their familiarity with managing international activities and students will also influence their engagement with regional projects. There could be a new bordering in the making: based on the institutional path-dependency that enables an institutional to consider whether to take part in the Mercosur HE Space or not.

### *Knowledge production project*

The 2006 Action Plan imagined the creation of “joint publication of studies and actions in the domain of HE in Mercosur” (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR/CRCES, 2005a, p. 5) by means of research centres. The plan was to

...promote the reflection and production of knowledge on HE in MERCOSUR linked to integration, to promote research on the subject and to propose initiatives that nourish the strategies defined by [CHE] as well as the process of formulation of public policies on HE in MERCOSUR (NEIES/MERCOSUR, n.d.).

From October 2005, SEM approved project aimed at the generation of new knowledge about the region became a matter of concern. The WG in HE Research started in 2007 under Argentina’s coordination.

NEIES funds joint HE research networks, which plan and deliver different academic activities, such as virtual seminars, publications, and workshops. A total of three calls for research networks was launched (March 2019) (see Table 16 below for a summary of the calls). Each call had a theme to guide applicants. The last one was on “Sectoral Studies” and suggested research on the themes of access and institutional diversity and its effects and the implications of mobility, regulatory frameworks for diploma recognition in Mercosur. To form a network and apply for funding institutions from at least 2 countries must come together with a research proposal. In addition to the networks, NEIES also runs a Journal, ‘*Integración y Conocimiento*’ (Integration and Knowledge) since 2012.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> So far, ‘Integración’ had eight editions published as an open-source material under a Creative Commons license. Texts are about the dynamics of HE in the region, and sometimes they have a special issue, such as the 2018 dossier /n the 1918 Cordoba Reform (Vol. 1, N. 8, 2018).

Three calls were put out, all of them funded by the Ministry of Education in Argentina. For the first call (2013), the budget available foresaw 100.000 Argentinean pesos (roughly 2.800 GBP) per 2-year project, out of which 50% of the value could be spent in publications (MERCOSUR/RME/CCR/CRCES, 2012). Because it is funded and managed from the HE Office (SPU) in Argentina, regulatory hurdles make it possible for only Argentinean public HE to be coordinators of the networks. This, of course, results in the large engagement of Argentinean universities. The country's initiative to assume the responsibility for this project is laudable. The project attracts a large interest in an area that is of interest and which does not have funding, i.e. seminars, publications. Nonetheless, this very fortune becomes a bordering agent, when only one type of institutions is allowed to manage the project.

*Table 12.3 Summary of NEIES calls*

<b>Call</b>	<b>Call 1 (2013)</b>	<b>Call 2 (2015)</b>	<b>Call 3 (2017)</b>
<b>Applications received</b>	41	47	n/a
<b>Projects approved</b>	12	16	6
<b>Number of participating HEIs</b>	33	43	n/a

If looking more carefully at what types of institutions are engaged with NEIES activities, the data reveals the overwhelming presence of research public universities, shown in Table 4 below. The majority of public universities taking part in the project is not surprising, given that most of research conducted in Latin America happens within state-funded institutions (Arocena & Sutz, 2005).

Table 12.4 Analysis of NEIES calls

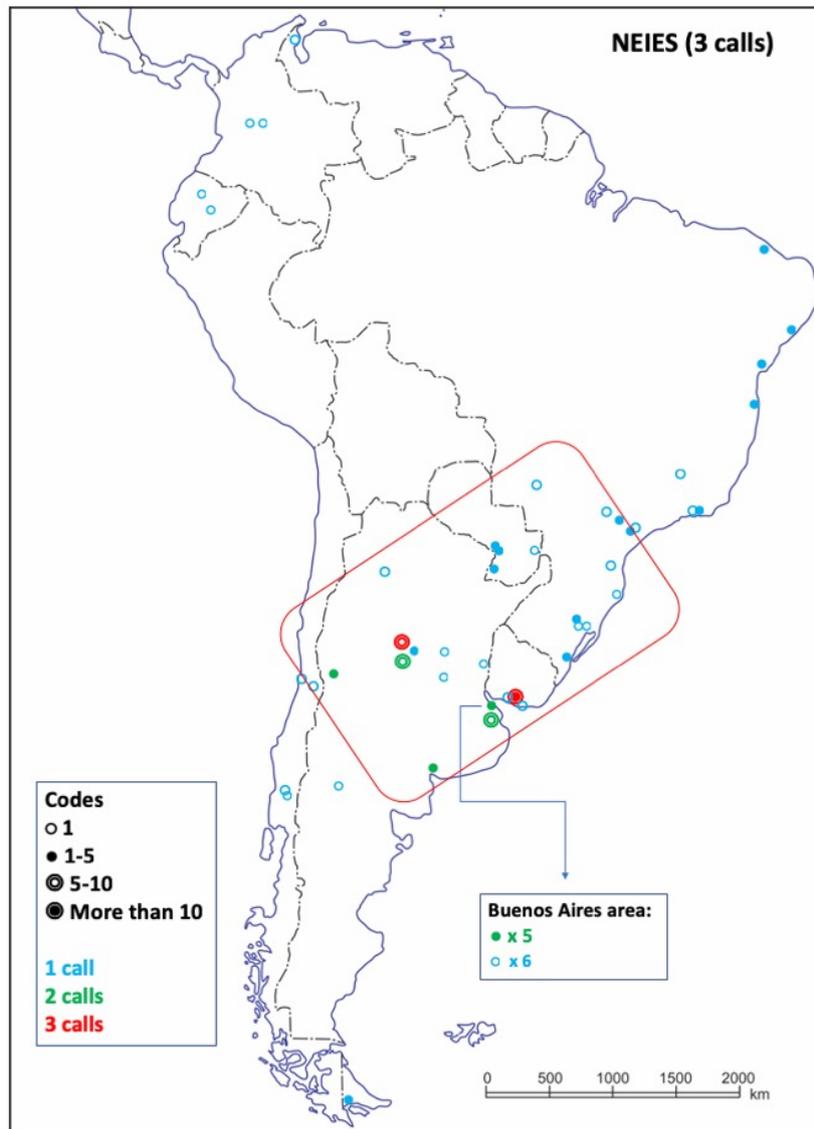
Call	Call 1 (2013)	Call 2 (2015)	Call 3 (2017) <sup>1</sup>
<b>Number of participating HEIs</b>	33	41	5
<b>HEIs per country</b>			
<i>Argentina</i>	13 (1)	18 (1)	4
<i>Bolivia</i>	0	0	n/a
<i>Brazil</i>	12 (3)	10 (1)	n/a
<i>Chile</i>	0	4 (2)	n/a
<i>Colombia</i>	0	2 (1)	n/a
<i>Ecuador</i>	0	2 (1)	n/a
<i>Paraguay</i>	4 (1)	4 (2)	n/a
<i>Uruguay</i>	3 (2)	1	1
<i>Venezuela</i>	1	0	n/a
<b>Public Universities</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>Argentina</i>	12	17	4
<i>Bolivia</i>	n/a	0	0
<i>Brazil</i>	9	9	0
<i>Chile</i>	n/a	2	0
<i>Colombia</i>	n/a	1	0
<i>Ecuador</i>	n/a	1	0
<i>Paraguay</i>	3	2	0
<i>Uruguay</i>	1	0	1
<i>Venezuela</i>	1	1	0
<b>Private Universities</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>
<i>Argentina</i>	1	1	0
<i>Bolivia</i>	0	0	0
<i>Brazil</i>	3	1	0
<i>Chile</i>	0	2	0
<i>Colombia</i>	0	1	0
<i>Ecuador</i>	0	1	0
<i>Paraguay</i>	1	2	0
<i>Uruguay</i>	2	0	0
<i>Venezuela</i>	0	0	0

Source: NEIES Website, <http://nemercosur.siu.edu.ar/webnucleo/index.html>

<sup>1</sup> The data available only shows the network's coordinating institution.

The spatial distribution of the institutions partaking in NEIES reveal that the only institutions to take part in three calls were the University of Cordoba (Argentina) and the University of the Republic (Uruguay). The latter has taken part in over 10 networks, out of the 34 approved in the history of NEIES. Nia strong participation of research universities in Argentina (Cordoba).

Figure 12.3 NEIES: Geographies of the production of knowledge about HE in Mercosur



This exercise was an attempt to reveal where the distribution of HE institutions were, given the conditions – or bordering – established for these three HE instruments. Although an experiment, it reveals how bordering depends on those actors who are determining the instruments, as they can exclude or include a number of participants. Could these bordering practices be different if FEM were to be more active? Would there be more engagement from private institutions if they had access to contact with the Ministries of Education? How different would this mapping be if other Ministries of Education were to commit to providing resources to NEIES the same way that Argentina did? These are all questions to be revisited in the future, when the future of the new nature of SEM and the HE Sector shows its outcomes.

## **Final thoughts**

The analysis revealed that the Regional HE space in Mercosur is, fact, clustered around, and highly dependent upon, the public HE institutions. This process of bordering and ordering of regional HE policies have largely privileged only a portion of the HE sectors in the region - namely the public university sector, and in some of the nations of the region, only a handful of public institutions located in the main urban centres. These processes of bordering and ordering that emerge out of regional education processes start out 'weak' and somewhat 'flat' for two reasons. First, because in Education the state continues to play a strong role in its governance and shaping (Dale, 2005). Education continues to be located in national settings and shaped by nationally located state projects, and though the influence of global policies have set in motion important changes, this has not resulted the replacement of the role for the state. Second, given that regions are cultural, political and economic projects that are complex, contradictory and variegated (Robertson, 2014, 2018), power relations are uneven as each component of the region has its own national features and histories and goes a long way in explaining why it is, for example, that Argentina's investment in the region result in a higher participation of its institutions in HE projects.

Critically assessing who gets to define the direction of the regional policies in this spatial dynamic, with what consequences for whom, is key to understand how regional education policies get 're-bordered' and as a consequence 're-ordered.' Moreover, it shows how the regional HE projects have largely privileged only a portion of the HE sectors in the region - namely the public university sector, and in some of the nations of the region, only a handful of public institutions located in the main urban centres.