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## Scenery s and Challenges of the University in the Knowledge Economy\*

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### ABSTRACT

In this article, scenarios and challenges of the university in the knowledge economy are analyzed, considering their insertion in the broader field of higher education formed by the plurality of actors and institutions interested in its dynamics. The notion of field formulated by Pierre Bourdieu is an important theoretical and methodological construct for the analysis of higher education in contemporary society. Historically, the university has revealed itself as a gateway and a privileged space to build paths and solutions to challenges presented, over time, to society. In the globalized world, the university operates in a field of uncertainties and contradictions, at the same time as it constitutes an indisputable component for the development of the countries' political project. In the competitive contemporary higher education, the concept of world-class universities has been disputed and built based on global standards and criteria directly associated with the classifications made by international rankings.

### KEYWORDS

Higher education. University. Knowledge economy. World-class universities. International rankings.

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## Cenários e Desafios da Universidade na Economia do Conhecimento

### RESUMO

Neste artigo analisam-se cenários e desafios da universidade na economia do conhecimento, considerando sua inserção no campo mais amplo da educação superior formado pela pluralidade de atores e instituições interessados em sua dinâmica. A noção de *campo* formulada por Pierre Bourdieu constitui importante construto teórico-metodológico para análise da educação superior na sociedade contemporânea. Historicamente, a universidade revela-se como porta de entrada e espaço privilegiado para construir caminhos e soluções para desafios apresentados, ao longo do tempo, à sociedade. No mundo globalizado, a universidade atua em um terreno de incertezas e contradições, ao mesmo tempo que configura um componente indiscutível para o desenvolvimento do projeto político dos países. Na competitiva educação superior contemporânea, o conceito de *world-class universities* vem sendo disputado e construído com base em padrões e critérios globais diretamente associados às classificações feitas pelos *rankings* internacionais.

### PALVRAS-CHAVE

Educação superior. Universidade. Economia do conhecimento. Universidade de classe mundial. *Rankings* internacionais.

## Escenarios y Desafíos de la Universidad en la Economía del Conocimiento

### RESUMEN

En este artículo se analizan escenarios y desafíos de la universidad en la economía del conocimiento, considerando su inserción en el campo más amplio de la educación superior formado por la pluralidad de actores e instituciones interesadas en su dinámica. La noción de campo formulada por Pierre Bourdieu es una construcción teórica y metodológica importante para el análisis de la educación superior en la sociedad contemporánea. Históricamente, la universidad se ha revelado como una puerta de entrada y un espacio privilegiado para construir caminos y soluciones a los desafíos presentados, a lo largo del tiempo, a la sociedad. En el mundo globalizado, la universidad opera en un campo de incertidumbres y contradicciones, al mismo tiempo que constituye un componente indiscutible para el desarrollo del proyecto político de los países. En la educación superior contemporánea competitiva, el concepto de universidad de clase mundial ha sido disputado y construido con base en estándares y criterios globales directamente asociados con las clasificaciones hechas por rankings internacionales.

### PALABRAS CLAVE

Educación superior. Universidad. Economía del Conocimiento. Universidad de clase mundial. Rankings internacionales.

## Introduction

The objective of this article is to analyze the position assumed by the university in the knowledge economy, highlighting elements that contribute to the understanding of how, in a globalized society, the performance of this institution is closely associated with the principles of the economy. The interpretative effort of the text is directed towards the analysis of the configuration of the university's role in the knowledge economy, considering its insertion in the broader field of higher education, starting from the assumption that, in the current times, this field deals with an economic dimension unprecedented at any other time in its evolution.

In contemporary society, higher education has an expressive variety of institutions with distinct proposals, functions, profiles and vocations, showing itself to be a factor of great relevance in the process of social transformation. In this complex scenario, the university is distinguished from non-university institutions by its social commitment to the generation of new knowledge, which contributes to its recognition as a privileged locus of knowledge production and innovation.

Despite the great contradictions that can be verified in its origin and evolution, the university is still conceived as the institution that, in the contemporary world, reveals the ability to promote the integration of knowledge, culture, values, peoples, as well as to promote respect for the differences and specificities of each nation. From this angle, it has fulfilled a social role that allows it to be recognized as a center of intense and true intellectual activity. From a historical point of view, the university is recognized as the institution responsible for organizing the body of knowledge produced by humanity, discussing ways generated by society to produce, transform and transmit this knowledge. In its course it has assumed the mission of concentrating efforts, aiming at the production of knowledge in the most varied fields of human life - cultural, economic, social, political, etc. -at the same time as it presents alternatives to preserve them. This double movement establishes diverse relations that reveal its commitment to a certain project of society.

However, in the new world order, the university develops its work in a competitive context in which the production of knowledge is strongly involved in the knowledge economy, and takes place in a society without frontiers. The dilemmas faced by this institution gain centrality in a context in which far-reaching movements such as the globalization process and the flexible accumulation of capital are verified. This scenario imposes on universities, especially public ones, the definition of other roles that suffer the reverberations of the principles of the economy, which have significantly influenced higher education worldwide.

As a broader field in which the university is inserted, higher education is interdisciplinary, which is why it demands that its investigation takes place in the light of theoretical matrixes linked to different areas of knowledge. Based on this premise, the discussion in this article is based on the sociological thought of Pierre Bourdieu (1930-

2002), particularly on the notion of field, a concept that assumes centrality in the author's work. The systematic reflection of the sociological contribution of this author leads to the recognition that the concept of field constitutes a relevant theoretical reference for the examination of higher education, aiming to understand it as a competitive space formed by institutions of a very heterogeneous and diversified nature. However, admitting that the understanding of the dynamics of higher education implies recourse to multiple theoretical references, the proposed reflection shares Bourdieu's (2004, p. 66) position against what he calls theoretical-methodological slavery in the analysis of any social phenomenon: "For my part, I maintain a very pragmatic relationship with authors: I turn to them as 'companions', in the sense of the craft tradition, as someone to whom one can ask for a hand in difficult situations".

Starting from the principle that an analysis is, at the same time, explanatory and interpretative, structurally the text is organized in four parts. The first discusses the notion of field, recognizing it as an important theoretical and methodological instrument for the investigation of higher education. The second contextualizes the field of higher education, considering that its multiple realities demand an understanding of it as a complex space that includes a plurality of institutions and actors who have distinct interests in its dynamics. The third part highlights the centrality of the university as an institution that, in its historical construction, has assumed the purpose of basing its work on the production of knowledge, research and innovation, but that, in the current world, has undergone reforms guided by the managerialist vision. The fourth and last part discusses the university in the knowledge economy, problematizing the validation of the market logic associated, notably, with this institution and, more generally, with higher education, a phenomenon that ends up compromising the conception of the latter as a public good. In this context, he highlights the dispute over the concept of world-class universities based on the premise that, in the knowledge economy, this model of institution is being built in light of standards and criteria translated into international rankings, produced in a world that is increasingly competitive, globalized and guided by economic principles.

### Field Concept as a Methodological Resource for Studying Higher Education

The choice of the notion of field theorized by Bourdieu (1983) to examine higher education is based on the recognition of this as a social space in which agents and institutions that form it establish, simultaneously, relations of complicity and competition, since they have distinct interests in its dynamics. He also considers that the theory of fields can help in the critical examination of higher education, since it has a set of university and non-university institutions with very heterogeneous and diverse profiles.

Bourdieu (2004) formulates the concept of field from his social theory, whose construction is based on a knowledge he calls praxeological. Assuming that the social world exists as will and representation, the author maintains that the praxeological posture perceives social reality in the light of a double structuring:

[...] on the objective side, it is socially structured because the properties attributed to agents and institutions present themselves in combinations with very unequal possibilities [...] on the subjective side, it is structured because the schemes of perception and appreciation, especially those that are inscribed in language, express the state of symbolic power relations: I think, for example, of the pairs of adjectives: heavy/light, bright/dark, etc. (BOURDIEU, 2004, p. 161).

In this logic, agents construct social reality, individually and collectively, based on categories that are not produced by them solely and exclusively, but as a result of a long and slow unconscious process of incorporation of objective structures. It means that social groups are bearers of socially shared conventions and values. In the author's view, in the construction of social reality the actors get involved in struggles and transactions to impose their vision, always starting from points of view, interests, and principles that define their position in the social space.

Among the various concepts formulated by the French thinker to explain his vision of the social world, two are central: field (BOURDIEU, 1983, 1992, 2004) and *habitus*<sup>1</sup>. Starting from the premise that these two concepts are inseparable, he states that "the object proper to social science is neither the individual [...] nor groups as concrete sets of individuals, but the obscure relationship between habitus [...] and fields." (BOURDIEU, 1992, p. 102). Still, according to the author, the more complex a society is, the more it is differentiated into distinct fields - political, scientific, cultural, educational, philosophical, artistic, etc. Each of these fields has its dynamics and specificities responsible for structuring the action of social agents. Transitioning within a given field requires the agent to try to adjust his way of thinking, perceiving, and acting to what this field objectively demands.

Due to its nature, the field shows itself to be dynamic and continuous, even if this varies according to the moments of a given social configuration, or even from one society to another, in the case of contrasts between them. From this angle, it is a space of moving relations, which ultimately presents its agents with the possibility of engaging in a struggle. Because of this, the field can be understood:

[...] as a social space endowed with its own structure - relatively autonomous over other social fields - and specific objectives that guarantee a particular logic of structuring and functioning. Although they relate to each other, the fields are endowed with an internal hierarchy, which makes their objects of disputes and particular interests irreducible to the struggles and interests of other fields (AUTHOR, 2013, p. 81).

<sup>1</sup> In Bourdieu's (1983) view, the habitus corresponds to an organizing principle of responses issued by groups that seek to adapt to what the field demands. The actors energize it to undertake actions of a collective nature, which prove to be convergent to ensure the success of their aspirations and claims. "The habitus as the word is said, is that which has been acquired, but which has become durably incarnated in the body in the form of permanent dispositions. [...] To summarize, the habitus is a product of conditioning which tends to reproduce the objective logic of the conditionings but introducing into them a transformation." (BOURDIEU, 1983, p. 105). Thus, the habitus allows social actors to participate in their objective realities and, at the same time, contribute so that the institutions in which they operate, such as those that make up the field of higher education, undergo revisions and changes.

Since there is always an object in dispute within each field, the objective relations that configure it can be of alliance and/or conflict, competition and/or cooperation between different, socially defined positions. Objectively, these positions gain strength independently of the characteristics of the agents that occupy them. It is in this interpretative context that the reflection proposed in this article understands the relations established among the institutions and actors that make the field of higher education dynamic.

In Bourdieu's (1983) view, the fields have certain properties that allow the establishment of more general laws governing their operation in each society and explain why there are common regularities among them. Among these properties, the following stand out: (i) relative autonomy of a field concerning the other social spaces, which depends on the value that capital<sup>2</sup> acquires in each of them; (ii) even though they have their peculiarities, fields do not behave in a watertight and isolated way, which enables agents a certain level of mobility to move between the various social spaces; (iii) all agents participating in a field have in common a certain number of essential interests. "For a field to function, there must be objects of dispute and people ready to dispute the game, endowed with habitus that imply knowledge and recognition of the immanent laws of the game, of the objects of dispute" (BOURDIEU, 1983, p. 90). Even though there is a variety of fields in each society, their properties contribute to the understanding that within them social actors and institutions participate in a struggle.

In practice, the level of recognition of the autonomy of each field defines the type of game and the conditions of struggle presented to the agents, as well as the rules to which they will be submitted. From this angle, when participating in the field they need to know and recognize the rules and laws that structure the game, which explains why the fight does not take place in a vacuum<sup>3</sup>, but in a social space of positions that objectively translate the nature and specificity of the object in dispute.

Since every field is simultaneously structured by struggle and consensus, the agents who participate in the dispute that takes concrete form in it share the same assumptions that construct the logic of its operation. The sharing of interests justifies the existence of a given field, which explains the objective complicity underlying all disputes in it and presupposes an agreement among the agents in a struggle about what deserves to be disputed. This

<sup>2</sup> The specific capital is worth only about a certain field and within the limits of this same field. It is associated with the idea that capital is symbolic, this conceived as the sum of different types of capitals - cultural, social and economic -, conditioning the position of the social agent in the field: "The symbolic capital is a credit, it is the power attributed to those who have obtained enough recognition to be able to impose enough recognition to be able to impose recognition". (BOURDIEU, 2004, p. 164).

<sup>3</sup> According to Bourdieu (2004), the fight that occurs in the field is regulated by a Doxa, which corresponds to everything that constitutes the field itself and all the assumptions that are tacitly accepted by the participants of the game. The Doxa assumes fundamental importance in the struggle waged by social agents because "there are questions that are not asked, that cannot be asked, because they touch the fundamental beliefs that are the basis of the science and the functioning of the field" (BOURDIEU, 2004, p. 20-21). It is, thus, a set of principles that social agents assume as an evident, reason why they are above any discussion because questioning them means putting in doubt the very functioning logic of the field.

explains why to understand "the social genesis of a field, is to grasp what makes the specific necessity of the belief that sustains it, of the language game that is played in it, of the material and symbolic things at stake that are generated in it." (BOURDIEU, 1983, p. 69). Transposing this assumption, of a general character, to the dynamics of the field of higher education leads to the recognition that in this field there is also "a state of power relations between the agents or institutions engaged in the struggle [...] which, accumulated in the course of previous struggles, guides subsequent strategies." (p. 90). It means that, in higher education, the actors and institutions struggle to conquer and/or ensure certain positions in relation to the others, aiming to maintain themselves in the game in which they participate.

### Broader Picture of the Higher Education Field

At each historical moment, human beings think and materialize an education that gives meaning to their lives and helps them construct explanations about social reality, given the web of relationships they establish among themselves. By incorporating this social dimension, higher education is characterized as an expression of diverse cultural practices that contribute to create meanings for each human group that produces them. Based on this premise, the study of higher education requires considering it from its insertion in the broader context of education as a social practice and from its conception as a complex field that includes interdisciplinary interpretations. Within this broader field, both the public and the private segments are understood as subfields of the former, based on the assumption that, as proposed by the field theory, relations of cooperation and/or conflict are simultaneously established between them.

In this perspective, the field of higher education is configured as a social space that reveals multiple realities, built from the dynamics installed by an expressive and diverse set of university and non-university institutions. Within it "actors and institutions fight, considering the defining rules of the dispute, the different levels of strength and the possibilities of success" (AUTHOR, 2013, p. 85). Endowed with very peculiar characteristics, whether public or private, these institutions show a very heterogeneous profile. However, according to the author, in many cases, there is still an ideologized discourse of treating it as "unique" when, in fact, it is possible to identify institutions with dynamics, management practices and academic vocations extremely complex and varied.

The examination of the field of higher education requires the consideration of the political, economic, social, and cultural contexts that mark its intentionality, the materialization of its policies, and the understanding of its relationship with the broader educational system. This requires an interpretative effort in two directions: (i) analysis of the trajectory and performance of the university, as well as of the different institutional formats that together make up this field; (ii) understanding of how actors and institutions realize certain educational ends, taking into account that this occurs in a social space of disputes that may vary in intensity and duration, depending on the context in which they manifest themselves.

Worldwide, in the last five decades, higher education has undergone considerable transformations in its dynamics and configuration, which contribute to the installation of a varied typology of institutions with very distinct academic characteristics and practices. As a result, the field is characterized, above all, by an extremely diversified institutional morphology. However, when the focus of analysis falls on the specificity of the university, it is also possible to perceive significant differences in relation to this type of institution.

The academic profile of universities varies according to a multiplicity of criteria, such as areas of knowledge, diversity of courses and programs developed, distinctive brands they build in relation to others, internationalization projects, scientific production and image they wish to promote and maintain publicly. But it is not only about instrumental or technical issues, nor about highly specialized material and human resources, nor, much less, about mere marketing strategies. There are political issues and broader cultural and scientific struggles that the very notion of field requires to be convened (AUTHOR; BORGES; AFONSO, 2019, p. 232).

These and other differences explain why, today, there are on various continents higher education systems of different sizes, several of which have thousands of institutions and millions of students (ALTACH, 2006). In the institutional heterogeneity that is the hallmark of these complex systems, a plurality of international, regional, national and local actors are involved.

Among them are [...] State, policy makers, rectors, professors, students, international organizations, associations of leaders of public and private institutions, academic entities, research promotion agencies, study centers, employers' and workers' unions. [These can be classified into three major categories: (i) actors linked to the State, which represent the bureaucratic sphere; (ii) social actors of the Higher Education field itself, which aim to strengthen it; (iii) actors from other social fields with interest in what is offered/disputed in the field under study - science, titles, innovation, patents, academic training, professional and institutional prestige, etc. (AUTHOR, 2021, p. 39).

The field of higher education demands to be understood as something dynamic, complex, and of historical and social nature, which is why its approach necessarily involves considering the time and space in which its policies are formulated and implemented. Due to its importance for any nation's development project, it has been receiving great attention from researchers, entities and governmental institutions. This level of recognition has been observed, among others, by the large increase in scientific production on the subject in the last decades, based on the connection between different areas of knowledge. As a whole, the studies have sought to approach it both from the point of view of its themes and its spatial distribution around the world<sup>4</sup>. As a result, the concern with its function, dynamics

<sup>4</sup> Since the 1990s, a significant number of investigations on the global perspectives of higher education have been produced by scholars linked to different theoretical frameworks and institutions. The first one pointed out the following trends: (i) expansion in geographical areas where, at the time, higher education was weak or non-existent; (ii) possibility of loss of spaces, by certain research centers, to new groups, as a result of the financial reductions that research started to face; (iii) continuance of a certain level of confusion/imprecision by the public that uses the results of research on the subject, caused by the distance between institutional studies and others of an eminently academic nature; (iv) tendency to continue and expand interdisciplinary studies; (v) possible reduction in large-scale research at the national and international levels, due to budgetary constraints (ALTBACH, 1997). The second study was conducted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) aiming to assess the major world trends and the challenges of higher education for the 21st century, grouping them into five axes: (i) the increase in demand for access



and evolution has grown significantly on the part of many scholars linked to various areas of research (AUTHOR, 2013).

From this perspective, the understanding of issues generated within the field of higher education demands interdisciplinary investigations that seek theoretical and methodological constructs in various Social Sciences and Humanities - Sociology, Political Science, History, Pedagogy, Economics and Administration. However, according to Altbach (2006), if, on the one hand, this interdisciplinary effort contributes to the establishment of many research centers in various parts of the world, on the other hand, it points out certain difficulties in establishing a methodology sufficiently adequate to study the singularities of higher education. Despite this, as a result of this interdisciplinary effort, the production of varied perspectives on the reality of higher education has been expanded, contributing greatly to increase the broad and generalized attention on the subject. This level of perception exists from the understanding of its insertion in the broader educational field, in which various actors and institutions assume differentiated positions in relation to a specific field (BOURDIEU, 1983).

As of the 2000s, a range of studies developed in different regions of the world on higher education reveals, among other elements, its quantitative expansion and recognition of its increased importance in the new world order (ENDERS, 2002; GARCÍA GUADILLA, 2004; RAMA, 2006; TROW, 2011), seeking to explain the guiding elements of this expansion, the relationships that structure it and the modus vivendi of the institutions. The results of these and other researches converged to the recognition that, in several regions of the world, access to this level of education is still not guaranteed for significant portions of the population. This fact justifies the need, in contemporary society, to continue studies that broaden the interpretations about the nature of the institutions that make up the field of higher education, their functions and their key components.

In this context it is also worth noting that in the globalized world, the interests of different actors - such as governmental bodies, a community of researchers linked to different epistemological matrices and various international organizations<sup>5</sup> - associated with their distinct conceptions of reality, will determine a diversity of interpretations and ways of approaching the field of higher education. Notably, multilateral organizations have

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to higher education is submitted; (ii) the continuous reduction of financial resources; (iii) the preservation of quality and relevance of measures for its implementation and evaluation; (iv) the problem of graduate employment that requires examination of university degrees and diplomas; (v) the internationalization of pedagogical methods, training and research (UNESCO, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> The logic produced and disseminated by international organizations has a strong influence on higher education in the countries, and suggests strategies for reforms in many of them. Being quite numerous, these organizations show both a global and regional action, standing out: World Bank (WB); Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); European Union (EU); bilateral development support agencies, such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Foundations, for example, Ford Foundation and Rockefeller Foundation. In addition, there are associations of universities, networks, international cooperation agencies, and various organizations with parallel and similar functions that operate on a regional level. (MALDONADO-MALDONADO, 2009).

exercised considerable influence in the formulation of an international agenda for this field, undertaking actions that cause their proposals to circulate at the global, regional and national levels. In certain cases, they stimulate comparative studies and propose policies in which "the reductionist view to the economic dimension is evident, focused exclusively on the cost/benefit ratio." (AUTHOR, 2013, p. 39). By revealing great interest in higher education, these organizations also tend to recognize it as a social space built from clashes and struggles, influencing the implementation of neoliberal educational policies for the sector that, in turn, has become transnational.

### University: Conception and Challenges in the Globalized Society

Due to its nature and its high proactivity in the production of knowledge, the university reveals the possibility of self-transformation through the development of diverse capacities oriented to change. From this angle, it is an institution that "is founded on the capacities for self-adaptation and adaptation to a changing society. The development of capacities for change means the core of successful performance" (CLARK, 2002, p. 23). Consequently, the conception of university implies its recognition as responsible for the organization of the body of knowledge produced by humanity, discussing, at the same time, ways to conserve, transform and transmit this knowledge. In this double movement it establishes relationships that reveal its commitment to a certain project of society. "The university is part of an inclusive global context that determines it and that, depending on its functioning and meaning, can collaborate in the maintenance or transformation of society. (WANDERLEY, 2003, p. 76). In its historical path, it shows that its first mission is to concentrate efforts, aiming at the production of knowledge in the most varied fields of human life - cultural, economic, social, political, etc. -, presenting alternatives to preserve them.

By assuming centrality in the field of higher education, the university has been the object of an expressive number of research studies, deserving to be highlighted those that discuss the uses of this institution (KERR, 2005; SCOTT, 2006). In particular, the classic study of the first mentioned author, conducted in the early 2000s, showed that some universities had already opted, at the time, for the establishment of relations with the economic and political demands that began to change its very institutional nature. Undoubtedly, since then, the alignment of the work of this institution to the demands of the market has intensified and shown new nuances

The analysis of the evolution of the university reveals important elements for the understanding of the place it has assumed in society. One concerns the recognition that, in human evolution, this institution is a fundamental pillar in the construction of knowledge, having shown great resistance to the great challenges that have been present in its own constitution, although its structure has changed over time, since its inception. The other refers to the fact that, considering the relations it has established with the scientific field, the State and the economic evolution of different countries and, in the last decades, with the configuration of a globalized society, the development of the university has not

followed a single model<sup>6</sup>. The historical construction of the idea of the various models of this institution attests to the fact that it is impossible to separate the production of a certain science from the historical and social conditions of existence of the human beings who produce it.

In its genesis and historical trajectory<sup>7</sup>, the university has been constituted as the gateway and privileged space for building the path and the search for solutions to the challenges posed, over time, to society. Thus, it has assumed vital importance in the growing process of humanity's intellectual development, a condition that it has preserved throughout the centuries, from its institutionalization to the present day. "The university is the true center of intellectual activity where the educational process progresses more than in any other institution [...]. It is the only place where forbidden or suspect subjects can be discussed with a certain impunity." (GILES, 1987, p. 63).

Faced with the changes they have undergone since the second half of the twentieth century, universities have a system of governance structured from three vertices - state, market and academic corporations, and the latter can be conceived "as levels and forms of academic authority which vary significantly among nations [and which] are [nothing more] than interest groups." (CLARK, 1983, p. 110). Considering the relationship between the three mentioned vertices, currently, the broader field in which the university is inserted has been undergoing major transformations that occur in emerging contexts, which are shown to be associated with the complexity of this same field. According to Morosini (2014, p. 386), these contexts can be understood as "configurations under construction in higher education observed in contemporary societies and that coexist in tension with pre-existing conceptions, reflecting historical trends.

The emerging contexts of higher education require an understanding of them that takes several factors into account, such as the effects of globalization on the configuration of national university systems and the evolution of these systems in various parts of the

<sup>6</sup> Although it reveals differences in its epistemological matrices, the historical idea of university is structured in six models: (i) French - also called Napoleonic - has as one of the most significant marks the professionalizing focus of the professions, in which research showed itself absent, since it was not articulated with teaching; (ii) English: characterized by humanistic training and transmission of knowledge; (iii) North American: being pragmatist, it indicates the basis for the emergence of the university-company; (iv) German: university as a community of researchers with political and academic freedom; (v) Soviet: predominance of strong state traces and defense of free offer, however, from the historical point of view, it did not come to constitute a model of world prominence (RIBEIRO, 1978); (vi) Latin American - also called democratization model - starts from the assumption that the university should be inserted in the community, seeking alternatives to help it propose ways to change the existential conditions of the individuals who belong to it.

<sup>7</sup> The history of the university can be structured into four major periods: (i) 12th century to the Renaissance: conditions conducive to the invention of this institution, in the medieval context, with reference to the pioneering experiences of Bologna and Paris, as well as its implementation in Europe, under the aegis of the Church; (ii) 15th century: in the Renaissance was strongly influenced by the commercial transformations of capitalism, literary and artistic humanism, as well as the Reformation and Counter-Reformation (sic); (iii) from the 17th century: great scientific discoveries in various fields of knowledge and the Enlightenment (18th century) vital for the beginning of the institutionalization of science; (iv) 19th century unfolding in the current times: characterized by the "introduction of a new relationship between state and university, establishing its main institutional variants" (TRINDADE, 2000, p. 122).

world. In addition, it is important to consider the stage of evolution of these systems at the turn of the twentieth century to the twenty-first, since their configurations reveal their own historicity, although several of them have come to suffer the direct influence of broader global processes. Among these, the Bologna Treaty<sup>8</sup> stands out, which, due to its reach, significantly affects the field of higher education worldwide.

In emerging contexts, new agendas have begun to appear in research on higher education, highlighting: academic architectures (FRANCO, 2012); repercussions of business management in the organization of the university (MOHRMAN; BAKER, 2008); globalized criteria of excellence for the construction of the concept of world class-universities (ALTBACH, 2004); internationalization (KNIGHT, 2012); differentiated systems of access (TROW, 2011); trans nationalization of university systems (HAZELKORN, 2013). However, if these issues are recent, their examination requires association with other latent issues in the field, such as expansion, evaluation, funding, and democratization/inclusion policies. The confrontation of issues directly related to these themes shows that contemporary society points great challenges for higher education, such as, for example, what refers to the strategies defined by the university to meet local demands in a globalized world.

As a process that has its historical roots in industrial society, globalization has led countries to become increasingly interconnected in their cultural, economic, commercial and financial relations, which end up influencing the structure of contemporary higher education. In this context, it is verified "the existence of national education systems in different continents and, simultaneously, the constitution of a transnational sphere in which thousands of institutions, millions of students, and the presence of a plurality of actors move" (MARTINS, 2015, p. 291).

In the globalized society, higher education produces and suffers the effects of certain tensions, which end up causing the need to segment it. This segmentation can be translated, for example, in the clear distinction between institutions that excel in research articulated to teaching and extension, and others that tend to feed the Napoleonic model of teaching. In the case of the university, the reforms it has undergone in recent decades reveal that there is a tendency for the coexistence of logics that reveal a certain level of hybridity capable of influencing the transformation of its role. In Franco's (2012) view, this hybridity reveals its concreteness to the extent that there is a:

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<sup>8</sup> In its essence, the Bologna Process can be seen as an ambitious proposal to improve the higher education systems of European countries, although its consequences have already extended to Latin America and the Caribbean. It is a powerful instrument to strengthen the European Union for the integration of higher education, taking as a reference the principles defined by the Ministers of Education of twenty-nine European countries, in the Bologna Declaration, in 1999. It is structured around two central axes - competitiveness of the European higher education system; mobility and employability in the European space. Also called the Bologna Pact, it is shrouded in various controversies, considering the level of ambition of its university reform program and the distances between what is proposed and what is realized.

[...] global university that responds to the market and gains space in its denominations of neo-professional, liberal-hybrid neo-Napoleonic (incipient research and focus on training of professionals), neo-humboldtian (orientation to scientific-technological production). The university is also understood in the critical perspective of producer of cultural models, but with space for the interconnectivity of knowledge (FRANCO, 2012, p. 64).

At the same time that it expands cultural exchanges, the phenomenon of globalization also reveals definite characteristics at the political-social level, which explains why the far-reaching reforms promoted by the State have led it to assume managerialism as the new management pattern. The result is the implementation of a managerialist model that adopts efficiency and productivity as principles for the control and defense of a performative performance. From this perspective, innovation and improvement of services that are more client-centered and not necessarily citizen-centered gain centrality in the state discourse (NEWMAN; CLARKE, 2012). Concretely, the implications of the managerial management model end up having repercussions on a new model of university, which begins to deal with challenges and dilemmas inherent to the actions that this institution defines in order to figure in the competitive field of higher education.

The strong presence of managerialism in the university environment significantly changes the values of the transformations imposed by the reforms undertaken, which require of the university functions that are incongruous with its historical mission, as well as contribute to destabilizing its institutionality, which, although manifesting itself today, is the result of a long historical course. The destabilizing process in question is directly associated, among other factors, with the intensity of the application of economic principles to the field of higher education. It results in pressure from a privatist mentality that defends the commodification of scientific knowledge, through "a pressure that aims to reduce the social responsibility of the university to its capacity to produce economically useful, that is, marketable knowledge" (SANTOS, 2008, p. 31).

### Dispute Over the Concept of World-class Universities in the Knowledge Economy

In the knowledge economy, the institutions that make up the field of higher education establish relations of struggle and competition, aiming to maximize certain symbolic profits associated with their practices. In this scenario, the university in particular has been induced to guide its practices observing primarily not the needs of society but the business calculation and the profitability of its actions. This reality has contributed to change the very nature of this institution - historically focused on the social production of knowledge -, as it has had to deal with the dilemma of meeting new orientations signaled for its work, which end up being the antithesis of the real democratization of its performance.

In current times, due to the close relationship it has established with the market, the university has been stimulated to generate patents in certain sectors, surpassing, in many situations, the companies themselves (ALTBACH; SALMI, 2011). On the one hand, this attests the requirement of the reconfiguration of the role of this institution and, on the other, the conception of knowledge as a commodity of great value in the globalized society. The direct implication of this is that knowledge tends to be worked by the university, aiming primarily at the market's own needs and not at strengthening its identity, built over time. It is in this scenario that has gained strength, especially in the last two decades, the dispute for the construction of the world-class universities/WCU concept, in close association with the principles of the knowledge economy.

The analysis of the concept of world-class universities requires the understanding of extremely varied realities, considering that, in different regions of the world, some institutions pursue it, in the perspective that it ensures their distinction from others. In this context, the notion of field (BOURDIEU, 1983) helps to understand that the construction of this concept takes place in the struggles established in higher education, considering that its configuration takes as a basic reference global criteria and standards of quality. However, despite being desired by several countries, the very formulation of this university model involves challenges, controversies, and disputes. In analyzing the interests and dilemmas inherent in the process, Altbach (2004, p. 3) calls attention to the fact that in the globalized world there is a kind of ambition for the WCU model: "everyone wants one (world or world-class university), no one knows what it is, and no one knows how to get one [...] no country thinks it can live without one.

The competitive scenario in which world-class universities are inserted requires them to meet certain requirements that, in practice, only a select group of these institutions can meet. One of them is that the research productivity revealed by the professors who make up their staff is associated, among others, with the prestige and institutional awards they receive. In parallel, due to the significant academic capital that these actors accumulate and that is generated in the competitive processes in which they participate, it is reasonable to assume that they reveal a tendency to occupy central positions in different research funding agencies. By revealing certain unique attributes that contribute to their recognition over their competitors, world class universities are distinguished from the others by certain characteristics. Among these, the following stand out:

[...] highly qualified faculty, outstanding research achievements, quality in teaching and learning, high levels of governmental and non-governmental funding, international and talented students, academic freedom, autonomous governance structure, and well-equipped facilities for teaching, research, administration, and-often-for student housing (ALTBACH; SALMI, 2011, p. 3).

Still according to the authors, the excellence achieved by the universities in question in research is associated with the development of research projects that meet international quality standards. Their researchers have academic autonomy in the definition of priorities, besides having funding guaranteed by financial resources that may result from public investments or public-private partnerships, a trend that is quite evident in the countries of the northern hemisphere.

In the managerialist model, the success of the competitive culture is directly associated with the motivation of individuals to produce quality oriented to the consumer and to the pursuit of excellence that, in turn, focuses on globalized standards and criteria. In a considerable number of cases, this leads to the production of international rankings often associated with the dynamics of institutions that intend to be part of the restricted and disputed group of world-class universities, as clarified by Thiengo; Bianchetti and De Mari (2018, p. 1,044):

In the case of the international rankings of higher education, the label presented to the top-ranked institutions is UCM [world-class university] status. These institutions come to be used as measures of productivity, as ways of presenting quality. Thus, the label of UCM signifies, encapsulating or representing a value, the quality or validity of an institution within the field of higher education judgment globally.

Although there are currently more than a dozen global rankings of higher education, the two most important and pioneering international comparative rankings on university performance are admittedly the "Academic Ranking of World Universities/ARWU" (Shanghai) and the British publication "Times Higher Education World University Rankings (THE)". In the case of the latter, whose first edition was published in 2004, its methodology is based on the organization of a ranked list of 200 universities in the light of two basic criteria: continent and areas of knowledge: Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine, based on a total of 13 indicators. In turn, the ARWU was first published in 2003, although it has been elaborated since 1999. The criteria adopted by this ranking privileges the number of articles published "in Science and Nature journals, citations of articles by researchers measured by Thomas Scientific, and by Science and Social Science Citations, professors who have won Nobel Prizes, students distinguished with Nobel Prize and (or) Fiels Medals etc." (MARTINS, 2015, p. 298).

Consultation of the classification made by the two rankings mentioned above shows that, systematically, the absolute majority of the twenty institutions that have reached the academic status of world-class universities, from the classification made by both, are located in the United States. This situation is made explicit by the data for the year 2020, shown below in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Top 20 universities in the world (2020)

<i>Academic Ranking of World Universities/ARWU</i>			<i>Times Higher Education – THE</i>		
Position	Institution	Country	Position	Institution	Country
<b>1</b>	Harvard University	EUA	<b>1</b>	University of Oxford	UK
<b>2</b>	Stanford University	EUA	<b>2</b>	California Institute of Technology	EUA
<b>3</b>	University of Cambridge	UK	<b>3</b>	University of Cambridge	UK
<b>4</b>	Massachusetts Institute of Technology – MIT	EUA	<b>4</b>	Stanford University	EUA
<b>5</b>	University of California, Berkeley	EUA	<b>5</b>	Massachusetts Institute of Technology – MIT	EUA
<b>6</b>	Princeton University	EUA	<b>6</b>	Princeton University	EUA
<b>7</b>	Columbia University	EUA	<b>7</b>	Harvard University	EUA
<b>8</b>	California Institute of Technology	EUA	<b>8</b>	Yale University	EUA
<b>9</b>	University of Oxford	UK	<b>9</b>	University of Chicago	EUA
<b>10</b>	University of Chicago	EUA	<b>10</b>	Imperial College of London	UK
<b>11</b>	Yale University	EUA	<b>11</b>	University of Pennsylvania	EUA
<b>12</b>	Cornell University	EUA	<b>12</b>	Johns Hopkins University	EUA
<b>13</b>	University of California, Los Angeles	EUA	<b>= 13</b>	University of California, Berkeley	EUA
<b>14</b>	Paris-Saclay University	France	<b>= 13</b>	Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH)	Switzerland
<b>15</b>	Johns Hopkins University	EUA	<b>15</b>	University College of London (UCL)	UK
<b>16</b>	University College London (UCL)	UK	<b>16</b>	Columbia University	EUA
<b>16</b>	University of Washington	EUA	<b>17</b>	University of California, Los Angeles	EUA
<b>18</b>	University of California, San Diego	EUA	<b>18</b>	University of Toronto	Canada
<b>19</b>	University Pennsylvania	EUA	<b>19</b>	Cornell University	EUA
<b>20</b>	Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH)	Switzerland	<b>20</b>	Duke University	EUA

Source: Available at <<https://www.hotcourses.com.br/study/rankings/arwu.html>>  
 Accessed on 27 Dec 2020.



As attested by the data shown, in 2020, fifteen of the twenty universities evaluated as the best in the world by the ARWU ranking, corresponding to 75.0% of them, are located in North American territory. Of the remaining institutions, four (20.0%) are European - three from the UK and one from Switzerland - and one is from Canada.

The data from the second THE ranking - which evaluates almost 1,400 universities in 92 countries - corroborates the exclusivity of WCUs in the northern hemisphere in the same year. Furthermore, they indicate that practically two-thirds of them - equivalent to fourteen (70.0%) are located in the United States, while the other six (30.0%) are distributed as follows: four in the United Kingdom, one in Canada and one in Switzerland. It should be noted that, in the year under consideration, the methodology used by this ranking led to the classification of two world universities in the same position (16th) - University College London and the University of Washington - the first being located in the United Kingdom and the second in the United States.

As can be seen, all 20 universities ranked by the ARWU and THE rankings as being the best in the world in 2020 are located in Western or Anglo-Saxon countries, a geographical concentration that reveals a certain uniqueness. Moreover, just as Latin was the predominant language in medieval universities, the English language ensures its hegemony with almost all of these institutions, a prevalence advocated by the OECD.

The language of instruction is a strong determinant of students' destination choice. English is the lingua franca of the globalized world, with one in four people using it globally. Not surprisingly, countries where English is an official language [...] are the top OECD destination countries for international students (OECD, 2017, p. 294 - author's translation).

From this point of view, it is in the domain of the English language that the hegemony of the globalization of erudition and the norms of discipline for productivity tend to be established/reiterated at the level of the internationalization of higher education. However, as Bourdieu (2002, p. 3) warns, "the establishment of genuine scientific internationalism [...] is the beginning of internationalism" [because] intellectual life is not spontaneously international."

In the competitive field of higher education, the dispute over the concept of WCU has been presenting strong references for the delineation of a new model of university, in various parts of the world, such as, for example, Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. "While China and India have focused attention on their efforts to position themselves competitively in international rankings, one cannot fail to note the attempts that Saudi Arabia has been implementing." (MARTINS, 2015, p. 302). Undoubtedly, the struggle of these and other countries for the construction of the concept in world-class universities occurs from its comparison with others, taking as reference globalized indicators of excellence, which translate academic and social prestige.

For Thiengo, Bianchetti, and De Mari (2018), the political and institutional developments of the search for the construction of WUCs can be grouped into two major axes. The other refers to the orientation of national and institutional policies and decisions, translated into the actions of governments and universities that also start using rankings to contribute, in a strategic way, to the formulation of their policies and decision-making. These developments are also associated with the definition of actions by several countries in the logic of the discourse of collaboration / cooperation of international academia, which gains strength in the context of inherent competitiveness in the field of higher education in various regions of the world, as Hazelkorn illustrates (2013, p. 14):

Russia, Brazil, Chile, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, and Qatar restrict their state scholarships to students admitted to top universities in other countries; India, Russia, and Singapore use rankings as criteria for academic collaborations; the Netherlands and Denmark use them as immigration criteria, accepting foreigners who graduate from top universities.

In these and other countries, the process of construction of world-class universities is guided by an instrumental rationality, which opposes the emancipatory nature of the policies and practices of the university itself, conceived in light of its historical constitution and mission. Within this instrumental rationality, at increasing levels, there is a threat to the values of autonomy and self-government of university institutions, as well as to its own academic freedom. "And this is the result of the conjugation of ideological factors (that contradictorily cross the State itself) and that feed on priorities established by international organizations" (AFONSO, 2015, p. 278), such as the World Bank, the European Union and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Finally, it is worth reiterating that the relationships established between WCUs, as well as between them and other institutions that make up the field of higher education, demand their understanding in the complex space that includes a plurality of institutions with very different vocations and that, as a whole, participate in a game to remain in this same field, with the perspective of being able to differentiate themselves from others.

## Conclusions

Considering the discussion made in this text, the notion of field formulated by Bourdieu (1983, 2004) helped to create the conditions for understanding the intensity of the challenges and dilemmas faced by higher education in the knowledge economy. It also contributed, also, to understand the expressive competitiveness installed in it, assuming that in the dynamics that are established among the different institutions that form it are present, simultaneously, relations of conflict and complicity, of cooperation and dispute. Besides, it has strengthened the conviction that, in the knowledge economy, especially, universities seek to conquer and/or maintain certain positions in the scenario of disputes in which they participate. This phenomenon has contributed to a select group of institutions - world-class universities - striving to occupy positions in the classification made by international rankings, which are defined by globalized standards and criteria.

The study of higher education requires considering both the policies formulated for the sector and the responses it has presented to social demands. Its historical evolution shows that it has been constituted in an extremely complex academic field, surrounded by a significant institutional heterogeneity in both the public and private spheres. Today, this diversity of institutional formats allows us to identify within it a plurality of academic practices and vocations.

As a result, in recent decades, there has been a growing interest worldwide in taking the field of higher education as an object of investigation, with a view to portraying its dynamics and specificity. In a globalized society, its examination requires special attention to the implications of the principles of economics on the academic practices developed by the institutions that make up this field, especially universities. In this context, it is indispensable to reflect on how the university has been required to associate its work with the logic that governs the field of economics, in broader terms.

Based on the application of the principles of the world of economics to the field of higher education, what is at stake inside the institutions is the [review] installation of a new logic that has been built in emerging contexts, which implies that knowledge is now seen as a commodity, as opposed to its conception as a public good. In practice, this change of focus means that knowledge has been constituted as the main productive force in globalized society, which occurs in the light of the guidelines indicated by the world's most developed countries.

In the highly competitive context of globalized society, the university finds itself heavily involved in the knowledge economy, which ends up presenting various challenges to this institution. Among these, one of the most expressive refers to the threats that surround the university's mission, historically built and which translates into its commitment to the social production of knowledge, in the perspective of the search for solutions to the problems presented to society, at different moments of its evolution.

In the contemporary world, the disputes around the field of higher education are intensified, in a way associated with the knowledge-based economy. The struggles that take place in this field end up inducing universities to seek the alignment of their work with the guidelines of this type of economy. Moreover, they have created certain conditions for the emergence of a new model of university - world-class universities - which, being evaluated through international rankings, tend to adhere to a kind of global scientific vision.

This new type of university seeks to conquer standards of excellence and institutional performance that prove capable of contributing to their struggles, aiming to secure positions of distinction before the others. The disputes in which they engage legitimize a basic principle of any field, according to which the struggles obey specific forms "between the new one that is entering and tries to force the right of entry and the dominant one that tries to defend the monopoly and exclude competition" (BOURDIEU,

1983, p. 88). In this context, the struggle for the concept of world-class university occurs relationally in the field of higher education, considering that each institution that participates in it always takes the others as a reference, as it seeks to build its own brand that, in turn, has its recognition in international rankings. Underlying the culture of competitiveness of these universities is a managerialist model of management that presents the basic references for the production of international rankings in which they participate.

Finally, it is worth noting that in a reality marked, above all, by major social, economic and political transformations, higher education undergoes major mutations that gain strength amidst the contradictions and uncertainties of emerging contexts. In this scenario, reforms in higher education have been promoted, demanding the restructuring of university systems, leading them to develop academic practices marked by competitiveness. Together, the institutions that make up the field of higher education engage in disputes, adopting strategies of struggle, but preserving relations of interdependence with their competitors.

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