

Comparisons between Argentine and Brazilian higher education: histories and effects of commodification

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ABSTRACT : *The present study seeks to understand the contrasts between Brazil and Argentina in relation to the demand for higher education, where both underwent university reforms closely linked to the guidelines of the Central Bank and IMF in the 90s. Brazil used public funding to consolidate large oligopolies of private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), while Argentina, even with a strong market for private HEIs, maintained greater state control over the number of enrollments. We seek to understand whether this present control of the public sector satisfies the demand for labor with higher education or not, in addition to accentuating these differences with Brazil. The results showed that Argentina followed the variations of its employed population with higher education in a very uniform way, while Brazil showed a constant increase in the population with higher education, while the employed population decreased.*

KEYWORDS – *Commodification, IES, Argentina, Brazil.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, Latin America has experienced significant transformations in its higher education systems, shaped by reforms and policies that seek to improve access to quality education. In this context, Brazil, driven by the 1968 reform, assumed a prominent role in promoting student financing as a means of expanding access to higher education (CORBUCCI et al., 2016; MARTINS, 2009; MOTA JUNIOR, 2019; TAVARES; MAUÉS, 2013). However, this trajectory is intertwined with the rise of liberal policies, encouraged by the World Bank in the 1990s (WORLD BANK, 1996), which have shaped the way higher education has developed in the country.

One of the notable consequences of this process is the consolidation of large oligopolies of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Brazil, with a notable growth of the private sector. In the midst of this expansion, the question arises of the extent to which the focus on student finance policies truly meets the demands of the labor market and the quality of education offered.

For an interesting contrast, consider Argentina, which also underwent a reform in its higher education in the 1990s, through the Ley de Educacion Superior. However, even with the presence of a robust private initiative, public HEIs continued to play a leading role in the provision of higher education in the country (MOREIRA, 2013). This discrepancy in relation to Brazil raises intriguing questions about the educational models adopted in both countries, the coexistence of the public and private sectors, and the results observed in the context of access, quality, and equity in higher education.

In this article, we will explore these dynamics, examining how student financing policies, the expansion of private HEIs, and the public higher education system have evolved in Brazil and Argentina, and how these approaches have impacted the educational structure and societal needs in both countries.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 Higher Education in Brazil

The market for private educational institutions in Brazil emerged as a consequence of the University Reform of 1968 and the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB) of 1961. Until the 1970s, higher education was formally public, but with few institutions, difficulty in admission, and a curriculum that was rarely approved by students (Martins, 2009). The lack of places in higher education institutions in Brazil was a matter of concern in the 1960s. In 1960, about 29,000 students who had been approved for a higher education institution were unable to enroll because of a lack of available places. The situation worsened over the next decade, with the number of students without a place rising to 162,000 in 1969 (Martins, 2009).

To supplement this growing demand for access to higher education, the military regime initiated a substantial volume of actions to study issues of implementing a larger-scale provision of this education. It is important to note that, in this process, the main study that stands out is the Meira Mattos Report (EAPES, 1969), written by the American professor Rudolph Atcon, beginning to introduce studies and initiate a strong characteristic of a globalized market with great commodified expression (EAPES, 1969).

The LDB of 1961 defined education as a right for all and established a set of guidelines for the Brazilian educational system. One of the main innovations of the LDB of 1961 was the creation of the Federal Council of Education, which was responsible for formulating the guidelines for national education and for regulating the creation of new educational institutions (BRAZIL, 1961).

Below we will have two distinct syntheses on the development process of HEIs. Firstly, until the 1970s, between 1961 and 1970, public HEIs went from a share of 56% to only 50% at the end of the period, reaching up to 62% of market share in 1963 and 1964 (Levy, 1986).

Table 1: Evolution of enrollments in the public and private spheres of higher education between 1961 and 1970

Year	Total Enrollment	Private Institution Enrollment	Public Institutions Enrollment	% of Public Enrollments over the total
1961	98.892	43.560	55.332	56%
1962	107.299	43.275	64.024	60%
1963	124.214	47.428	76.786	62%
1964	142.386	54.721	87.665	62%
1965	155.781	68.194	87.587	56%
1966	180.109	81.667	98.442	55%
1967	212.882	91.608	121.274	57%
1968	278.295	124.496	153.799	55%
1969	342.886	157.826	185.060	54%
1970	425.478	214.865	210.613	50%

Source: adapted from Levy (1986).

On another point, and here we introduce the concept of a possible real trigger for the financialization of private HEIs in Brazil, is the 90s, with the World Bank's policies for higher education in countries and the expansion and "democratization" of student financing for these private HEIs.

Table 2: Evolution of public and private enrollments in higher education institutions in Brazil (1960-2020)

Year	Enrollment in Public Institutions	Enrollment in Private Institutions	Total	% Public	% Private
1960	59.624	47.067	106.691	56%	44%

1970	210.613	214.865	425.478	50%	50%
1980	492.232	885.054	1.377.28	36%	64%
1990	578.625	961.455	1.540.08	38%	62%
2000	887.026	1.807.219	2.694.24	33%	67%
2010	1.461.696	3.987.424	5.449.12	27%	73%
2020	1.956.352	6.724.002	8.680.35	23%	77%

Source: elaborated by the author based on data from the Sense of Higher Education (INEP, 2021).

Above, we can see that during the 90s and 2000s, there is a *boom* enrollments in private HEIs, from 961 thousand to 1.8 million. The first point to be analyzed as a factor for this expansion is the investment priorities defined by international organizations. According to Corbucci *et al.* (2016), During the 1990s there was a reduction in attention to higher education, especially in the public sphere, these limited investments were largely supported by guidelines from international financial organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, which recommended that spending on education in developing countries should focus on basic education. As a result, the gap between the growing demand for higher education and the supply of places in public institutions has widened, making room for the growth of the private sector. The reduction in investments in infrastructure and capital in the period from 1995 to 1998 also indicated the federal government's willingness to favor private sector growth. Or *boom* Between 1997 and 2003, there was a 132% increase in the number of enrollments in face-to-face undergraduate courses.

The major point for this consolidation of private higher education would be student financing (Student Financing Fund – FIES), created in the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso in 1999 and substantially expanded during the Lula 1 and 2 governments (PRADO, 2016; SOUZA; SAINTS; SILVA, 2020). The availability of easy access to the program, including the reduction of interest rates, the waiver of the need for a guarantor and the creation of the guarantee fund, among other measures, has transformed FIES into a highly favorable opportunity for private educational institutions. Together with the work of the University for All Program (Prouni), the IPO on the stock exchange and the participation of investment funds (private equity), these companies experienced an exponential growth in their ventures in the educational sector (KEYS; SAINTS; KATO, 2020).

Table 3: Impact of FIES on the largest groups of private HEIs in Brazil (2010-2016)

Year	Kroton		Staius		Be Educational		Anima	
	FIES Transfer	Net Revenue	FIES Transfer	Net Revenue	FIES Transfer	Net Revenue	FIES Transfer	Net Revenue
2010	39,35	802,06	57,57	1.495,95	-	-	26,32	330,62
2011	192,01	833,21	14,36	1.540,55	-	-	71,85	366,91
2012	525,11	1.192,70	372,48	1.735,18	104,53	387,93	122,97	443,27
2013	926,63	1.534,53	765,78	2.231,98	210,48	588,95	245,63	538,58
2014	2.128,96	2.926,85	1.374,43	2.915,85	425,98	855	361,86	785,56
2015	2.928,73	4.151,80	1.558,46	2.824,85	532,64	1.148,32	419,24	925,82
2016	2.496,95	4.019,03	1.440,57	2.893,11	553,26	1.151,08	344,35	931,29

Source: adapted from Chaves; Saints; Kato (2020).

In the table above, we can clearly see that the largest groups may have used FIES resources for expansion and profit maximization, in which, at the same time that the volumes of transfers in their accounts grew, their results were also higher

1.2 Higher Education in Argentina

First, we need to understand the role of the State in the dynamics of resource distribution for the country's educational sectors. To Krawczyk (2008), education in Argentina has not escaped the centralizing inclination of

the state, which has been rooted in the country's federalist logic since the nineteenth century. As a result of this advance of the National State in the expansion of primary education, in contrast to the limited provincial initiatives, two distinct education systems emerged. One of them was national in character and was structured throughout the Argentine territory, while the other consisted of precarious provincial educational systems. This division illustrates the duality in the Argentine state's approach to primary education, which combined financial centralization with administrative fragmentation.

According to Moreira (2013), in 1884 Argentina enacted Law 1.420 de educación común, which made primary education compulsory and free. This law established the general administration of schools under a National Council of Education attached to the Ministry of Public Instruction. It guaranteed the existence of free public schools for schoolchildren, with the creation of School Districts with at least one public school in urban areas of 1,000 to 1,500 inhabitants and in colonies and territories with 300 to 500 inhabitants. In addition, the law regulated the training and conditions of hiring teachers, the quality of school buildings, the organization of education, punishments for parents who did not keep their children in school regularly, and defined a mandatory curriculum. Religious education was offered outside the mandatory minimum curriculum, in after-school hours, before or after classes. With the implementation of this legal framework, the Argentine education system was gradually built and strengthened, and in the first decades of the twentieth century, approximately 70% of Argentine children between the ages of 6 and 13 attended school.

In Tiramonti's synthesis (2005), the consolidation of the national education system in Argentina is intimately linked to a societal plan inspired by the ideals of European Modernity, with the Nation-State as its main articulating axis. In this context, education assumes a primary function in Argentine society, that is, to strengthen the idea of belonging to a nationality among the population, creating conditions for the consolidation of the Nation-State itself. It is based on a universalist culture of promoting equal rights of citizenship.

Private education institutions had a late entry into the Argentine higher education system. According to the country's Office of University Policies (SPU, 2011), it was only in 1959 that the first private university appeared, the Universidad Católica Argentina, located in Buenos Aires, which later obtained the recognition of the Vatican as "Pontifical". That same year, two other private universities were also founded: the Universidad Católica de Córdoba (UCC) and the Universidad del Salvador (USAL). While the former had a Catholic confessional approach, the latter was a private educational institution. In 1960, the Universidad Católica de Santa Fe (UCSF) was established, and the following year, in 1961, another private university, the Universidad del Museo Social Argentino, opened in the nation's capital. This late evolution of private higher education institutions in Argentina has played a significant role in the diversification of the country's education system.

According to Buchbinder (2005), Argentina had an enrollment rate in higher education, equivalent to 37.4% of the total enrollment in this modality in Latin America in 1955. This process was triggered by a series of measures that sought to break with the limitations on university admissions to the sectors of the population that had fewer economic resources.

Still on Buchbinder's synthesis, it is important to understand that Argentina had a large number of universities, mostly public. It was only in 1955 that there was an opening to the private sector, largely due to the post-World War II global trend. In the same way that happened in Brazil with the university reform of 1968, seen in the previous section, Argentina also saw the implementation of several initiatives. This included the creation of the Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (1958), which focused on funding research and stimulating a career as a researcher. In addition, the Basic Cycles were introduced in the first years of university studies, there was flexibility and updating of the curriculum, the departmentalization of faculties, encouragement of the exclusive dedication of professors and the creation of new courses, among other measures (Moreira, 2013). This process of modernization and renovation affected the various universities differently over the period from 1955 to 1966.

Table 4: Evolution of private enrollment in Argentina (1970-1991)

Country	Years	Enrollment in private higher education institutions	% of private enrollments over total
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	1970	47,673	17%
Argentina	1982	120,101	22%
	1991	159,475	15%

Source: adapted from Schwartzman (1994).

In the end, Argentina went through a process of university reform in the 1990s, more precisely in 1995, with the Federal Law of Higher Education 24.521/1995. This, like the 1968 reform in Brazil, was a reflection of the World Bank's policies to ensure a supplementation of the supply of vacancies for the private sector (Mestman & Suasnabar, 2006).

As a result, the Argentine higher education system has become peculiar in relation to the Brazilian one. Argentina in 2008 had a total of 921 public and 1,206 private higher education institutions, but had a total of 1,599,308 enrollments in the public sector and only 578,723 in the private sector (Moreira, 2013). In other words, even though there were more private HEIs, the public sector had the largest volume of enrollments.

III. METHODOLOGY

For the present study, we sought to analyze the supply and demand of vacancies from two countries that are so close, but that developed in different ways through the same market stimuli.

On the one hand, we seek to analyze the Argentine population with higher education and its relationship with the volume of jobs for this class, aiming to identify the differences with Brazil, since we see Argentina as a more centralizing model in relation to its HEIs, which have developed a lot with the meticulous presence of the state and, even though there are more private institutions in the country, it is in the public sector that the largest volume of enrollments is found.

With this, we aim to accentuate the dynamics of the market, to understand if the evolution through a process of oligopolies in Brazil and with large volumes of student financing was consistent with the market demand, in contrast to the Argentine model, which was, in a way, more conservative in private expansion.

We will use documentary research, data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) of both countries, as well as data from the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP) for data from the sector of Brazilian private HEIs and for Argentina we seek data from the Ministry of National Education and Secretary of University Policies.

It is important to highlight some limitations regarding some data from Argentina, which were not possible to enter due to the lack of information in the country's databases.

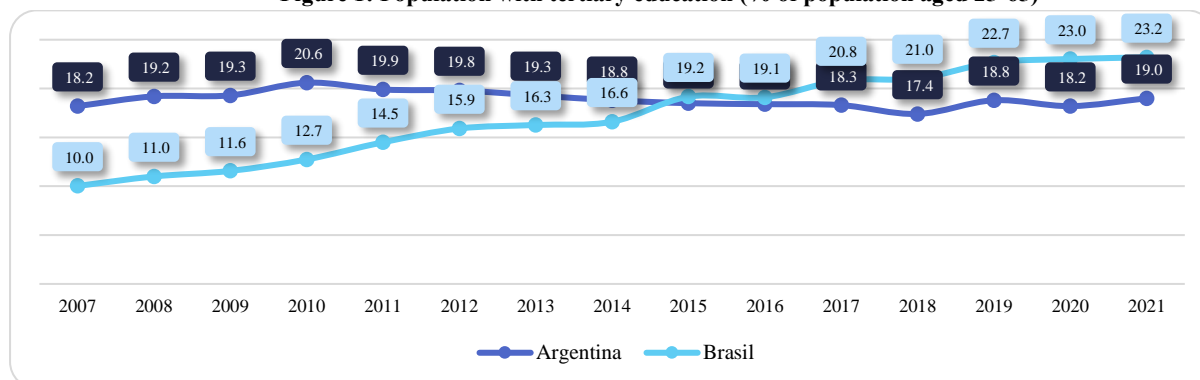
IV. RESULTS

The first points to be analyzed are focused on the percentages of the populations of both countries that have higher education.

In the first place, Argentina's leadership scenarios in terms of employability of the population with higher education are highlighted, which has always remained above Brazilian levels during the years analyzed. Secondly, we highlight that Argentina has perpetuated itself in an absolute leadership in relation to the percentage of the population between 25 and 35 years old with higher education until the year 2015, where Brazil consolidates itself in this regard until the last year analyzed. However, it is important to take into account that Argentina opened up an 8 percentage point difference in the percentage of the population between 25 and 35 years old with higher education and, as we will see, the pattern of job demand of the population with higher education has always followed the percentages of the population with higher education, or vice versa.

Below we see the data on the percentages of the population between 25 and 35 years old in both countries with tertiary education.

Figure 1: Population with tertiary education (% of population aged 25-65)



Source: Prepared by the author based on OECD data (2023).

Above, we can see that Argentina opened up 8 percentage points in relation to Brazil in 2007, where even if oscillating in some years, the difference only narrowed, until a difference of 2.2 percentage points in 2014. From 2015 onwards, Brazil began to lead the position among the countries, starting with an advantage of 0.2 percentage points until reaching the final difference of the analysis of 4.2 percentage points in 2021.

It is also important to draw attention to the fact that there is a constant demand for the population with higher education in Argentina. Between 2007 and 2021, Argentina showed a positive variation of only 4% growth in its population with higher education, which we can see in the graph that was not so positive in fact, since there were negative oscillations such as between 2010 and 2018, when the country jumped from 20% to 17.4%, a variation of -16% in the period.

Brazil has fewer oscillations, its growth has been concrete and constant, with no reductions, and still with a positive variation of the population with higher education of 131% between 2007 and 2021. With this synthesis of the difference in demand for higher education between the two countries, it is necessary to analyze the dynamics of course supply in both.

As previously demonstrated, Argentina has a mostly public education sector of HEIs. In 2019, Argentina had a total of 2,343,587 students enrolled in the university system, of which 1,616,000 were in public universities and 727,587 in private universities (MINISTRY OF EDUCATION CULTURE, 2020). This represents a gross enrollment rate of 43.6%.

Between 2015 and 2019, the number of students enrolled in the Argentine university system increased by 11.5%, with public universities growing by 13.3% and private universities by 7.8% in the same period (SECRETARIAT OF UNIVERSITY POLICIES, 2020). The share of public universities in total enrollment increased from 68.3% in 2015 to 69% in 2019.

Between 2016 and 2020, enrollment in public higher education institutions (HEIs) grew by 12.63%, from 1,438,000 to 1,620,000 students (MINISTRY OF NATIONAL EDUCATION, 2021). Enrollment in private HEIs fell by 2.4% in the same period, from 747,000 to 729,000 students.

Table 5: Evolution of enrollment in Higher Education in Argentina (2007-2021)

Year	Public Enrollment	Private Enrollment	Total Enrollment
2007	1.100.000	600.000	1.700.000
2008	1.140.000	620.000	1.760.000
2009	1.180.000	640.000	1.820.000
2010	1.220.000	660.000	1.880.000

2011	1.260.000	680.000	1.940.000
2012	1.300.000	700.000	2.000.000
2013	1.340.000	720.000	2.060.000
2014	1.380.000	740.000	2.120.000
2015	1.420.000	760.000	2.180.000
2016	1.438.000	747.000	2,185,000
2019	1,616,000	727,587	2,343,587
2020	1,620,000	729,000	2,349,000

Source: author's elaboration based on data from the Ministry of National Education (2020) and Secretary of University Policies (2021).

Below is a table about the enrollments of Brazilian higher education, demonstrating the great role of the private sector in the demand for undergraduate degrees in the country. It is important to note that the data for the years 2019 to 2021 are approximate and were obtained from the results of the 2020 Higher Education Census (INEP, 2023).

In addition, the data for the year 2021 are preliminary and were released by the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (Inep) in November 2022 (INEP, 2022).

Table 6: Evolution of enrollment in higher education institutions in Brazil (2007-2021)

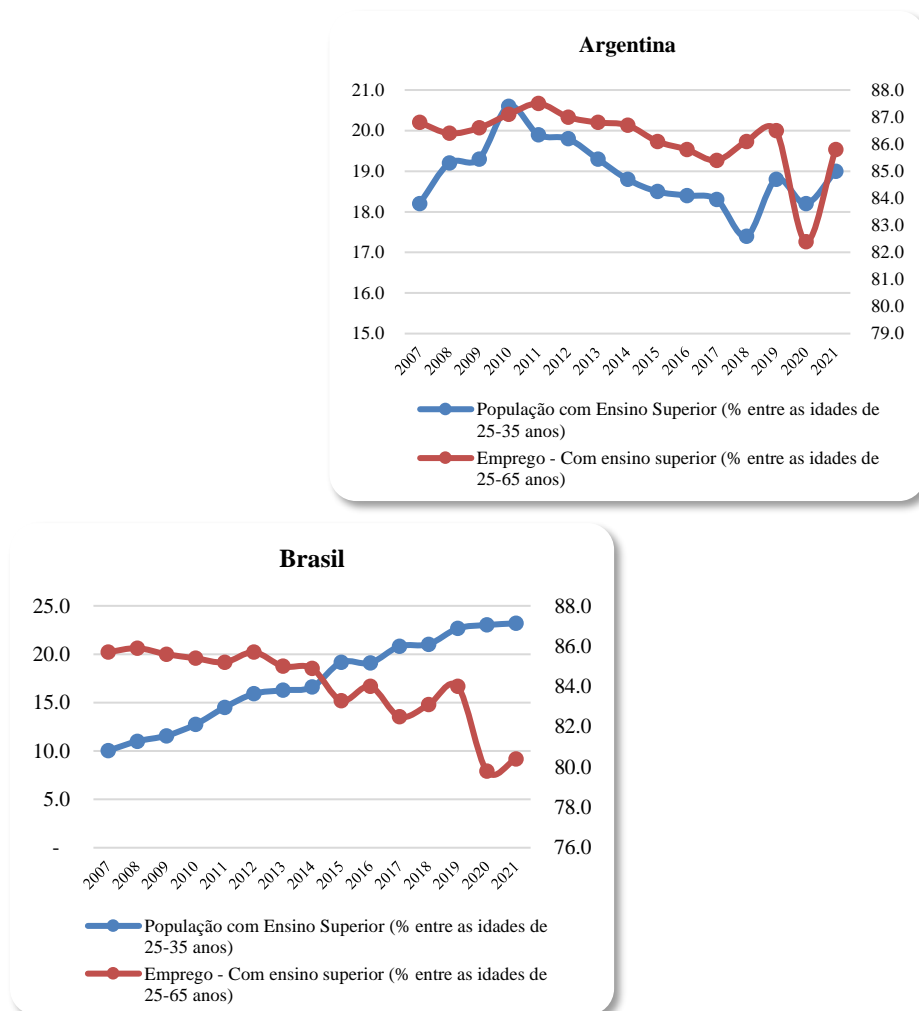
Year	Enrollment in Public Institutions	Enrollment in Private Institutions
2007	2.155.327	3.262.942
2008	2.308.993	3.522.191
2009	2.484.732	3.794.598
2010	2.682.238	4.032.594
2011	2.862.926	4.282.819
2012	3.042.431	4.546.982
2013	3.219.332	4.821.056
2014	3.393.566	5.105.734
2015	3.570.596	5.401.786
2016	3.746.947	5.710.841
2017	3.924.768	6.033.803
2018	4.102.913	6.370.287
2019	4,280,000	~6,700,0001
2020	~4,500,0001	~8,600,0001
2021	~4,800,0002	~9,000,0000

Source: elaborated by the author based on the Higher Education Census carried out annually by INEP.

According to the historical series analyzed, Brazil has, on average, a private higher education about 57% higher than the public one. This difference was found at 87% in the year 2021. In addition, Brazil achieved an increase of about 2658% in the number of enrollments in private HEIs from 2007 to 2021, remembering that the population with higher education evolved about 131% in the period.

Below, we will expand our analysis with the percentage of this population with higher education between the ages of 25-65 who are employed in both countries.

Figure 1: Graph of the percentages of workers with higher education in Brazil and Argentina, compared to the percentage of the population with higher education (2007-2021)



Source: prepared by the authors based on OECD data (2023).

Above, we clearly see the effects of possible commodification. While Brazil, with an evolution of more than 2000% in its private HEIs and just over 100% in variations in the population with higher education, has a constant decrease in relation to the percentage of employees with higher education, in fact, a reduction of 6% from 2007 to 2021 in this percentage. It is also important to note that in 2020 more than 40% of the population with higher education in Brazil was employed in jobs that did not require a degree (Lima & Gerbelli, 2020).

Still regarding this comparison, Argentina has a certain linearity regarding the two variables, we can clearly see that the percentage of the population with higher education follows the employed population with higher education.

It is quite possible that Argentina has this contrast with Brazil due to the way in which higher education has been fostered by both countries. While Brazil, after the indications of the World Bank in 1996, consolidated the private sector as the maintainer of the population's demand for higher education, Argentina continued with policies to maintain public power in HEIs. Thus, while Brazil used public financing to consolidate large groups of private HEIs, which expanded throughout the country and substantially evolved both the number of companies

and the number of customers, Argentina went in the opposite direction, placing the promotion of the market in the hands of the state, which resulted in a conservative growth among the variables. that went together between the period analyzed.

It is also important to have an idea of the size of the IES market in Argentina. In 2021, there were about 686 thousand institutions for higher education and 214 thousand for secondary and technical education (ABMES, 2021). However, it was not possible to find precise information on the distribution between public and private of these institutions. To give you an idea of the size of this market, in 2021, Brazil had approximately 313 public and 2,261 private higher education institutions.

V. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

First of all, we can see that Brazil has possibly experienced a substantially high growth in relation to both its population with higher education and the number of enrollments in private HEIs. We can affirm through this study, substantiated by previous works (Ferreira, 2023; FERREIRA & SINDEAUX, 2022), that the private sector played a fundamental role in this growth, which apparently ignored many of the social development variables analyzed by the author, such as employment rates and the employment rates of the population with higher education.

In this study, we see that Brazil experienced a growth of more than 100% in its population with higher education between 2007 and 2021, while the rate of this population that is employed went through a reduction of 6% in the same period. As mentioned above, this is very possibly due to the fact that Brazilian higher education has found in the private sector a way to achieve the supply of places necessary for the population, however, with the volumes of public financing at low interest rates for private HEIs, the market has consolidated itself in the formation of large oligopolies and a supply of places aimed at scale, poorly aligned with the labor market and much less with the quality of education, as demonstrated in previous studies.

Argentina, in this analyzed spectrum, has a mostly public higher education, even with a large presence of private HEIs, which very possibly impacts the country's vacancies, which we see as being very well aligned with the employment factor for these individuals with undergraduate or graduate degrees. In addition, there was little variation in the percentages of its population with higher education and employment in this population.

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