



Supporting the contribution of Higher Education Institutions to Regional Development

Peer Review Report

Northern Paraná, Brazil

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background: OECD/IMHE review

This review of the Northern Paraná region in Brazil is part of the OECD/IMHE project entitled Supporting the Contribution of Higher Education Institutions to Regional Development which embraced 14 regions in 12 countries in 2005/2006. The IMHE thematic review project was launched as a response to a multiplicity of initiatives across OECD countries seeking to mobilise higher education in support of regional development. The aim was to synthesise this experience into a coherent body of policy and practice to guide higher education institutions and regional and national governments. At the same time, the IMHE project was designed to assist with capacity-building in each country/region through providing an opportunity for dialogue between HEIs and regional stakeholders and clarifying roles and responsibilities.

Review process

The Peer Review drew on a self-evaluation process guided by an OECD template. This asked HEIs to critically evaluate, with their regional partners and in the context of national higher education and regional policies, how effective they were in contributing to the development of their regions. Key aspects of the self evaluation related to: the contribution of research to regional innovation; the role of teaching

and learning in the development of human capital; the contribution to social, cultural and environmental development and the role of the HEIs in building regional capacity to act in an increasingly competitive global economy.

The Northern Paraná self-evaluation was coordinated by a team of researchers from the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR) commissioned by the State Secretary for Science, Technology and Higher Education (SETI). Participation from higher education institutions, government-related agencies and businesses was pursued.

The direct costs of the project were covered by the state government. The OECD review visit took place on 20-26 August 2006. The Peer Review Team - José Ginés Mora-Ruiz (Spain), José Ferreira Gomes (Portugal), Paulo Haddad (Mexico) and Francisco Marmolejo (Mexico) - met with more than 88 people from universities, government agencies, community based organisations and companies.

The Northern Paraná region

Paraná is a state located in the southern part of Brazil. With an area of 199 554 km², it represents 6% of the Brazilian GNP and 5.62% of the total population. It has a unique racial composition in Brazil: whites represent almost two-thirds of the population. Paraná's capital city is Curitiba with a greater metropolitan population of close to 2 million. Curitiba is rapidly becoming the place of new investments in the Brazilian automobile industry.

The State of Paraná is divided into municipalities. For analytical purposes the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) has divided the state in ten regions, which have no formal government authority. One of these "regions" is Central-Northern Paraná, which is the second most important region in Paraná composed of 71 municipalities. These include Londrina and Maringá, the two biggest cities after Curitiba, each hosting one of the two main state universities in Paraná and each making their own efforts to develop their respective microregions.

Thus, the region of North Paraná has, to some extent, a fuzzy identity. It is a "statistical region" but does not have an overseeing political or administrative structure. In addition, its integration in the State of Paraná is also weak as a consequence of its distinct migratory settlement patterns. The region's settlement and development around the 1950s was motivated by coffee bean plantations, which have declined since the middle of the 1970s. Since the 1980s, the economy of the Northern Paraná has achieved good results, mainly thanks to the agribusiness industry; a regional specialisation in services; and growth in a variety of industries such as clothing, fabrics, furniture, food, alcohol, plastics and mechanical parts.

Northern Paraná has one of the highest standards of living in Brazil. While it is performing positively in economic and social terms, it has been losing its relative position in the state economy since the 1970s. The regional economy, however, has great potential to grow at a faster rate than the state economy and even the national economy, especially in the areas of biotechnology, bio-energy, consumer goods, and agro-industrial food production. The favourable perspectives for economic

development highlight the question of the role to be played by higher education institutions in the development strategies.

Higher education institution's contributions to region building

Paraná is one of the few states where the state system of higher education is larger than the federal system. Its expenditures reach 7% of state revenue. The state system includes five universities and 11 faculties with a total enrolment of 70 510 students representing 24% of the total enrolment of 292 018 higher education students. In Northern Paraná, only 4.7% of the 18-22 year-old youth enter higher education, a figure well below the Brazilian average of 7.6%, which, in turn, is rather low when compared with other Latin American countries.

Higher education in Paraná includes one federally funded university located in the capital of the state, five state funded universities and a variety of privately owned institutions. Two of the state funded institutions are located in the Northern region: the State University of Londrina (UEL) and the State University of Maringá (UEM). Together, the two institutions represent 50% of the total student population enrolled in state universities in Paraná. They offer 45% of all undergraduate courses, 56% of specialization courses, 80% of master courses and 100% of doctoral programs made available by state universities in Paraná. In addition, there is a variety of private higher education institutions which complement the academic offerings of the state universities including UNOPAR, CESUMAR and UNIFIL.

HEIs in Northern Paraná are non-substitutable regional protagonists because government and business sector have proposed plans for the future of the region including activities which are intensive in scientific and technological knowledge and which are essential part of the HEIs' institutional missions. These development strategies cannot be implemented without the strong and continuous action of HEIs in the region. HEIs are prepared to promote consistent research and innovation to deal with the economic, social and environmental issues of the sustainable development processes of Northern Paraná. Also, a new national legal framework has been set up to induce research programs from higher education institutions towards more active and effective regional engagement.

However, some obstacles need to be overcome if universities are to be fully engaged in region building. These include: (1) limited organisational flexibility in HEIs; (2) a lack of institutionalized system of financial incentives for engagement in regional innovation; (3) ideological tension inside HEIs; (4) limited vision and capacity in SMEs in the region; (5) limited collaborative framework among industry and HEIs; (6) outdated research infrastructure in HEIs in the region; and (7) a lack of policy for innovation at the regional level.

The study program offerings of the state universities are ample and, in general, appear to be responsive to local needs and to the requests of the local community. While the efforts made by many members of the university community to respond to societal needs are commendable, there is also ideological resistance among staff to partnerships with industry. Systematic channels of communication between society and universities for curricular reform remain limited. Despite recent increase in academic collaboration between higher education

institutions, there is an evident need for more coordination and collaboration among them.

The national perspective

In recent years, Brazil has experienced rapid growth and transformation in higher education in an environment characterized by demographic pressures, political diversification, economic globalization, and government decentralisation.

As the country faces the need to play a more effective role in the knowledge-based society, higher education institutions in Northern Paraná, with the active involvement of the business sector and the state government, are in a unique position to develop and implement a strategic partnership for regional engagement. This could be used as a basis for a constructive dialogue with the national government and the key ministries involved, as well as with the broader national higher education community, the business sector and other important actors to further review and implement necessary changes to:

- funding mechanisms,
- regulations for quality assurance,
- institutional governance,
- levels of flexibility in the offering of academic programs,
- contracting of academic staff ,and
- internationalisation of institutions.

The regional perspective

There is perceived competition between the two main cities, Maringá and Londrina. The two poles of the Maringá-Londrina Axis have a lot of similarities from an economic and social point of view. In this sense, North Parana is a region with shared interests but without a formal structure for building cooperation and a common future. The relevance of a jointly configured Maringá-Londrina Axis would be much greater than the relevance of each city independently. It is therefore critical to develop a regional economy and society that can face the competitive world with confidence. The region could become an economic pole of reference at the national level and an attractive site for inward investments. Some steps have already been taken to this direction, including the creation of joint institutions at a micro-regional level, aimed at developing a more prosperous future together. These serve as a good example of the promotion and development of collaboration, including institutional collaboration between universities.

The concept of a stronger and more consolidated region will be beneficial for all the citizens. That is why it is critical that municipal authorities, employers, development associations, and social entities take a more proactive role in seeking regional integration. It also implies that HEIs in the area become active partners in the development of this regional capacity.

The various HEIs in Northern Paraná must work more effectively, both separately and together as a system. This is only likely to take place if there is firm leadership and direction from the state government in establishing a higher education plan and system and in creating an appropriate regulatory framework, funding mechanisms, quality assurance mechanisms and incentive systems (institutional and individual) that align with these purposes and needs.

On the one hand the government of Paraná should use its influence to persuade and require that universities adapt in this way. It is apparent that the institutional missions of the HEIs need to be clarified and diversified to better serve the community. On the other hand, the state government, together with the universities and other regional stakeholders, should lobby and persuade the national government to make the required legal, regulatory and financial changes that will allow the region and its higher education institutions to more effectively address the challenges ahead. HEIs will need to have strengthened autonomy to be able to become more entrepreneurial.

This OECD review process has stimulated dialogue in Northern Paraná about the importance of higher education in the region's development. This opportunity should be seized to develop a stronger consensus and working agenda for higher education action in and for the region. This is a process not to be left to higher education institutions alone, but a participatory one in which relevant stakeholders should be actively engaged. This will lead the region to further appreciate the importance of higher education, to better use the talents and capacity of higher education institutions, to refine the work that related government and state agencies conduct, to engage the business sector in a more responsive way, and to foster necessary change in the higher education sector by abandoning some old attitudes and habits, and create the channels and means for working together.

The HEI perspective

In recent decades, Brazilian higher education institutions have developed a strong interest in research but limited involvement in fostering regional development. Although some groups of researchers are dedicated to innovation, these ideas are not a main driver of public universities. The worldwide trend is to transform universities to become more entrepreneurial and active in using their potential to act as engines of social, cultural and economic development. These changes are bringing additional resources to universities - essential to coping with current and future challenges. These universal trends are not yet apparent or strong enough in HEIs in the Northern Paraná region.

Teaching activities in Northern Paraná universities seem to be focused on the provision of traditional knowledge and less on general competences and transferable skills necessary in the knowledge society. HEIs in the region must start a process of reflection about their new mission and roles in the knowledge economy and the way to better accomplish these functions. There is a need to review the social role of universities in the region with regards to the problems of access, equity and low participation in higher education and to implement measures to address these issues. Creating a more diversified teaching portfolio including shorter degrees and continuing education courses could better serve the needs of the region and its population.

HEIs also need to initiate a process of collaboration with the objective of strengthening their positions in the academic world and in the social and economic development of the region. In particular, public universities must develop better and more efficient systems of communication and collaboration to combine efforts in research and teaching and transform themselves into partners, to take a proactive role and become the engine for the economic and social development at the regional level and to explore more collaboration with private institutions, especially for teaching activities.

Conclusion

The state of Paraná and Northern Paraná are facing major challenges which have profound implications for both higher education and territorial development. If the stakeholders in the region address regional capacity building as an urgent task, the region and its universities can turn their distinctive features to their advantage. The process of reflection initiated by the OECD review may serve as a good basis for a comprehensive process aimed at further improving the interface between higher education and the wider society regionally. It is up to the region and its main stakeholders to move ahead.