Education policy and its international dimension: theoretical approaches

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Abstract
The international dimension of education policies has been widely discussed in the last couple of years. This article argues that the activities of international agents involved in education policy formulation cannot be entirely and exclusively understood from a national perspective and, thus, should be studied as a discrete level of analysis. Questioning how we might best conceptualize this field of study, this paper presents three theoretical approaches – neoinstitutionalism/isomorphism, externalization, and the international regime theory. The focus here is laid on the analysis of international education policy based on international regime theory.

Keywords: Education policy – International organizations – Neoinstitutionalism – Externalization – International regime theory.

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In the discussions on education policies held in the last two decades, we often find references to the global dimension of education. Generally, globalization, internationalization, the knowledge economy etc. are mentioned to. Many theoretical frameworks in the social sciences also adopt a global perspective as, for instance, the world polity theory (Meyer et al., 1997), the world-systems approach (Wallerstein, 1986; 1998; 2004), and the systems theory/the theory of world society (Luhmann, 1990; Stichweh, 2000). Education has also been approached in a global perspective, as we may observe in documents and publications from various organizations like, for instance, the European Commission's *White Paper on Teaching and Learning – Towards the Learning Society* (1995) or the Lisbon Group's Report (1994) or, yet, in numerous documents by the World Bank. Besides approaching education in a global perspective, it became visible during the last years that the activities of international organizations have been intensified and changed qualitatively, too. Education systems all over the world have been influenced, in a way or another, by activities or

programs of international organizations such as the World Bank (WB), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the European Union (EU), among others. This article argues that due to the emergence of new agents and new constellations of agents, in part explicitly intended by the state, in part induced by the current high level of international organization and integration as well as the high level of internationalization of the education policies,[1] the analysis of education policy needs to be considered in a differentiated context.

The main argument here is that the results from the interrelation dynamics between the new agents pointed to above as well as the emergence of new social, political, and economic contexts, suggest that education policies might not be entirely and exclusively understood from a national perspective. They need to be studied as a discrete level of analysis.[2]

This perspective raises the question of how this level of study may be theoretically conceptualized and established. Current approaches concentrate themselves on the diffusion of universalized scripts as, for instance, the neoinstitutionalist theory called *world polity*, and sometimes they become too abstract; or, conversely, as we may observe in the externalization theory, for instance, they focus the internal logic of a systems to the detriment of arguments about the effects of institutional processes. It is in this context that international regime theory emerges as a useful theoretical tool for the analysis of the international dimension of education policies, as we will discuss below.

There are different interpretations of the term regime, however, common to all of them is the recognition of a set of governing rules and principles which control a particular field of action. An important dimension of the term relates to cognitive institutionalized *scripts* which shape a frame where social reality is perceived, a fact pointing to the institutionalist perspective adopted here. Regimes are viewed, thus, as regulating structures more or less independent from their participants, dynamic forms of social organization based both on formal and informal elements along with complex constellations of agents. In Germany and some other European countries

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1. We refer to the discussions on *internationalized education policy*, which point to the high level of similarity among international public policies. See, for instance, Wiseman; Baker, 2005; Gvirtz; Beech, 2007; Ball, 1998.
2. Not only education has been an object for discussion on the international dimension. About the impact of globalization on social policies as a whole and the need for considering this dimension, see Deacon, 2007.

the term regime is being currently employed in academic discussions on education policy to describe such forms of public governance (Masschelein; Martens, 2005; Radtke, 2006; Parreira do Amaral, 2006; 2007). Regime theory, thus, has to be viewed in the context of discussions about governance. Nevertheless, we should distinguish different interpretations of this concept. There are some theoretical frameworks which employ the term in a normative sense as, for instance, *good governance* (World Bank, 1994) or *new public governance* (OCDE, 1995; Rhodes, 1997). Other theoretical frameworks employ the term to express a change of perspective in analyses of socio-political regulation processes in which the state is only one of the agents involved:

> Instead of relying on the state or the market, socio-political governance is directed to the creation of patterns of interaction in which political and traditional hierarchical governing and social self-organization are complementary, in which responsibility and accountability for interventions is spread over public and private actors. (Kooiman, 1993, p. 253)

My use of the term regime follows the conventional usage in the field of international relations in the political sciences. From an analytical perspective, the concepts of 'governance' and 'regime' share their research object, i. e., both focus the different conceptualizations of how socio-political regulation processes are coordinated among the different agents, be they public or private. Regime theory thus emerges as one of the possible theoretical frameworks from which *educational governance* may be analyzed. The concepts of governance and international regime refer to principles and rules of collective decision-making in contexts where there is a plurality of agents or constellations of agents (states, international organizations, etc.) and there is not a strictly formal control system able to set the rules under which all the participants are to act, as we observe in the international dimension of education policies.

In what follows, I first make some observations on the international dimension of education policy. Second, I present three theoretical approaches from which the international influence on education has been studied – neoinstitutionalism/isomorphism, externalization, and the international regime theory. I focus the analysis of international education policy based on the international regime theory, which will be discussed in the last section.

The international dimension of education policy

When we talk about education or education policies, we start from the principle that public education systems – i. e., organized, controlled, and funded by the government – constitute the standard pattern to which all other forms are to be compared. According to sociological studies, nation states have created education systems with national reach and differentiated in many institutions in order to (re)produce cultural techniques (reading/writing in vernacular language, etc.) and allow citizens to take part in the nation's economic welfare (Archer, 1984). Education policies have eventually become part of the social infrastructure in many countries, which came under the complete discretion of national governments – something Wolfgang Mitter (2006) called 'national sovereignty on education'. During this period, inter or transnational organizations had no direct influence on this political domain, although since the emergence of societies organized as nation states there was a strong link between these and developments on the international level. In particular in the literature on comparative education, one observes a huge interest on international developments. There is plenty of writing about and by educators who traveled through many countries explicitly in search of information about education throughout the 19th century: Victor Cousin in France, Horace Mann and Henry Barnard in the USA, Mathew Arnold in England, and Domingo Sarmiento in Argentina.[3] From the 20th century on, Brazil also developed an intense history of international education cooperation (Silva Scaff, 2007).

Especially since the 1990s, this nation state sovereignty concerning the education system has been problematized. On the one hand, as a result of transnational convergences (see the concepts of lending/borrowing below), on the other, phenomena such as globalization, internationalization, and supranationalization bring about some degree of denationalization of the national systems of education. As Dale (2003) suggests, "globalization does represent a new and distinct shift in the relationship between state and supranational forces and [...] it has affected education, profoundly and in a range of ways" (p. 90). In addition, the literature on education reforms in a wide range of countries shares references to

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3. See, for instance, Schwinges (2001) and also quotations in Jeismann (1995).

causes and reasons which go beyond the nation state. The common topic in this line of research looks for explanations and lessons for reform in the international level: these are references to global transformation processes and to the diffusion of supposedly universal principles of rationality, norms, and values (Meyer et al., 1997). These principles generates pressure over national education systems and lead to the emergence of a postnational (Habermas, 1998) or transnational dimension with its own characteristics and dynamics (Lawn; Lingard, 2002; Parreira do Amaral, 2007). In the next section, I present a short review of the literature on the international dimension of education along some concepts employed in the fields of international and comparative education.

Education multilateralism, lending/borrowing and transfer in education

Since the post-Second World War period, the activities of international organizations concerning education have established themselves as an area of continuous activity. At first, these activities were developed by intergovernmental agents for the reconstruction of Europe (Organization for European Economic Co-operation, predecessor of OCDE, the World Bank) and organizations aiming at encouraging international understanding through education and culture (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – UNESCO). A field of action was established which Karen Mundy denominated 'educational multilateralism' (1998; 1999). International organizations are regarded here as the main agents in this field of activity; however, they are seen as instruments of national governments which for me is problematic since this restricted sense of intergovernmental organization clouds many of the characteristics of these agents.[4] Rittberger and Zangl (2003) summarize different concepts of international organizations; they point to different understandings of their scope, ability for action, and agency. Three forms are relevant in the present context: (i) international organizations as a political tool of state diplomacy, i. e., as an extension of the state apparatus; (ii) international organizations as arenas in which systems of intergovernmental coordination and

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4. Along with intergovernmental organizations, there are also regional organizations (for instance, the EU, NAFTA, APEC etc.). About their effects on education, see Dale; Robertson, 2002. In Latin America, there is also a considerable activity in the Organization of American States (OAS). Concerning it, see <http://www.sedi.oas.org/dec/espanol/>.

negotiation are formed; and (iii) international organizations as corporative agents with own political agendas. Along with these three forms, it is possible to point out international organizations as bureaucracies (Barnett; Finnemore, 2004).

Also, in the field of international and comparative education, there is a vast literature on lending/borrowing and transfer of policies, models, and education reforms (Halpin; Troyna, 1995; Steiner-Khamsi, 2002; 2004, Phillips; Ochs, 2004); it fills an important gap in the analysis of this field. Here again the nation-state is the central unity of analysis. Lending/borrowing, transfer, and adaptation of policies and models take place between two or among more than two countries.

More recently, the influence of international organizations on national systems of education[5] has been explained using two particular concepts (Parreira do Amaral, 2006): the program of neoinstitutionalist research with the concept of isomorphism (Meyer; Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio; Powell, 1983) and the concept of externalization (Schriewer, 2000) with reference to Niklas Luhmann's systems theory. The neoinstitutionalist approach concentrates on the diffusion and the effects of cognitive-cultural models and institutionalized rules on social behavior. In turn, the concept of externalization introduces a dialectic view on the processes of internationalization and *inter*-national variation, referring to the concept of interruption of self-reflexivity through the externalization to world situations (Schriewer, 2000). In the next section, I present a concise introduction of both positions.

Neoinstitutionalism, world polity, and public policies

Since the 1970s, one finds in the social sciences many theoretical studies that resumed an interest on institutions as central elements for the understanding of social processes. The works of this 'new' institutionalism[6] are characterized by a critical vision of models of social and organizational action, in which autonomous agents follow their preferences and interests with unbounded rationality. Currently, one of the most important research lines is the so called *world polity-research*. Neoinstitutionalists employ the term *world polity* in a wide sense: "a broad cultural

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5. The example employed here is OECD, one of the most active international agents on education.
6. In a relevant manner, the issues that neoinstitutionalism discusses are not so new as the prefix *neo* suggests, having their intellectual origins in the 1950s with the sociology of Robert Merton and Philip Selznick, among others. In turn, those currently called *old institutionalists* were influenced by Max Weber.

order that has explicit origins in Western society" (Meyer, 1987, p. 41). The term has a close relation with Max Weber's concept of 'occidental rationalization' and consists in: belief in progress, secularization, imposition of intentional and functional actions (i. e., rational ones) in all levels of social life. *World polity* also includes cultural patterns such as individualization, universal justice norms, ability for voluntary and self-organized action, as well as cosmopolitism. The diffusion of these principles of orientation and the structures related to them is the object of research of this theoretical framework.

According to the neoinstitutionalist approach, there is a gradual process of world convergence. Departing from the presuppositions of globalization and the dissemination of a world culture (understood as a set of transnational cognitive and normative beliefs), it is argued that public policies are becoming increasingly analogous (Meyer et al., 1997).[7] DiMaggio and Powell (1983) conceptualized three mechanisms by which structures become similar or isomorphic: *coercive* isomorphism refers to "formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations" by legislation, norms etc.; *normative* isomorphism is related to professional pressures; and *mimetic isomorphism* is related to emulation processes due to a high level of uncertainty, typical of organizations which work with "ambiguous technologies for the production of results hard to assess/evaluate" (p. 150).

The first generation of neoinstitutionalist analyses in the late 1970s and early 1980s brought about a research field that (1) defined schools (or educational institutions) as institutionalized organizations (Meyer, 1977); (2) analyzed the structures and operations of these organizations employing institutionalist theoretical concepts (Meyer; Rowan, 1978); and (3) analyzed the rapid diffusion of a 'global' model of school stemming from Europe to the rest of the world (Ramirez; Boli, 1987; Meyer; Ramirez; Soysal, 1992).

In what concerns the contribution of this theoretical framework – neoinstitutionalism – it allows us to understand the vast similarity among public policies advocated by international organizations – these are considered by neoinstitutionalist scholars as the main vehicles for the diffusion of world culture. On

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7. An example of this approach may be observed in a work on the widespread of a global model of research university, which employed both Brazil and Germany as unities of analysis (Amos; Bruno; Parreira do Amaral, 2008). Another discussion illustrates the introduction of racial quotas in Brazilian universities as an example of this widespread of universal principles (Parreira do Amaral, 2008).

the other hand, and due to the fact that it employs highly aggregated data, this approach is of little utility in concrete analysis of processes and (causal) mechanisms of policy implementing; moreover, it does not discuss conflicts and oppositions that emerge at the intermediate and local levels (cf. Campbell, 2002).

Externalization

From the perspective of Niklas Luhmann's systems theory (1982),[8] society is viewed as a functionally differentiated social system. Systems and subsystems are constituted through the distinction system/environment and they are marked by their operationally closed functioning,[9] autopoiesis,[10] and self-referentiality.[11] This is the theoretical context in which Jürgen Schriewer (2000) develops his externalization thesis. He adopts Luhmann's concept of reflection theory and the notions of self-referentiality and reflexivity to describe, education theory as a "reflection theory *of the* education system, developed *within* the education system" (p. 151, emphasis in orig.). The theory of reflection of education is considered as the development of self-description within this functionally differentiated subsystem which improves the system's competence of self-knowledge and self-control. Self-referential systems need, however, interruptions of the circularity of self-reflection and interdependence relations. These systems (countries, regions, education systems, etc.) open up, then, to the environment in a process of "externalization to world situations". In this way, they look for stimuli, international perspectives, and solutions. Outside perspectives serve, on one side, to stabilize the system and, on the other, to assure the highest level of system's autonomy from the environment and other subsystems. The patterns of externalization identified refer to principles of scientific rationality, values, and the organization of the systems themselves, along with international agents.

This approach focuses adaptation processes and the reinterpretation of elements from outside the system – for instance, a certain public policy employed by

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8. See also Neves; Samios, 1997.
9. Operationally closed simply means that there's no direct link between system and environment. This closing allows the system to create its own complexity and the more complex it is, the more it turns able to know the environment.
10. Autopoiesis refers to the fact that a complex system reproduces all of its elements and structures in an operationally closed process, employing only its own elements.
11. The operationally closed functioning is a precondition for self-referentiality. With this, it is possible for the system to identify itself as a unique one and to create a particular structure.

international agents. The Bologna Process may illustrate the kind of analysis to be made according to this theoretical framework: what is conventionally called the Bologna Process has been created as a national initiative, but it rapidly became a supranational program in the European Union which aims to harmonize, i. e., turn more similar and comparable the higher education systems of different countries; enhance students and professors/researchers mobility; and optimize the strategic position of these systems in face of other regions (especially the USA). Signatory and member countries, within and outside the European Union, agreed to take six different action lines, of which action line number 2 is the most comprehensive, for it aims at introducing a system of two consecutive academic cycles – today widely known as Bachelors' and Masters' degrees – which was new to most of the countries. Courses should be arranged in modules, allowing also the introduction of a system of credit points – the so called European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). in what concerns the international competitiveness and employability of Europeans, certificates should "qualify graduates for a specific profession". According to Schriewer (2000), each national system will re-contextualize the elements of this policy, or in the terminology of the systems theory: a translation of the system's internal logic, maintaining, thus, a large number of historic-cultural variations. In Germany, all debates on university reforms held in the last years have made a compulsory mention to the Bologna Process. In fact, almost all agents in this arena regard it as unavoidable and unquestionable – according to Schriewer's concept this constitutes an "externalization of world situations". However, a concrete analysis of the changes shows a great variation in the effects of this international influence. In Germany, the process of formulation of reform policies depended and still depends on the 16 Länder (federation unities), turning it hard to assess the process globally. The final results from the adoption of new courses – in addition to taking longer to be implemented – are considerably different one from the other, not only in any of the 16 Länder, but also from institution to institution, undermining the original idea of competitiveness and comparability already on the national level, not mentioning here the European dimension. The homogenization of the nomenclature hides thus important differences among the various levels.

The two approaches discussed above may be regarded as complementary, since neoinstitutionalism concentrates on the macro perspective and the concept of

externalization on the system's internal logic. However, these two positions should be placed in a common level on which it is possible to observe the effect of institutions (cognitive-cultural models) and, at the same time, keep an eye on agents' different logics. In my view, the neoinstitutionalist and Schriewer's approaches should then be complemented with a focus on the agents involved in the process, as they have different missions, scopes, weights, and possibilities to influence the field of public policy. My main claim is that the concept of international regimes may facilitate the understanding of changes in education as a public policy. What is needed is an analytic tool that focuses agents on the international level, while considering, at the same time, their interdependency with the nation state level agents, all of which are regarded as embedded in cognitive-cultural models institutionalized globally. Agents in both levels – international and national – may be state agents or not, as, for instance, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, multinational corporations etc.

International regimes as regulation structures

In the field of international relations in the political sciences, the term regime denotes an international institution considered by some authors as a set of governing rules, by others as institutionalized collective behavior or still by others as rule-governed cooperation that is more than a temporary arrangement and that effect changes in the behavior of regime members. The regime theory may be regarded as an attempt made in the 1970s by social scientists to account for the existence of rule-governed behavior in an anarchic international system, i. e., in the absence of a superordinate power (world state).

Regimes are institutions, permanent structures for action and interpersonal communication. They consist of a network of roles, which are connected by rules and convention (Müller, 1993). A definition proposed by Stephen Krasner (1983) may be called consensual, although it has been questioned many times. For him, regimes may be defined as:

> "sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations. Principles are beliefs of fact, causation, and

rectitude. Norms are standards of behavior defined in terms of rights and obligations. Rules are specific prescriptions or proscriptions for action. Decision-making procedures are prevailing practices for making and implementing collective choice." (p. 2)

Regimes perform the basic work in solving conflicts between states, although members of the regime might frequently have a private character, as, for instance, a multinational corporation. Regimes are cooperative institutions which operate in specific issue-areas. These areas are specific fields of international politics (such as ecology, security, and as argued here education). Their mission is to facilitate communication and cooperation between members of a regime. International regimes are not synonymous with treaties and agreements, nor are they identical to international organizations, which are regarded as subcategories of institutions and marked by their more physical structures, such as statutes, administrative and juridical offices, buildings (headquarters), and employees. International regimes exist on a lower level of materiality. However, international organizations may also take part in one or even in several regimes.

That is, international regimes are structures which govern state's behavior in specific areas of international relations (see Krasner, 1983, p. 2). The concept can be illustrated by an example from the area of international security: a central part of this regime is the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. This regime consists of a system of treaties, agreements, obligations, practices, organizations, and norms which aim at avoiding the proliferation of nuclear weapons. According to the definition mentioned above, the non-proliferation regime is based on the *principle* of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), which is based on the mutual understanding (i. e., the principle) that the proliferation of WMDs is harmful to world peace and, thus, must be stopped. Among the regime *norms* which substantiate the principle of non-proliferation is the statement that the members of this regime shall not produce or contribute to the production of nuclear weapons (IAEA, 2009). The control of their members' exports is one of the *rules* of the security regime. *Procedures* refer to provisions for decisions and collective revisions among the members,[12] sanctions, conflict mediation, and other procedural courses of action in the regimes. The single elements may not by themselves prohibit (literally) the proliferation of nuclear

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12. One of the main members, along with the states, and a forum for collective decision-making is the International Atomic Energy Agency, which has its headquarters in Vienna, Austria.

weapons, but jointly they form a coherent strategy which makes proliferation at least more difficult.

In the political sciences, defining regimes has filled most part of the history of the study of this concept. Despite the consensual definition mentioned above, the term is still contested on different grounds by the diverse theoretical perspectives. This paper follows a definition regarded as well-balanced; it was proposed by Levy, Young, and Zürn (1995), who:

> "suggest defining international regimes as social institutions consisting of agreed upon principles, norms, rules, procedures and programs that govern the interaction of actors in specific issue areas." (p. 274)

The definition of regime, its relevance, and its effect on a particular area of public policy are viewed differently according to the prevailing theoretical framework in the study of international regimes. There are three main lines or schools in the study of international regimes. The first one is a *realist* perspective, in which power is the crucial element in an inherently anarchic and competitive international system. According to this viewpoint, regimes – if they exist at all – perform a role of lower importance. The second one, the *institutional-liberal* perspective, also departs from an anarchic view of the international system; they focus, however, on interests more than on power. Members of a regime (usually nation-states) pay attention both to absolute and relative gains. Neoliberal institutionalists see regimes as a means of avoiding suboptimal outcomes as a result of uncoordinated action. The third line in the study of regimes adopts a *cognitive* perspective which highlights both causal and normative elements in the cooperation among the regime members. According to this perspective, the understanding itself, the perceived interests, and the objectives stated by the regime members are shaped by knowledge. Ideas, norms, institutions etc. perform an important role in this perspective. The study of regimes needs, then, to take into consideration ideology, values, causal suppositions, etc.

A synthesis of these approaches seems to suit best analyses of international education policy. Space limit precludes a thorough discussion of all conceptual adaptations involved. However, a few comments on three assumptions central to my research are crucial. They relate to regime formation and to its type as well as to the members of the international education regime.

Concerning regime formation, it can be noted that they have not necessarily to be created (through negotiation or imposition). A regime may also be formed through self-generation processes, i. e., due to the convergence of the participants' expectations (Levy et al., 1995, p. 281). This seems to be the case in education policy. The high level of international interaction in education brings about mutual understandings of what education is or should be, of its function within society, and also of how it should be organized, ruled, and even researched. The convergence of expectations is enhanced by the continuous participation in international comparative studies (INES, PISA, IEA, etc.), by programs of education statistics (such as those of UNESCO and OCDE), along with world conferences on education such as, for instance, the World Conference of Ministers of Education, in Geneva (2008), the World Conference on Higher Education, in Paris (2009), or the World Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI), in Belém do Pará, Brazil (2009).

In regard to the type of a regime, it might be distinguished by its level of formality (for example, official agreements) and the degree of convergence of expectations (high or low) of its members (Levy et al., 1995, p. 272). In the case of education policy, it can be observed a low level of formality and a high degree of convergence of expectations, characteristics that justify talking of a tacit regime. Concerning the agents, states (or state agencies) are usually regarded as the main participants of a regime in the study of international relations. The central position of these actors is not to be denied. Notwithstanding, the role of governmental and non-governmental international organizations deserves closer attention, as they perform an important role in shaping the state's preferences and in the formulation of national interests (Finnemore, 1996).

In this sense, studying an international regime of education includes, first, identifying a social institution as a regime when there is a fourfold structure is given: *principles*, *norms*, *rules*, and *decision-making procedures*; second, identifying the members of a regime, since the agents do not necessarily need to be nation states and rule-based international cooperation consists both of formal and informal elements; finally, third, analyzing the effects of a regime in a specific area such as education policy.

The subsequent observations elaborate the first step, i. e., it identifies some regime elements in the beginning of a process of regime formation (Parreira do Amaral, 2007).

Elements of international regimes

Principles are consensually agreed components crucial to the regimes. Principles interpret the reality in which problems and conflicts are to be cooperatively tackled by a regime (Müller, 1993). Descriptions of state of affairs, objectives and goals, along with the relation between means and ends, agreed by the members of a regime, are inherent to the principles. Principles include basic concepts and indicate reasons for the emergence (or also the creation) of a regime in a particular area, i. e., they substantiate the creation of a regime. In the field of education, one of the first principles is the genetic and anthropological recognition that all human beings are able to learn and need education for their own personal development. This principle has been institutionalized since the times of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Amos Comenius, Immanuel Kant, and others. Furthermore, nowadays not only individual advantages, but also the social returns of education are placed on the foreground – especially concerning social inclusion and the economic benefits of education, as an analysis of the contents and the discourse of key-documents from international organizations may reveal.

Norms establish general guiding directions that are mainly formulated as rights and obligations. The rights of a member of a regime include the obligation of all the others to concede and support these rights. Reciprocally, the obligations of all members of the regime establish patterns for the own behavior. Norms have a decisive role in regimes, as they serve to guide the behavior of regime members in areas which are not, or cannot be, formally regulated with the intent of producing collective results in harmony with the shared objectives and convictions specified by the regime. The "shared convictions" are "specified" in the principles of a regime (Müller, 1993, p. 40). On the other side, norms have the function of guiding the non-formalized part within the established principles. The right for education is one of the most widely recognized norms in modern societies. The Charter of the United

Nations establishes education as a human right. There's also the norm of compulsory education, be it practiced in the school or at home.

A third component of regimes also performs a constitutive role: *rules*. They translate the rather informal norms into formal prescriptions and proscriptions that are legally binding (agreements, prohibitions, etc.). Related to the rules of a regime, they are precise guidelines of behavior in the area concerned. Rules are standards employed for the assessment of compliant or non-compliant regime behavior on the part of its members. Rules build, in this sense, the normative backbone of a regime. The rule of non-discrimination on grounds of race, color, sex, religion, or other criterion, as well as the meritocratic organization in the schools, are examples of rules in the field of education. One example from Saudi Arabia points to the international influence: a country where schools segregate 100% of the girls has made huge efforts to justify this policy in order to be in conformity to the rules of the international agenda (UNESCO, 2003/2004).

Procedures, in turn, refer to a series of issues over membership, collective review or revision of provisions, sanctions, conflict mediation, and other routine courses of action within regimes. In education, the qualification and accreditation of the professional teaching personnel, but also the requirement of state proofed teaching materials/textbooks as well as the official recognition of certificates may be regarded as conventional procedures. Instruments of control such as international comparisons (PISA, TIMSS etc.), *monitoring*, and assessment systems have been adopted internationally, too.

Discussion

The elements mentioned above form the basis on which an international education regime seems to be emerging. They eventually came to be considered as 'universal' during the last two centuries. Currently, they seem to serve as a basis for specific forms of education policies, in particular along neoliberal lines.[13] As mentioned earlier, current debates over the reform of education systems display internationally a high level of similarity. These lines along which reforms are

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13. Silvina Gvirtz and Jason Beech (2007) enumerate some of the elements in a unique model which is being reproduced by international agencies.

discussed and implemented are almost the same around the world: changes in orientation from *inputs* to the *outputs* of education institutions and teachers, a paradigm of efficiency and efficacy, management decentralization, introduction of market mechanisms, evaluations and benchmarks and rankings of institutions are some of the elements of education reforms and policies not only in Brazil, but also in most of the countries.

An international education regime is the result of the dynamics of the interaction of cognitive elements (principles, norms, values) and new agents (international organizations, non-governmental organizations etc.) in new social contexts. On the *cognitive level* tone can observe the global widespread of rationality principles. Many authors see these principles as a global trend towards scientization. Scientization may be interpreted as an attempt to "discipline and rationalize the chaotic uncertainties of modern social environments" (Drori; Meyer, 2006, p. 31). There are different articulations of this trend: scientific rationalization based on the type of knowledge legitimate in modern societies – value-neutral and based on specialized expertise. This can be observed in attempts to produce causal knowledge about educational processes, but also in the education policy based on evidences (evidence-based education policy).[14] According to this view, this should be the kind of knowledge to be produced at universities, which are increasingly regarded as excellence centers, especially the public ones (Drori et al., 2003; Drori; Meyer, 2006). (Instrumental) rationalization of processes through the introduction of technological management programs, new public management, and simulation of free market are common examples of this rationality. There is also a social version of this rationality which may be observed in the constant thematization of (democratic) inclusion, quality (achievement and attainment), as well as social and individual usefulness (Ramirez, 2001; 2006a; 2006b; 2009).

In regard to the *agents* involved, it may also be observed an intense activity on the international level (international organizations, etc.); however, these agents might not be regarded as monolithic sets. For instance, the education policy adopted by the World Bank could not be adequately understood ignoring the different interests and positions within the bank itself. Conceptualizing these agents and constellations of

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14. On causality in educational research, see Schneider et al., 2007; AERA, 2009. On *evidence-based education policy*, see, for instance, OECD, 2007.

agents as elements constrained by an institutional web (from an institutionalist theory point of view), it is possible to come to a better understanding of its dynamics in the difussion of certain policies, as well as to realize how and why contrary forces are successful or not.

The *social contexts* in which education policy are shaped and implemented have changed, too. The self-description of modern societies as information society, knowledge society, knowledge economy, etc. has also influence the formulation of education policy. One of the most apparent implications is the thematization of education as an economic variable – human capital, factor in the international competition, etc.

In order to conclude, an international regime is a form of social regulation. Two elements might be considered crucial to the hypothetic education regime discussed here. The first is a 'semantic regime' which consists of metaphors and economic rhetoric, usually a neoliberal one. In a discursive horizon, this regime sets the rationality along which discussions of education and, consequently, the formulation of public policies take place. Analyses of content and of discourse of the main documents on education policy by international organizations – the World Bank, OCDE, UNESCO, etc. – but also of national education policy – programs, draft bills, and other Brazilian documents – points to this discursive regime.[15] The second element refers to a consensus among agents of education policy – be they national or international organizations or other participants in the political process – on new form of public management, better characterized by a focal attention on efficacy, efficiency, and, consequently, on the economic returns, independent of their consequences for pedagogical arrangements, an orientation which might be observed among international organizations involved in international education policy: especially the World Trade Organization, the European Union, UNICEF and OCDE.

Regime theory might be useful as a heuristic tool for analyzing education policies. It aims at displaying not only the cognitive and normative elements, but also the agents involved – for and against certain policies. A current example of this trend concentrates itself on analyzing what is conventionally called the Bologna Process.

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15. On the discourse of the World Bank in Brazil, see Barreto; Leher, 2008; Robertson, 2008; 2009; Klees, 2008.

Its cognitive basis (principles, norms, rules), its procedural nature (mechanism of conferences), as well as the agents (European Union, member states, international organizations, crucial organizations to the process etc.) and its context (European integration, society and the economics of knowledge etc.) may be modelled as a regime, and, starting from this, the effects on higher education policies as well as on pedagogic processes can be studied.

Deeper analyses on this theme are needed, especially those in search of analytical tools which can enhance the understanding of mechanisms and implications of this form of management in the education field. Regime theory may prove very useful for this purpose.

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