Academic productivity and neocolonial effects of incentive mechanisms

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Academic productivity and neocolonial effects of incentive mechanisms

Academic productivity is an important component of institutional prestige and for most academic institutions this prestige is also related to access to research funding (Mirnezami and Beaudry, 2016; Litwin, 2014). Publications and citations are natural components to measure academic productivity and classification systems and rankings operate as instruments for evaluating academic productivity, influence the researchers' behavior and form the institutional decision-making in academia.

Due to these reasons, it is essential to have a better understanding of how these evaluating instruments are conceived, since they reflect the development of assessment tools and to ensure diversity across institutions, provide transparent information, and make assessments. However, the main challenge for those who compile the rankings is to create rankings that take into account the contrasting goals pursued by diverse universities, as well as reflect sociocultural forces and economic policies that can shape academic performance (Berbegal-Mirabent and Ribeiro-Soriano, 2015).

A concern regarding the journal rankings, for example, is the inclination of the measures in favor of English-speaking countries creating asymmetries in favor of these countries and triggering a series of actions by universities in non-English speaking countries, such as promoting formal and informal incentives to motivate their members to publish in English-language international journals. The research published in this language tends to spread much further and gain larger recognition in the academic community (Berbegal-Mirabent and Ribeiro-Soriano, 2015).

This paper presents a research on the internationalization of the field of Management Information Systems (MIS) in Brazil, carried out to investigate institutional incentives developed to promote internationalization of Brazilian scholars. In the Brazilian context, to be considered an "international" researcher means to be ranked in the higher level of academic productivity among peers, what grants them prestige and better conditions to access resources for developing their research activities.

Internationalization as indication of academic quality

The theme of the internationalization of teaching and research is widely debated in the area of Education through several aspects. Among them are the comparison of academic performance between countries (Bentley & Kyvik, 2013; Kwiek, 2016), academic mobility of students and teachers, international scientific publication for dissemination and transfer of knowledge, international collaboration in research (Knight, 2007, Rostan, Ceravolo, & Metcalfe, 2014, p.119), as well as discussions on academic productivity (Shin & Cummings, 2010).

To seek visibility on the international scene, there are basically three primary forms of a given local knowledge community to export knowledge (Heinzl, Winter & Bichler, 2015: 226): "Publish research in international journals or congresses in the field, participate in the conduct of international projects of research or make the physical transfer of the academic abroad. "

As already explored by Diniz et al. (2017a), inspired by Heinzl et al. (2015), the Formation dimension considers the international formation of the researcher and his orientandos and is related to the "physical transfer of the researcher abroad". The Dissemination dimension considers the profile of the researcher's publication in international congresses and journals from the identification of their relevance. The Collaboration dimension considers the integration of the researcher into international research networks through the participation of scientific committees of international congresses and journals, scientific associations and international research projects.

However, as pointed out in a previous study (Diniz et al., 2017b), these dimensions limit the understanding of internationalization actions to the individual initiatives of the researcher, neglecting the variables related to the environment in which the individual researcher is in. Considering that a researcher will always be part of a teaching and research institution (TRI), it is important to understand the institutional mechanisms that influence the researchers' behavior in order to achieve international recognition among their academic peers. In this paper, we consider two levels of incentives that characterizes this institutional dimension: one is the "internal" dimension, related to institution where the researcher is enrolled, and another is the "external" dimension, related to national and international institutions that influences the policies created at the internal level.

Internal and External institutional incentives influencing academic internationalization

The internal institutional dimension considers the institutional context in which the researcher is inserted for the internationalization of research (Kwiek, 2016; Shin & Cummings, 2010). That is, in this dimension we consider the institutional factors that an TRI makes available to guide the individual actions of the researchers that aim to give international prominence to their work. The availability of financial resources for research, the existence of reward mechanisms or awards to researchers, departmental culture and working conditions, the distribution of dedicated time between teaching and research, support of staff, disciplinary norms institution's goal-orientation, institutional mission, formation of networks of strategic alliances, visiting lectures and scholars, are internal institutional variables identified in the literature that can influence the productivity of the researchers and consequently in the (Bentley & Kyvik, 2012, 2013, Knight, 2007, Kwiek, 2016, Rostan et al., 2014, Shin & Cummings, 2010).

Some of the most common mechanisms of internal incentive identified are: awards for international publication, support for participation in international events, financial incentives for professors and students to have international experiences, creation of opportunities to bring foreign professors to the institution in Brazil, among others (Diniz et al., 2017b).

According to Knight (2007, p.220) the formation of networks and strategic alliances can be seen as an institutional way to promote the internationalization of research favoring various purposes, such as: academic mobility, collaborative research and education initiatives, program development and curricula to achieve academic, scientific, and cultural goals, as well as being seen as a means of bilateral approximation and cooperation to gain competitive advantage.

If researchers are influenced by the context of their institutions, they are also influenced by the requirements of accreditors who certify their performance based on internationalization criteria. In addition, research support institutions also influence both the decisions of researchers and IEPs by restricting or expanding access to resources for participation in congresses, funds for the development of joint research with foreign institutions, and fellowships for researchers to develop internships outside. Thus, an External Institutional dimension that considers the institutional context broadened beyond the limits of the IEP must also be taken into account when analyzing the dynamics of internationalization.

In Brazil, at the internal level of the country, the recommendations of the Administration area at Ministry of Education related to Graduate Studies (CAPES, 2017, pp. 27, 29) suggest institutional actions that stimulate the international insertion of researchers. Among these actions, we highlight the transit of researchers (professors and students) for interacting with research groups outside Brazil, the recruitment of foreign researchers to compose the faculty, and agreements for double apointment with international institutions. At the end, the programs are evaluated according to their ability to meet these criteria.

At the international level, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB International) is a non-profit association founded in 1916 that stimulates excellence in higher education in the area of knowledge of the Administration. This association brings together 750 business schools in about 50 countries and territories (AACSB, 2017), periodically publishes a report that emphasizes the academic and practical impact of the survey (AACSB, 2012) with its potential indicators on the accreditation process of such schools. In this way, a contemporary aspect that is required of educational institutions and their researchers is that the academic and practical impact of academic research may favor its applicability in organizations (companies) or community (society) (Niederman et al., 2015). To gain the AACSB approval, institutions also have to meet these internationalization criteria.

Located in a country on the periphery of the world publication scenario, Brazilian institutions have been careful to meet the internationalization requirements demanded by both international accrediting agencies and national (CAPES, from the Ministry of Education) evaluation bodies. Thus, our TRIs, despite their diversity of governance and access to resources, have increasingly incorporated mechanisms to encourage their researchers to become more relevant internationally.

Incentives as sociomaterial mechanism to evaluate academic production

Sociomateriality has already contributed to the understanding on how performativity mechanisms are being developed in many organizations to consolidate institutional evaluation process, as well as their use (and abuse) at the corporative level (Gond et al., 2016). We propose in this paper to adopt the same lenses of sociomateriality to investigate the process of developing mechanisms for evaluation in academia and explore how these mechanisms are being adopted somehow without the necessary critical understanding of the consequences of the internationalization of the academic production in a country in the periphery of the world academic production. By studying the Brazilian case, we claim that the process of non-critical incorporation of incentive mechanisms can be perverse and against the creation of a scientific community directed to solve local problems.

Our investigation is based on data collection carried out within 13 post-graduate programs classified in the top Brazilian universities, to evaluate the existing incentive mechanisms in each one of them. Then we identify the existing mechanisms in national and international certification institutions (CAPES and AACSB) and support (CNPq, FAPESP, etc.) that influence the internationalization policies of institutions. Lastly, we collected data from 26 interviews with senior scholars, post graduate program coordinators, and research leaders in the MIS field in Brazil. Our results suggest that the incentives being disseminated in the country leads to a neocolonial process of understanding the academic production that could deepen the abysm between the scientific knowledge being developed in the country and the mainstream scientific production in the world.

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