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**REVIEW**

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<sup>1</sup>SENKEVICS, A. S. *Access, in Reverse: Inequalities in the Shadow of the Expansion of Brazilian Higher Education, 1991-2020*. 2021. Thesis (Doctorate in Education) – Faculty of Education, University of São Paulo, São Paulo, 2021. 437p. Available at: [https://www.teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/48/48137/tde-11012022-103758/publico/ADRIANO\\_SOUZA\\_SENKEVICS\\_rev.pdf](https://www.teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/48/48137/tde-11012022-103758/publico/ADRIANO_SOUZA_SENKEVICS_rev.pdf). Accessed on Sep 29, 2024.

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Marcos Henrique Carneiro Alves<sup>2</sup>  
The Federal Technological University of Paraná

Fábio Zambiasi<sup>3</sup>  
The Federal Technological University of Paraná

Graziela Scopel<sup>4</sup>  
The Federal Technological University of Paraná

Maria de Lourdes Bernartt<sup>5</sup>  
The Federal Technological University of Paraná

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Over the last three decades, there has been an increase in the number of enrollments in higher education in Brazil. This expansion has been in line with the expansion of policies for access to higher education in the public and private sectors, resulting in greater diversity among students at this level of education. However, this scenario of increased enrollment, which marked a bright side of public policy, has outlined a great paradox. That is, while opportunities for young people to enter higher education were expanded, in counterpart, social disparities still caused many to be excluded from universities, thus intensifying a competitive environment for graduates, marking a dark side of the access expansion process. Therefore, the thesis presented here is dedicated to investigating these issues, with the objective of “*Investigating the transformations in access to undergraduate education between 1991 and 2020.*” To address this challenge, the research took a mixed approach, divided into three levels of analysis: macro, meso, and microsociological. Thus, during this review, the main conceptual and methodological aspects, as well as the results of the thesis, will be further detailed, reflected upon, and discussed.

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<sup>1</sup> Translator Daniela de Paula Farias - [danielapfarias@gmail.com](mailto:danielapfarias@gmail.com).

<sup>2</sup> Master's in Regional Development. Federal University of Technology – Paraná, Pato Branco, Paraná, Brazil; E-mail: [marcosalves@alunos.utfpr.edu.br](mailto:marcosalves@alunos.utfpr.edu.br); Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/3211129124281135>; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3266-8884>.

<sup>3</sup> Master's in Regional Development. Federal University of Technology – Paraná, Pato Branco, Paraná, Brazil; E-mail: [fabio.zambiasi@hotmail.com](mailto:fabio.zambiasi@hotmail.com); Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/0565548660579440>; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1497-0687>.

<sup>4</sup> Master's in Regional Development. Federal University of Technology – Paraná, Pato Branco, Paraná, Brazil. E-mail: [grazielascopell@gmail.com](mailto:grazielascopell@gmail.com); Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/8520076121372857>; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-9804-1698>.

<sup>5</sup> Doctorate in Education. Federal University of Technology – Paraná, Pato Branco, Paraná, Brazil. E-mail: [marial@utfpr.edu.br](mailto:marial@utfpr.edu.br); Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/1982876455910216>; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8847-5443>.

The thesis, entitled “**Access, in Reverse: Inequalities in the Shadows of the Expansion of Brazilian Higher Education, 1991–2020**”, was written by Adriano Souza Senkevics within the Graduate Program in Education, in the concentration area of Education and Social Sciences: Inequalities and Differences, at the School of Education of the University of São Paulo. His thesis defense and publication occurred in 2021, receiving in the following year, 2022, the Prêmio CAPES de Tese na área de avaliação da Educação. took place in 2021, and in the following year, 2022, it received the CAPES Thesis Award in the field of Education.

Its objective was to investigate the transformations in access to higher education, with the author’s express intention not to celebrate the bright spots, such as the progress made, the positions opened, and who was included in the system, but to study the shadows, specifically: which barriers still characterize the transition from high school to higher education, who remained excluded from the expansion process, and which obstacles mark the experiences of university applicants. However, the author explains that the constitution of this study is not due to a disbelief in the advancements achieved over the last three decades in terms of access and democratization, but rather an understanding that social stratification in Brazil is dense, serious, and profound. Furthermore, by working with a time frame encompassing the years 1991 to 2020, the author highlights that the three decades of access expansion generated contradictory results, the outcomes of which are still to be fully comprehended, thus revealing the singularity of the present thesis in its commitment to advancing this understanding.

The thesis is constructed around educational stratification and social inequalities, which constitute its main analytical concepts, referencing theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu and Raymond Boudon, among others. In its theoretical–methodological design, the work is structured across three analytical levels: macro, meso, and microsociological. The macro level aims to characterize access to higher education and analyze educational stratification, drawing on time-series data and literature review. The meso level investigates inequalities in access among high school graduates using longitudinal data. Finally, the microsociological level investigates challenges and perspectives of prospective university students in the Federal District, using questionnaires and interviews. Thus, the first two, the macro and meso stages are quantitative, based on secondary data, while the microsociological stage is qualitative, based on primary data sources. Therefore, the first two levels, macro and meso, are quantitative, based on secondary data sources, while the third, micro-sociological, is qualitative, based on primary data sources.

To this end, developing research with such a claim required the author to analyze the object of study from various angles. In this sense, he developed a 'convergent parallel' mixed methods design, based on Creswell and Plano-Clark (2013). In this model, the author explains that the qualitative and quantitative elements are intended to answer distinct questions, with relative independence and in a parallel timeline, converging in the final interpretation of the results to compose the complete panorama of the study. This integration was achieved through 'methodological triangulation' which, based on Flick (2011), allows knowledge on a research problem to emerge from different analytical levels—thus going beyond what a single approach could provide.

The thesis is organized in what the author calls three main “parts,” corresponding to the macro, meso, and microsociological levels: “Higher Education Between 1991 and 2020”; “Access in a Longitudinal Perspective After 2010”; and “Brasília and Prospective University Students in 2018.” These three main parts are subdivided into chapters and sections that, together with the introduction, conclusion, appendices, and annexes, conform to a total of 439 pages. It is worth highlighting from the outset that structuring the thesis in these three analytical parts reveals a very singular format, demonstrating originality in how the author organizes and presents his work. Unlike the structures of works commonly observed, which are organized around a division based on the foundational elements of academic and scientific research—such as theoretical framework, methodology, results, and discussion—the author demonstrated a successful attempt to go beyond the usual, articulating these elements throughout the three main parts, resulting in a more fluid narrative and stronger analytical coherence, while maintaining theoretical and methodological rigor.

Delving deeper into the specific parts of the thesis, in 'Part I,' entitled 'Higher Education between 1991 and 2020,' the author addresses the transformations that occurred within the context of higher education expansion in Brazil. This premise is grounded in an analysis of quantitative data, based on a temporal scope and a literature review covering the years 1991 to 2020. During the analysis of the thirty-year period described by the author, the number of enrollments more than quadrupled, just as the demand from young people to enter higher education more than tripled. This historical context is marked by the inclusion of a group that previously could not even dream of attending college, due to quota programs, financing, and scholarship offerings that enabled the inclusion of those who were formerly less privileged.

Thus, public institutions became characterized by their heterogeneity and grew in number, while also sharing space with a profitable private sector, creating tension

between the relationship of 'education as a right' and the view of 'education as a commodity service' (Senkevics, 2021, p. 76). Concurrently, in the face of an increasingly necessary specialization for the labor market, the offering of qualifications through the Distance Learning (DL) model began to gain ground as an option to replace the in-person model.

The 'Part II' aimed to discuss the changes based on a context of inequality present in the Brazilian reality, attributing important aspects to the conclusion of secondary education and the entry of young people into higher education between 1995 and 2015. And, considering what the author calls 'socioeconomic disparities,' the old and new barriers present in access to Brazilian education are discussed. It is highlighted that, in 1998, the creation of the 'National High School Exam' (ENEM) was witnessed, and subsequently, in 2012, the growth of subsidies in private higher education and, also in that year, the creation of the federal quota law. Furthermore, in 2009, Congress approved mandatory enrollment for young people and children between the ages of 4 and 17, obliging education systems to expand their offerings, thus serving a student population unlike ever before in the country's history.

Throughout both parts (Part I and II), based on the author's central discussion idea and the quantitative analyses developed, it can be observed that the entire trajectory of educational offerings in Brazil, to a certain extent, does not consider the complex social relations that are part of the educational sector. Furthermore, despite the availability of this offer, these intrinsic relations present within the educational system suggest an education that is still not for everyone.

Subsequently, 'Part III,' entitled 'Brasília and young university applicants in 2018,' is comprised of two chapters—Chapters 5 and 6—and aimed to investigate how they experience, perceive, and give meaning to these transformations during their lives, specifically concerning the secondary-to-higher education transition. The field research involved young high school graduates who, in 2018, were in the condition of university applicants. To this end, the author made use of qualitative data, collected through the application of 200 questionnaires<sup>6</sup>, in three community-based pre-university courses, in addition to semi-structured interviews<sup>7</sup> involving 21 young people who had not yet entered undergraduate studies but had previously faced high

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<sup>5</sup>The questionnaires aimed to survey the sociodemographic and educational characteristics of students in community pre-university courses in the Federal District (DF), to select potential interviewees for the subsequent stage of the fieldwork.

<sup>6</sup>The interviews aimed to investigate a set of issues that are little explored among research subjects who, like our interviewees, run the risk of not securing a place in higher education.

school dropouts, difficulties, and vulnerabilities characteristic of the public targeted by higher education access policies.

For the methodological organization of the section, the author mentions it is a case study of access to higher education in the Federal District (DF) and provides a detailed panorama presenting the inequalities among the regions, based on data such as average per capita income, road structure, mobility, housing conditions, services, public fixed assets, and universities. For the panorama of higher education in Brasília, the author uses data from official platforms to characterize the vacancies in the DF and the profile of the young people.

In the year of the research, the Federal District (DF) had 66 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), four<sup>8</sup> of which were public and 62 privates. More than 95,000 secondary education graduates and leavers residing in the DF registered for the National High School Exam (Enem) in 2018; it is believed that nearly all of them did so seeking a spot in higher education via the Unified Selection System (Sisu), the University for All Program (Prouni), or the Student Financing Fund (Fies).

The author highlights the existence of community-based pre-university courses as a distinguishing factor in the life trajectories of these young people but criticizes the lack of studies on the influence of these institutions on entry into higher education. In the thesis, the author presents three such courses named Alfa, Beta, and Gamma, all of which are free and staffed by volunteer teachers. Among the activities, besides classes, students receive tutoring, psychological counseling, extensive review sessions, student mentorship, simulated tests, in addition to cultural activities such as dance and theater classes, and support from technological and streaming platforms. Regarding the profile of the students in these courses, the author concludes that they come from public schools and/or are scholarship recipients from private schools, with most having completed secondary education one or more years prior.

The author considers that this is a generation that sees higher education as an opportunity to improve their general living conditions, as they experience the growth in undergraduate offerings, the adoption of affirmative action policies, and the expansion of social assistance programs. However, he reflects that for a disadvantaged young person, pursuing an undergraduate course coincides with other life transitions, and reconciling everything is not always possible, leading them to prioritize primary needs, such as entering the labor

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<sup>7</sup> University of Brasília (UnB), Federal Institute of Brasília (IFB), Superior School of Health Sciences (ESCS), and Superior Institute of Police Sciences (ISCP).

market, starting a family, or leaving their parents' home. Pais (2009 apud Senkevics, 2021) points out that the 'rites of passage' in this context transform into 'rites of impasse'.

Finally, the author concludes the thesis, in the final considerations section, by resuming the argumentative line of the thesis, chapter by chapter, seeking to synthesize the main results and conclusions. Furthermore, the author also presents the main limitations of the research, gaps, and suggestions that can inform new research agendas based on the advancements and discussions proposed in the thesis. Above all, the author closes the text by reiterating that, 'if this thesis has contributed to illuminating the shadows of educational expansion a little more, I believe the objective has been achieved' (Senkevics, 2021, p. 334).

Based on our reading, we observed that the expectation set by the author in the introduction, 'my expectation is that, by the end of the reading, the shadows of higher education expansion will have been revealed a little more and access will be better understood' (Senkevics, 2021, p. 39), was indeed met. The thesis truly contributed to illuminating several aspects of the 'shadows' that lie behind the bright side of the higher education expansion process in Brazil, leading us to agree with the author when he pointed out in several passages of the thesis that, 'where there is light, there is shadow' (Senkevics, 2021, p. 33). We understand that the depth of the analysis established by the author, together with the way the thesis was structured and presented in macro, meso, and micro-sociological levels, allowed the author to carry out a detailed analysis of the data obtained throughout the investigation process, which provided substantiation for the arguments woven by the author throughout the thesis.

Regarding originality and novelty, we highlight that the importance of this research lies precisely in the author's ability to work with mixed methods. When conducting some searches using the thesis's keywords on certain websites, we observed the existence of a few studies that address the theme, but we did not find any articulating various data sources with the depth proposed here by the author. Furthermore, as described by the author in some parts of the text, previously conducted works resemble this one in some respects, however, they fail to consider the relations and rearrangements of the educational reality, not engaging with the complexities of demand, access, and offering, whether in basic or higher education.

The research is indeed rich in the exploration of descriptive statistics from quantitative data available on official platforms, featuring unique cross-referencing and analyses. The volume of data in the thesis poses a challenging element for its reading; however, the author

himself suggests that, due to the nature of the data, the parts can be read separately, provided that the order of the chapters within them is respected.

Furthermore, the thesis in question can bear good fruits regarding other reviews that discuss other aspects more specifically, depending on the interest of each researcher who benefits from its data. Finally, it is out of recognition of the author's splendid work that this review was constructed, and thus, we hope that the work of Doctor Adriano Souza Senkevics serves as inspiration for authors in the field of education.

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