

## THE TEACHING OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN HEI: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PORTUGAL AND BRAZIL

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**Abstract.** With the aim of planning the future and making the best choices, the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have been, a little around the world, defining strategic plans in the short and medium term. To do this, they set achievable goals, but depend on increasingly demanding levels of performance and efficiency. In such a competitive universe, as it is nowadays the Higher Education, the definition of both objectives and strategies is privileged by to conduct comparative studies capable of making known the best practices and, at the same time, provide clues to achieve competitive advantages. It is in this context that the present study is aimed to compare the portuguese and brazilian reality at the level of the curricular offer of the Public Relations Degree.

JEL Codes:

Keywords

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### 1. Introduction

Public Relations, as a strategic element of organizational communication, assume an important social function, even highlighting its democratic function in so far as they contribute to the communicational flow while emphasizing a humanistic culture of diversity (Bentele, 2004: 84).

However, despite considerable advances, the strategic role of Public Relations, while clearly distinguishing areas such as Marketing or Advertising, remains unclear even among some academics, being as a field of research a relatively recent area. Considered for a long time as a simple set of information disclosure techniques, Public Relations are nowadays framed in the so-called Social Sciences, assuming itself as a discipline of excellence in Communication Sciences (Broom and Dozier, 1990; Grunig, 2001; Grunig and White, 1992; Lesley, 1997; White and Mazur, 1995).

Matrat in France, Sam Black in the United Kingdom, Carbó and Canós in Spain, and Avelar Soeiro in Portugal are indispensable references in the theoretical and practical construction of Public Relations in Europe. Because of their contributions, from mere mediating agents, public relations professionals have become decisive elements for the establishment of symbolic relations with certain culturally diverse public (Sriramesh and Vercic, 2009). Also, Margarida Kunsch's analysis of the institutionalization of Public Relations in Brazil (2006, 2009) corroborates a double dimension: as a professional practice and as an academic field of study. It should also be noted that, despite its original professional conception, with a practical dimension, of the know-how in the beginning of the twentieth century, today Public Relations are also a profession based on academic knowledge (Grunig, 2003: 69).

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At the international level, the Stockholm Agreements were of vital importance, constituting nowadays the document that best translates the practices and the Public Relations profession, and its role in organizational management is now consensual given its impact on the decision-making process and on the reduction of uncertainty indices.

This recent statement of Public Relations, as a scientific area, field of academic knowledge and business environment, justifies the fact that different Institutions of Polytechnic and University Higher Education propose, in their formative offer, some courses in this field of knowledge.

In a perspective of continuous improvement and implementation of good practices, the present study is based on an analysis of the Higher Courses of Public Relations in Portugal and Brazil, reflecting on the evolution of the training offer in HEIs and on which parameters have been made changes over the last 50 years.

The formative offer in Public Relations Superior Courses results from a need of the labour market, considering that, in Portugal, in Brazil, or in the rest of the world, Public Relations have their origin in a business need for connection and relationship with different stakeholders - in an initial phase more restricted and, throughout the evolution of the area, more transversal and comprehensive - and only later it is affirmed as scientific field and an academic framework in HEI.

Eventually, this circumstance configures the courses themselves, by proposing the training of qualified specialists to perform a function that was already felt as necessary, and the program contents defined in a paradigm of know-how, in a logic of what is currently considered Polytechnic Teaching.

One of the dimensions of analysis focuses on the employability of the courses and the implicit or explicit description of the adjustment of training provided to the labour market, given that in both countries the courses result, in this area, from a need of companies and professional institutions.

One of the concerns of different authors is precisely a possible but undesired dichotomy of theory-practice (Barry, 2005, Grohs, 2017, Wehmeier, 2009, Worley, 2001 and Macnamara, 2010). and it is common for communication executives to identify a mismatch between the needs of the market and the training provided by HEIs (Ferrari, 2015).

Given the above, the main objective of the present study is to track the national and international offer in the area of Public Relations by means of benchmarking, with the purpose of seeking excellence, thus implying a comparative analysis in order to allow, on the one hand, to identify good practices and, on the other hand, to define comparative advantages.

## **2. Research on Public Relations Courses**

In order to better characterize the Public Relations Teaching-Learning options, different authors have developed investigation on the formative offer by HEIs (Aldoory, 2000, Gonçalves, 2009 and 2013, Willis, 2011, Grohs, 2015, Krohling Kunsch, 2017, Ferrari, 2017), analyzing parameters such as:

- Configuration of the study plan (Aldoory, 2000; Moura, 2001);
- Analysis of a specific curricular unit (Worley, 2001; Grohs, 2017);

- Dichotomy theory-practice (Worley, 2001, Barry, 2005, Witmer, 2009, Wehmeier, 2009, Macnamara, 2010, Grohs, 2017);

- Experimental projects of teaching-learning dynamics with new didactic and pedagogical options (Barry, 2005; Adams, 1993; Lubbers, 2002; Parkinson, 2002; Aldoory, 2000; Barbosa, 2018; Nogueira, 2000; Grohs, 2017; Hutchison, 2002; Henriques, 2017; Sebastião, 2012; Lasta, 2017);

- Emerging challenges of the course (Barry, 2005, Xifra, 2007, Rhoden, 2013, Tavares, 2015, Krohling Kunsch, 2017, Wehmeier, 2009, Willis, 2011, Macnamara, 2010, Lasta, 2017);

- Competence to be developed in students (Kent, 2001; Barbosa, 2018; Hutchison, 2002; Worley, 2001).

In a benchmarking logic, the different authors express in their studies the concern to share with the scientific community and responsible for these training proposals a set of good practices and / or suggestions for improvement, pointing to a formative proposal that can accurately translate a curricular plan and pedagogical dynamics adjusted to the new challenges and competences that Public Relations specialists and organizations of the twentieth century expect from HEIs.

The curricular structure of Public Relations Courses in Brazil goes further in this area, because, in addition to national guidelines, the HEIs have the possibility (and the duty) of considering "needs and demands of society and local community to form the professional capable of intervening in their social environment " (Kunsch, 2006:49).

Regarding the challenges of Public Relations professionals today, in which HEIs should better prepare their students, there are a number of issues, among which we can highlight the Information Society, Online and Digital Communication, Social Responsibility and Sustainability, or Corporate Transparency, making it essential that the University follow the changes and social changes, in order to adjust their graduates to the expectations that society and the business fabric puts on it.

Nowadays, strong social, economic, cultural, political and technological changes highlight the urgent need to establish new curricular guidelines that consolidate Public Relations as an up-to-date theoretical and professional field, with a strongly defined identity based on theories and practices and interfaces with numerous professional and knowledge fields (Kunsch, 2017: 17).

### **3. Convergences and Divergence of Public Relations Education in Portugal and Brazil**

The history of Public Relations in Portugal and Brazil is similar to the rest of the world. Public Relations higher education courses would come as a response to the training of specialists who have already performed this function in government entities and companies. In Portugal, the first Superior Course dates back to 1964 at the Institute of New Professions in Lisbon, and in Brazil to 1967 at the School of Cultural Communications (now the School of Communications and Arts of the University of São Paulo).

Having undergone different curricular changes over the last decades, Brazil currently has in force the so-called National Curricular Guidelines of the Public Relations Undergraduate Course, approved by the Ministry of Education in 2001 and revised and updated in 2013, establishing it like a specific course and no longer like a qualification of

Social Communication (Kunsch, 2017), along with Journalism, Advertising and Propaganda.

As had already happened in 1984 with Resolution no. 2/84 of the MEC (apud Moura, 2001), there is a set of basic contents indicated by the MEC and a set of specific contents defined by the IES, giving them the possibility to elaborate innovative and more and more differentiating pedagogical and academic projects.

Nevertheless, these Guidelines translate into a greater convergence of the training offer in the Course, compared to what happens in Portugal, where the 1st Cycle of Public Relations have adopted very different designations and configuration of curricula, proposed by the Teaching Institutions that they teach them, translating sometimes ambiguous options into a knowledge and professional area that still needs some clarification. Periodically, these HEIs are evaluated by the Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES), which validates these options, trying to contribute to a greater convergence of the training offer at national level.

Similar to what happens in Brazil, most Public Relations courses are taught by private HEIs, and it is essential that they take on designations with the capacity to attract candidates, as well as curricular configurations and arguments associated with careers. It is also worth mentioning that there is a concern of public and private HEIs in reinforcing the training of students for the labour market, although it is especially relevant for private HEIs that this argument is explicit in their advertising campaigns (Ferrari, 2017).

#### **4. Methodology**

Whether it is during the appearance of a new study cycle proposal, or when it is reviewed and updated, management techniques such as benchmarking, marketing research, or SWOT analysis can provide a set of information that should be considered in the design of a training proposal.

At international level, there is an increasing use of this instrument to the extent that it can contribute to an increase of efficiency and consequently the release of resources.

In the Education context, at its different levels, benchmarking allows the comparison of institutions to define a set of indicators.

In this alignment, and based on a qualitative methodology, the present study performs a comparative analysis of the training offer at the level in Public Relations Degree at Portuguese and Brazilian Higher Education Institutions.

The For this purpose, the national and international supply in the public relations area was carried out. The database for the benchmarking comparative analysis resulted from the analysis of the web pages of the courses in comparison.

The selection criteria were taken into consideration:

1. This is a degree course,
2. Be officially recognized (in the country in which it is taught),
3. Include the term "Public Relations" in its designation.

At the same time, it should be noted that if in the Portuguese case it was already possible to include all HEIs that meet the inclusion criteria, in the case of Brazilian HEIs, and taking into account the existence of more than 8 dozens of courses that meet the requirements presented, it was decided at this first moment to include only the 12 HEIs whose courses obtained the highest classification from the Ministry of Education) of Brazil.

In this way, the *corpus* consisted of 21 Higher Education Institutions (Public and Private - Table 1).

**Table 1. UNIVERSITIES**

<b>Portugal</b>
<b>Higher School of Social Communication - Polytechnic Institute of Lisboa</b>
<b>Higher School of Education of Viseu</b>
<b>ISVOUGA</b>
<b>Higher Institute of New Professions - CODEPA</b>
<b>ISPAB</b>
<b>University of Azores</b>
<b>Lusophone University of Humanities and Technologies</b>
<b>Polytechnic Institute of Guarda</b>
<b>ISMAI - University Institute of Maia</b>
<b>Brazil</b>
<b>State University of Londrina (UEL)</b>
<b>University Feevale (Feevale)</b>
<b>University of Santa Cruz do Sul (Unisc)</b>
<b>Federal University of Santa Maria (UFSM)</b>
<b>University of Vale do Rio dos Sinos (Unisinos)</b>
<b>University Center FECAP</b>
<b>Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul</b>
<b>Lutheran University of Brazil (Canoas)</b>
<b>Federal University of Paraiba</b>
<b>University of Taubaté - UNITAU</b>
<b>Faculties Atibaia (FAAT)</b>
<b>Paulus Faculty of Technology and Communication</b>

The analysis defined, in the present phase of the study, the following categories:

- a) Course Title;
- b) Inclusion in the School / Department / Faculty;
- c) Reference to the indices of employability in the course web page;
- d) Indication of professional exits on this page;
- e) Existence of the course unit and its duration.

## 5. Results

The data collected regarding the institutions under analysis allows us to observe points of confluence and distinction between the Portuguese and Brazilian reality.

### a) Course Title

If in Portugal only one HEI presents a course denomination exclusively "Public Relations" (Maia University Institute), in Brazil 10 institutions (of the twelve selected) assume this designation.

In the Portuguese case, the heterogeneity of designations and, on the other hand, the combination of the term "Public Relations" with "Marketing", "Advertising" and "Communication" (Table 2) as a way to raise potential candidates (following a logical assumption that they will be in greater numbers if different components of the Communication are combined).

**Table 2.**

<b>COURSE NAME</b>	<b>UNIVERSITY</b>
<b>Public Relations and Business Communication</b>	Higher School of Social Communication - Polytechnic Institute of Lisboa
<b>Advertising and Public Relations</b>	Higher School of Education of Viseu
<b>Marketing, Advertising and Public Relations</b>	ISVOUGA
<b>Bachelor Degree Public Relations and Advertising</b>	Higher Institute of New Professions - CODEPA
<b>Marketing, Advertising and Public Relations</b>	ISPAB
<b>Public Relations and Communication</b>	University of Azores
<b>Applied Communication: Marketing, Advertising and Public Relations</b>	Lusophone University of Humanities and Technologies
<b>Communication and Public Relations</b>	Polytechnic Institute of Guarda
<b>Public relations</b>	ISMAI - University Institute of Maia

The need to clarify the concept of Public Relations, as a professional area, as well as the field of academic knowledge that supports it, is not exclusively a national concern, being reflected in a study by Van Ruler and Vercic (2003) that sought to find a truly European concept of Public Relations, considering that several European countries adopt different designations for the activity.

Perhaps for this reason, in the training proposals of HEIs, the designation "Public Relations" has been replaced by similar terminologies, such as Communication Sciences - Organizational Communication, Business Communication, among others, which have not contributed to the clarification of this area of knowledge.

### b) Inclusion in the School / Department / Faculty

As regards to affiliation to a given scientific area / Department or Faculty, in Portugal the indefiniteness remains. Thus, the courses are divided by areas such as Communication, Business Sciences or more generally by the Social Sciences (Table 3).

**Table 3.**

<b>COURSE NAME</b>	<b>UNIVERSITY</b>
<b>Public relations</b>	State University of Londrina (UEL)
<b>Public relations</b>	University Feevale (Feevale)
<b>Public relations</b>	University of Santa Cruz do Sul (Unisc)
<b>Social Communication - Qualification in Public Relations</b>	Federal University of Santa Maria (UFSM)
<b>Public relations</b>	University ofVale do Rio dos Sinos (Unisinos)
<b>Public relations</b>	University Center FECAP
<b>Public relations</b>	Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul
<b>Social Communication - Public Relations - in extinction</b>	Lutheran University of Brazil (Canoas)
<b>Public relations</b>	Federal University of Paraiba
<b>Public relations</b>	University of Taubaté - UNITAU
<b>Public relations</b>	Faculties Atibaia (FAAT)
<b>Public relations</b>	Paulus Faculty of Technology and Communication

Such heterogeneity of interpretations of the predominant scientific area results from the inexistence of ministerial directives (following the logic of university autonomy) and from a certain lack of definition of the Public Relations profession itself (to a large extent also, due to lack of legal framework and organization of the class).

In Brazil, on the contrary, 100% of the HEIs analysed fit their graduations in the scientific area of Communication Sciences (Table 4). Still in Brazil, Ferrari (2017) points out that, also in Brazil, this lack of clarification about the activity has contributed to the reduction of the number of Public Relations courses, since "the lack of legitimacy of the exercise of the professional activity in society, unlike what happens with journalism and advertising, which are professional activities recognized and easily understood by people in general.

"Nevertheless, in Brazil, and contrary to what happens in Portugal, there is a mandatory professional registration for the Public Relations exercise, although the Regional Councils do not have the capacity to respond in this inspection, attending to a large number of people with other formations that occupy the space of public relations (Ferrari, 2017).

**Table 4.**

<b>UNIVERSITY</b>	<b>SCIENTIFIC AREA</b>
<b>Higher School of Social Communication -Polytechnic Institute of Lisboa</b>	Marketing and Advertising
<b>Higher School of Education of Viseu</b>	Social Sciences
<b>ISVOUGA</b>	Marketing and Advertising
<b>Higher Institute of New Professions - CODEPA</b>	Communication Sciences
<b>ISPAB</b>	Marketing and Advertising
<b>University of the Azores</b>	Faculty of Human Sciences and Social Sciences
<b>Lusophone University of Humanities and Technologies</b>	School of Communication, Architecture, Arts and Information Technologies
<b>Polytechnic Institute of Guarda</b>	Higher School of Education, Communication and Sports
<b>ISMAI - University Institute of Maia</b>	Communication Sciences and Information Technologies

### **c) Employability**

Regarding the employability of the courses (although they often figure indirectly), the Portuguese HEIs seem to show a growing concern about their dissemination (in the case of Brazilian HEIs only two do it on their web pages) considering that this is an important criterion and motivation factor that guides the students' choices about the cycles of higher education they are enrolled in.

The concept of employability has, however, been difficult to interpret for both employers and universities, so it can be said that this concept entails a certain lack of definition. For a better understanding of this, Lees (2002) states that from a university perspective, employability is the whole process of producing students with the ability to adapt to the job market. On the other hand, from the perspective of employers, "employability is the propensity of the graduate to exhibit attitudes that employers anticipate will be necessary for the future effective functioning of their organization" (Harvey, 1997, quoted in Lees 2002: 3)

Lees (2002: 1) suggests that, on the one hand, it is the responsibility of those teaching at universities to foster useful skills for their employability. Silva *et al.* (2003: 1286) agree with this perspective, stating that "employability is a real and unavoidable challenge, requiring an increasingly rational and strategic management of university courses. Attractiveness for employability has become for universities an imperative of survival in the context of new pressures, demands and social expectations."

Thus, employability appears as a guide strategy for the design and review of the study plans proposed by the HEIs that try to validate their choices (and the skills and the knowledge they promote) with institutions and employers.

### **d) Careers information**

This item translates a confluence between the strategies of both sets of institutions. Thus, all HEIs under analysis refer to the careers information in their pages. It should be



noted that this fact can not be understood in isolation, and its relation to the previous category of employability is even considered.

The inclusion of careers information seeks, on the one hand, to respond to a clarification of the public relations training itself and, on the other hand, to account for the broad and multifaceted character of a professional in this area, a characteristic that is increasingly appreciated by the job market.

#### **e) Existence of the course unit of Internship**

Regarding the existence of the course unit and its duration, the present study demonstrates that 6 of the 9 Portuguese HEIs present in their curriculum the Internship (compulsory). This is part of the third (and last) year of the respective degrees, but has a very variable duration, reflected in the number of credits allocated to it (between 5 and 18 credits).

In the case of Brazil, the existence of the Internship Curricular Unit in 83% of HEIs (the remaining ones include the Project curricular unit), and their particularly significant duration (reflected in the number of hours and semesters according to the table 5). Still in Brazil, and following the good practices pointed out in the literature, it is frequent a student to carry out more than one internship during his / her graduation. Dias *et al.* (2015) points out that the existence of multiple traineeship experiences throughout the study plan tends to reduce graduates' unemployment rates by 37 percent, with the remaining constant variables. The same authors also point out that the reasons given for institutions to continue to offer single-level placements are due to logistical difficulties, either in the allocation of students themselves or in the establishment of orientation networks.

**Table 5.**

<b>UNIVERSITY</b>	<b>SCIENTIFIC AREA</b>
<b>State University of Londrina (UEL)</b>	Education, Communication and Arts
<b>University Feevale (Feevale)</b>	Communication
<b>University of Santa Cruz do Sul (Unisc)</b>	Social Communication
<b>Federal University of Santa Maria (UFSM)</b>	Social Communication
<b>University of Vale do Rio dos Sinos (Unisinos)</b>	Social Communication
<b>University Center FECAP</b>	Communication
<b>Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul</b>	Communication
<b>Lutheran University of Brazil (Canoas)</b>	Social Communication
<b>Federal University of Paraiba</b>	Communication, Tourism and Arts
<b>University of Taubaté - UNITAU</b>	Social Communication
<b>Faculties Atibaia (FAAT)</b>	Social Communication
<b>Paulus Faculty of Technology and Communication</b>	Communication

The inclusion of curricular internships has been, as mentioned by Alves (2010), considered, by the academic leaders, as a strategy of facilitating the obtaining of a first job for its graduates. Entry into the labour market - defined as the relationship established between those seeking work / employment and those who offer it (INE, 2016) - is considered the decisive moment for the construction of the adult condition that any young person aspires to. This will allow the construction of a material heritage, indispensable for the acquisition of economic independence vis-a-vis the primary socialization family. But increasingly, it turns out that this process tends to be "long and fraught with uncertainties" (Alves, 2007 cited by Pereira, 2016:14).

At the same time, and together with the intention to assure students a high quality academic experience, most institutions emphasize, as priorities, adequacy to the labour market and social responsibility, which necessarily implies a reinforcement of the link the community. In turn, by fostering greater closeness to the surrounding community and its business fabric, internships allow the Academy to identify gaps and (re) adjust training plans to new market needs and requirements, encourage the development of research and facilitate the transfer of knowledge.

## **6. Final considerations**

The inclusion of new graduates in the labour market is increasingly concerned with all educational agents and policy makers. This fact justifies the broad debate that both civil society and political and academic institutions (Silva, Behrez and Raymundo, 2017, Paulos, Valadas and Frago, 2017, European Commission, 2014, A3Es, 2014, 2012; (Amaral & Carvalho, 2003) have undertaken. In this context, it is important to note that there is a need for a better understanding of the role of higher education institutions.

From the point of view of teaching Public Relations in Higher Education, the Bologna Declaration, officially signed on 19 June 1999 in Italy by 29 Ministers of Education, laid the foundations for the creation of the European Higher Education Area by promoting the unification of curricula, the definition of ECTS (European Credits Transfer System) and the free mobility of students and teachers between the acceding countries. In parallel, the various levels were compacted, reducing the formation time. However, this effort to achieve uniformity did not lead to the definition of a common strategy, neither on an international scale nor even in the national context, where the proposal to flexibilization of the curricular structure proposed by Bologna has not always been properly implemented.

Maintaining the same spirit, the Lisbon strategy adopted by the European Council in March 2000 (under the Portuguese Presidency) defined as a priority strategy to make Europe the most competitive and dynamic economy in the world based on knowledge and research. This strategy has even been presented as the only way to generate more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.

In this new paradigm, employability becomes a central element both for the reputation of the institutions and for the degree of attractiveness they can (or will not) exert over their current and future students. In this way, the constraints and pressures are undeniable and require the reorganization and rationalization of the supply of higher education.

As Santos and Borges (2015) point out, an organization will only be able to sustain its project as long as it is felt necessary in the scrutiny that the different stakeholders do their mission, being essential the creation of value adjusted to the expectations that the community reflects in the IES, by combining this set of attributes capable of generating satisfaction. In this sense, like any organization, the university project must also gain a base of legitimacy, trust and adhesion on the part of the community that welcomes it and determines its sustainability base.

Thus, it is imperative to reflect on the responsibility of universities and even to question their relationship with the labour market (Gonçalves *et al.*, 2006: 104). However, this does not invalidate the fact that the concept of employability is at the heart of universities' concerns, that is, the "relationship" between these institutions and the labour market has to be more and more visible.

Assuming employability as a relevant criterion, not only of public policy decisions regarding evaluation, accreditation or funding of study cycles and their institutions, but also of individual decisions regarding the choice of areas or educational institutions, it is essential to obtain uniformly cross-sectional indicators that allow the comparison between areas and institutions, as well as the analysis of the evolution of these indicators of employability over time.

In addition, the significant contraction in the labour market complicates the situation of HEIs which are now competing simultaneously by students and by the levels of employability of their graduates, aware that this second element may have a medium and long term impact on the attractiveness of each institution in relation to new and potential students. In turn, the employability will depend on the adjustment of the curricula, considering the inclusion of practical training in a work context, even if supervised and tutored.

On the one hand, the curricular internships appear as a way of favouring a first contact with the world of work and, on the other hand, tend to contribute, as pointed out by Paulson & Baker, 1999, to a greater self-confidence and proactivity of graduates.

The literature also suggests that curricular internships are an important asset in terms of employability (Hergert, 2009; Teichler, 2009; Paulson & Baker, 1999), because they can be a first filter for companies / organizations and for the trainee himself (which defines preferred areas of activity).

Knemeyer and Murphy (2002) go even further by adding another advantage to the possibility of undertaking a curricular internship in the context of an academic training: the application of skills in the work context. Yorke and Knight (2006) go even further considering that not only the internship allows the application of skills but also promotes the acquisition of new ones and it is therefore positive both from the point of view of personal enrichment and the employability of graduates.

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