

A Successful Case of University-Government Cooperation Aiming at the Development of the Brazilian-Uruguayan Border

The Federal University of Pelotas, located at the southernmost state of Brazil, Just 250 km from the border with Uruguay, is now an institution with 25,000 undergraduate students and 3,000 graduate students. Pelotas is a town in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, and our University is 600 km far from Montevideo, the capital city of Uruguay, and about 900 km far from Buenos Aires, the capital city of Argentina, which means we are in a privileged location in terms of Mercosul, or Mercosur, the Southern Common Market, the largest trading bloc in South America.

The cultural origins of Pelotas, as well as its geographical situation, have encouraged our University to embrace its vocation for regional integration and development. The *gauchos* of the *pampas* have a strong cultural identity in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, as well as in Argentina and in Uruguay. Moreover, from a geographical viewpoint, Pelotas is a town that is close not only to Argentina and Uruguay, but also to Paraguay.

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- Antonio Cesar G. Borges - Rector of the Federal University of Pelotas. UFPEL. Brasil

Two years after the Asunción Treaty was signed, the President of Brazil took a decision in May 1994 – that the Federal University of Pelotas would be responsible for the management of the Brazilian actions as outlined in the Lagoa Mirim Binational Treaty, a document signed by both Uruguay and Brazil. Therefore, our University had a pioneering role in the field of regional integration in the sphere of Mercosul, especially at the border between the two countries.

At first, our University took to itself the management of two large dams in that region: the floodgate of São Gonçalo and the Chasqueiro dam.

The São Gonçalo floodgate is charged with the preservation of drinkable water for the town of Rio Grande, 50 km south of Pelotas. Rio Grande is the largest port of the Mercosul area in the Atlantic Ocean. The Chasqueiro dam is responsible for providing water to the rice fields, and rice crops are the main investment along an extensive area of agricultural economy in the Southern part of our State – down to the border with Uruguay.

Aiming at consolidating the University's activities and its role in the Mercosul, the Federal University of Pelotas founded in the following year, 1995, the Mercosul Center in downtown Pelotas. Its building is open to the University members and to the citizens of Pelotas who wish to organize any event that is related to regional integration and development. And this building hosts both the School of International Relations of our University and the Simon Bolivar Foundation, a non-governmental organization that gives support to the University.

The main objectives of the Mercosul Integration Center are:

- to encourage academic studies on the integration between the countries that comprise the Mercosul;
- to strengthen the cultural BONDS/LIAISONS between Brazil and the other countries of Mercosul;
- to promote debates, lectures, and seminars on the theme Mercosul;
- to provide access to information on this theme to the academia and to society at large;
- to be a center for information exchange between commercial and industrial companies, on products and business opportunities in the countries comprising the Mercosul;
- to act as an agency of consultancy for both public and private organizations due to programs that relate to this agenda that aims at promoting regional integration and development.

In 2007, the Federal University of Pelotas was put in charge, by the Brazilian Ministry of Education, of taking the first steps towards the creation of another university with several campuses spread over ten different towns in the border region, and that was how UNIPAMPA was founded. It was our University's duty to create the campuses of Jaguarão, Bagé, Santana do Livramento, Dom Pedrito, and Caçapava do Sul. The implementation of this new university came to its conclusion in 2010, and today UNIPAMPA is an institution of higher education in its own right, with its own and brand new Administration.

The Center for the International Border Studies in Livramento/Rivera

Why Livramento/Rivera?

The “Peace Border”, (Fronteira da Paz) as it is commonly called by the population living in that area, is actually a long avenue and an adjacent large park, where the social, cultural, and commercial exchanges flow naturally as if the towns of Santana do Livramento (Brazil) and Rivera (Uruguay) were amalgamated, forming one city with its one people.

So it seemed only natural that, by the end of 2010, during a visit to Livramento, by Brazilian President Lula and Uruguayan President Mujica, the Federal University of Pelotas founded the Center for Studies of International Bordering Areas at Livramento, in a building that is adjacent to the borderline between Brazil and Uruguay.

The importance of this Center (NEF – Núcleo de Estudos Fronteiriços) is quite clear, for it is in accordance with the Action Plan of the Education Sector of Mercosul (SEM – Setor Educacional do Mercosul) for 2006-2010, as sanctioned in June 2006 during the 30th Meeting of the Ministers of Education of Mercosul that took place in Buenos Aires.

According to Objective No. 2 of that Action Plan, the Education Sector of Mercosul says it shall “promote high quality education for all as a factor of social inclusion, human development and economic production, as well as strengthen the activities in the areas along the borders between the Mercosul countries.” Objective No. 3 follows suit and underlines the need to “promote reciprocal cooperation and exchanges that will aim at strengthening both the educational systems of the countries comprising Mercosul and the operation of the network of universities in the region.”

The Objectives of the Center for Studies of International Bordering Areas (NEF) are as follows:

- (1) To develop and support studies and research work on topics related to the bordering areas, with both Brazilian and Uruguayan researchers from different areas of scientific knowledge in an interdisciplinary manner;
- (2) To act as a governmental agency, giving support to projects that will promote the integration of the bordering areas and of Mercosul itself;
- (3) To facilitate academic exchange between Brazilian and non-Brazilian universities that have signed agreements for mutual exchange of human resources, etc, but especially in reference to the Universidad de la Republica del Uruguay.
- (4) To make public the knowledge thus produced, through all kinds of publications as published by the Center for Studies of

International Bordering Areas (NEF) and, moreover, with the aid of other organizations that might be interested in this theme of regional integration and development within the scope of Mercosul and other such international economic blocs for integration.

The facilities of the Center comprise a library; a small auditorium for lectures, seminars, workshops, and so on; a room for meetings; an area for exhibitions; and an office for project design is provided by the Federal University of Pelotas to be used by any and all the mayors of the towns of the Southern Region of our state of Rio Grande do Sul.

At the Center, one will find several permanent projects and temporary activities taking place. Among the permanent projects carried out, we have the Binational (Livramento/Rivera) Health Committee. Among the temporary activities carried out at the Brazilian-Uruguayan border through our Federal University, with the support of the local municipal government, we have the following:

- The 2009 Education Exhibition (EXPO-EDUCA), organized by the Uruguayan Ministry of Social Development, through its agency in the town of Rivera.
- The technical cooperation for the teaching of Portuguese in Uruguay and of Spanish in Brazil. This was devised by our Pelotas University teachers and teachers from the Regional Center of Teachers from Northern Uruguay, through their branch in Rivera.

- The first binational course in Environmental Management, with emphasis in the management of solid residue. The group of students is made up of 20 Brazilian and 20 Uruguayan students.
- The binational choir “Madrigal Santa Ana”, with half of its singers being Brazilians and half Uruguayans.
- The second binational colloquium on Youth and the Job Market, organized in a joint effort with the Uruguayan Ministry of Labour.
- Art exhibitions at the “Sin Fronteras” Museum of Uruguay and at the Davi Canabarro Art Museum of Brazil.
- Binational Filmmaking Workshops, taught by filmmakers from Europe and from the Mercosul countries.
- Seminar in the area of Sports, with the support of the Ministry of Sports of Uruguay.
- Second Binational Forum on the youth and the job market, a joint organization together with the Ministry of Labour of Uruguay.
- First Binational Book Fair, held in Santana do Livramento/Rivera.

The scientific and cultural productions of the Federal University of Pelotas that relate to the international bordering areas have been recorded in the series “Fronteiras da Integração” (Frontiers of Integration) through the publishing of books. These volumes frequently are the result of dissertations and theses from post-graduate programs defended either in our Pelotas University or

else in other universities. And these are bilingual books, published in the official languages of Mercosul, Spanish and Portuguese.

From a social point of view, the major Project designed by our University for the international bordering area concerns the implementation of Border Zone Health Units (Unidades Fronteiriças de Saúde) to be built in the twin towns along the borderline dividing Brazil and Uruguay, meaning, respectively:

- 1- Jaguarão / Rio Branco;
- 2- Santana do Livramento / Rivera;
- 3- Santa Vitória do Palmar and Chuí / Chuy;
- 4- Quaraí / Bella Unión;
- 5- Aceguá / Acegua.

UFPel coordinates this Project with financial support from both the Federal and the State governments. The personnel hired to work at the Health Units will come from both the Brazilian and the Uruguayan town (one Health Unit for each of the five pairs of twin towns). The units will be served by doctors in residence from the School of Medicine of the Federal University of Pelotas, and they will work with the Brazilian and Uruguayan physicians and surgeons that live in these twin towns. At the Health Units, any citizen, regardless of their nationality, will be seen by a doctor and receive treatment. And these Border Zone Health Units may be taken as models for the other bordering areas of Brazil, for they will be providing the following services in health care: medical and dental treatments, clinical analysis, ECGs, radiology, short-term hospitalization, prevention and treatment of drug addiction. At the Health Units only patients suffering from the more common diseases will be treated,

whereas those whose condition is more serious and complex will be referred to our University's School Hospital.

Given that the Federal University of Pelotas works in accordance with the local administrations towards solving the problems of those citizens living in the international bordering areas, we are proud to say that the overall results are quite positive. Therefore, the President's Office in Brazil took a decision this last year, nominating our University as the institution to be in charge of coordinating all projects that aim at qualifying personnel for the Mayor's Offices in the countries of Mercosul. This nomination was taken to the Consulting Forum for Municipalities, Federative States, Provinces, and Departments of Mercosul (FCCR – Foro Consultivo de Municípios, Estados Federativos, Províncias e Departamentos do Mercosul).

The Mercosul FCCR is made up of delegates from:

- federative states and municipalities (Brazil)
- departamentos (Uruguay)
- provinces and municipalities (Argentina)
- departamentos and municipalities (Paraguay)
- states and municipalities (Venezuela)

We are well aware of the role of paramount importance of the universities for the development and social inclusion in the zone that

comprises the the borderlines between Brazil and other countries in South America. These borderlines put together are almost 16 km long and represent 27% of the national territory, with approximately 10 million residents – people whose quality of life is far from ideal, for there are obvious deficiencies in education, health and security to be overcome.

In order to solve these problems, it is *sine qua non* that efforts be put together from governments both local and central. It is in this picture that the support of the universities can make a difference.

The State of Rio Grande do Sul, where Pelotas is located, has created the Network of International Border Municipalities, and both UFPel and the Simon Bolívar are members of this network.

In the eleven Brazilian states that have borders with other countries in South America, there are 140 universities, and each one of them can carry out significant actions towards integration. In order to form a network of universities for the bordering zone development, UFPel has brought together those universities in the 1st Permanent International Seminar on University and Integration. This seminar took place in April 2010, so that we could gather and disseminate information on university extension activities as carried out in this huge bordering zone. Now in May 2011 (next month) the 2nd Seminar will take place, with the participation of heads of universities from Brazil and from Latin America.

Prof. Antonio Cesar G. Borges
Rector of the Federal University of Pelotas
Spain, April 2011