

Perú and the struggle about university autonomy

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At least 25 years of struggling about university autonomy

- There are **different narratives** on this topic, and a dispute in the higher-education field contrasting perspective about the role of universities, the role of state and the society.
- Academically speaking, the worst-case scenario: **having an essentialist perspective about autonomy.**
- **Necessity to analyse** “practices of autonomy within the university (living autonomy, Massen and Gornitzka, 2017) **and understand what is behind the narratives.**

At least 2 narratives around autonomy in the Peruvian University System

There are at least two points of view that are important to stand out:

- i) Those who promote a **relationship between university and society** seeking universities to assume some kind of **responsibility** regarding the quality of what they offer.
- ii) Those who seek to **disconnect university and society**, making universities institutions that can develop their own purposes and can be autoregulated.

**Responsible
Autonomy
(Model 2014-2023?)**

**Autonomy
(Model until 2014)**

The uses of “autonomy” in Perú: the cases of three universities

“Facade” universities, the case of Telesup (20 000 students)

- Its owner and his family were **related to three institutions**. None of these were licensed by Sunedu (new regulator).
- In 2014, this university got **40 million soles** in annual turnover.
- Its owner had representation in **Congress** with the political party “Podemos Perú” and make strong pressure against reform. Control of other institutions (judiciary and electoral systems)
- Their argument against the reform: **infringement to university autonomy**.



Photo from Andina.pe

The uses of “autonomy” in Perú: the cases of three universities

The case of Alas Peruanas (100 000 students)

- Due to its lack of compliance with **minimum quality requirements**, this university was not licensed by Sunedu.
- According to reports, during 2017, 27 million soles from this university ended up in companies of Joaquín Ramírez, Secretary-General of political party Fuerza Popular (that has the majority in congress 2016-2020, 73 out of 120 congressmen).
- In January 2020, **search and seizure** to this university was authorized for being under suspicion of taking part in an **elaborated scheme of money laundering**.
- Strong pressure against reform for “violating” autonomy.



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The case of San Marcos and the resistance to meritocracy

- In 2018, San Marcos university was **licensed** by Sunedu.
- According to some reports, in 2019 there were alleged cases of **irregularities** in the hiring of professors.
- They were sanctioned by SUNEDU
- In 2021 and 2022 San Marcos Rector Jeri Ramón supported new law that neutralized SUNEDU based on the idea that **autonomy needs to be retrieved**.



Retrieved from El Comercio

The uses of “autonomy” in Perú: the cases of three universities

- For years, **self-regulation** did not stop these practices.
- Orlando Velásquez, former President of Asamblea Nacional de Rectores, was part of a corruption network related to Poder Judicial and Junta Nacional de Magistratura (Those who select the judges).
- Business, political and corporate interests had completely **captured** this institution.



The uses of “autonomy” in Perú: the cases of three universities

“This is being reinforced by a **system of democratic elections** of university leaders that promote **clientelism** and frequent rotation of leaders, a major internal university council that makes the decision-making process difficult, and an egalitarian academic culture that disapproves of recognizing and rewarding researchers and outstanding professors.”

Altbach y Salmi



Under the autonomy model....

- Peruvian public universities did not generate relevant knowledge internationally.
- “Latin America (along with Africa) is the continent with the fewest top quality research-intensive universities. No Latin American university is found in the top 100 of global university rankings and relatively few Latin American scholars and scientists are among the most highly cited academics” (Altbach and Salmi, 2021).
- Autonomy, as it was understood for many years in Perú, produced low-level universities in terms of research.

From Autonomy to responsible autonomy (2015-2023?)

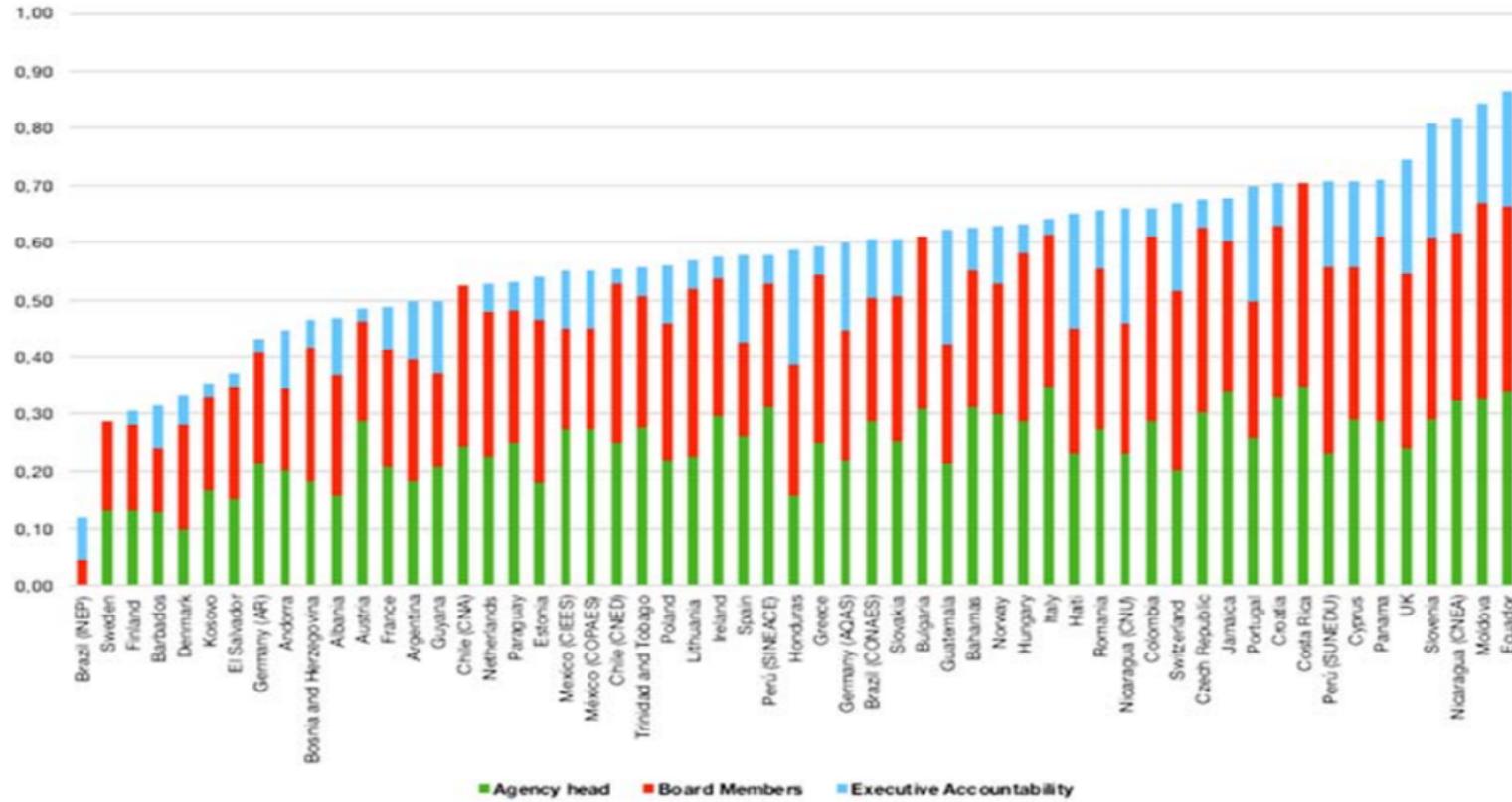
- In 2014, a new law was launched: **University Law** (*Ley Universitaria*, N.º30220).
- It introduces a new actor, **the State**, which is responsible for the guarantee of the universities purposes (Model of Responsive autonomy).
- Evaluate all universities and give authorization to those who guarantee basic quality conditions. New independent institution (SUNEDU).



- A considerable increase in the amount of research.
- From 2015 to 2017 the number of papers in indexed journals doubled.
- As of January 2022, 95 licenses were given to 93 universities and 2 graduate Schools. 50 licenses were rejected. Most of them for profit universities.

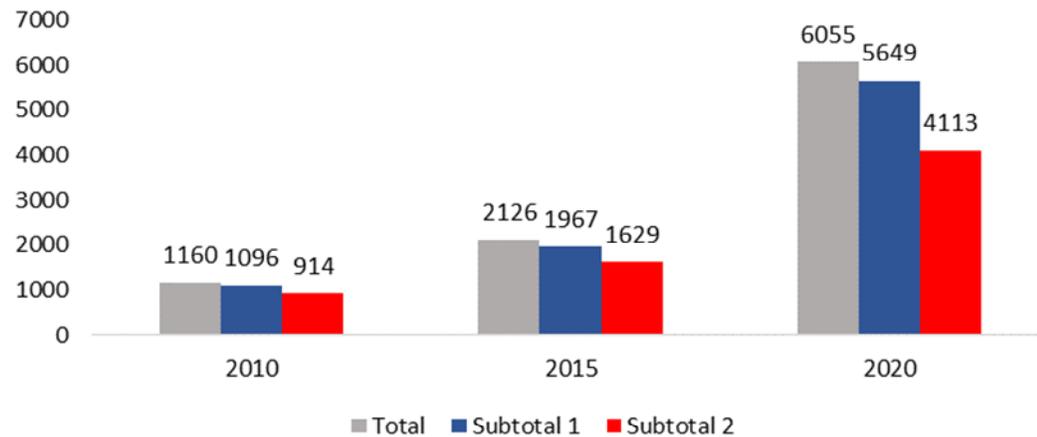
Independence of the regulator (Garcia et al 2020)

14  A. G. JUANATEY ET AL.

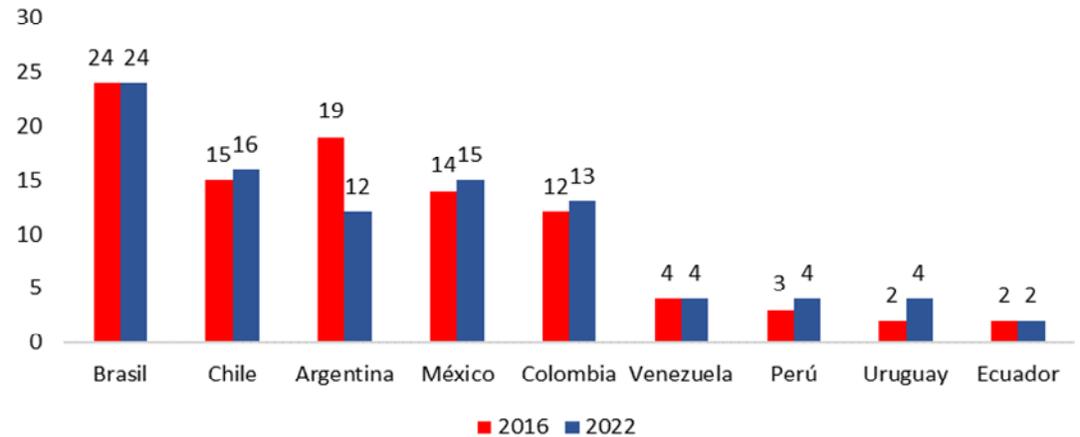


Changes in research productivity after the reform

Number of publications from Peruvian institutions in Scopus, per type of publication, 2010, 2015 and 2020.



Number of universities in the TOP 100 QS Ranking, by country, 2016 and 2022.



Note. Subtotal 1 considers publications such as articles, reviews, conference documents, book chapters and books; while Subtotal 2 considers articles, book chapters and books.

Source: Adapted from Scopus database.

However, a new law seeks to come back to the autonomy model and self regulation.

- Interpellation and destitution of Ministers that promote reform(2016-2020). Remember that university owners (those who lost authorization) have representation in congress.
- Launching of a new law (“Law that restores university autonomy”), supported by UDUAL (Unión de Universidades de América Latina y el Caribe). 2022
- But highly questioned by major Peruvian universities, which claim that “academic freedom” was not infringed.



Conclusions

The current regulation model introduces **a new independent actor** (Sunedu) that promote responsive autonomy and could neutralize corporate, political and economic interests

With the new law 2022 there is the risk of going back using the argument of “defense of autonomy” rhetorically.

By doing this, the possibility to develop open institutions, promoters of knowledge and of good academic practices that reject clientelism and corruption, is being affected.