

Schools, teachers, and territories. State capacities and human capital in Uruguay, 1877-1910

Escuelas, maestras y territorios. Capacidades estatales y capital humano en Uruguay, 1877-1910

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A N A L Y T I C A L S U M M A R Y

This article analyzes the case of a pioneer country in the implementation of schooling laws in Latin America, Uruguay, at the beginning of the First Globalization. The Uruguayan schooling experience is relevant for international debates about human capital accumulation during the period of mass education for the following reasons: a) decision-taking processes were highly centralized; b) the State took a leading role in the provision of schools in the context of a major process of secularization; c) Uruguay reached high levels of human development in the 20th century. Bureaucratic memories were analyzed combining qualitative and quantitative tools, with the aim of identify the main obstacles to school reform and territorial heterogeneities in educational provision and demand.

In the context of a military *de facto* government established in 1876, a substantial change took place in Uruguayan primary education: the school reform of 1877. This institutional change involved the creation of *Dirección General de Instrucción Pública*, a public organization in charge of the administration and regularization of primary education in the national territory.

How did the Uruguayan educational supply evolve and what characteristics did it present during the First Globalization? This article shows that, during the first three decades of school reform, the school budget increased significantly, as well as the number of public schools per square kilometer and the number of teachers, early developing a highly feminized labor sector. In contrast to other Latin American educational experiences, the spending per student in Uruguay was higher in less prosperous regions in fiscal terms, which in turn is explained by the high centralization of the Uruguayan school model. School authorities noticed the importance of increasing public expenses to improve the quality of public education, to reduce the influence of Portuguese language in border areas and to consolidate public education as a tool for state and national building processes.

What were the territorial heterogeneities in the demand for education? During First Globalization, state-provided education was the most important in terms of enrolment in Uruguay, even more so in rural areas. In contrast to the supply of education, the Uruguayan case was similar to other historical experiences in terms of enrollment where it was higher in the wealthiest territories. This relationship was observed mostly in Montevideo and in the departments on the west coast of the Uruguay River. Another inequality factor was found in the levels and promotions within enrollment: Montevideo was the leader in the accumulation of human capital in the higher levels of primary education.

These results contribute to a better understanding of processes of educational expansion at a global level, through a successful case in terms of enrollment with a highly centralized educational model in Latin America.