

# **PROCESS TRACING OF THE LATIN AMERICAN DEBATE MOVEMENT**

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Submitted to

Central European University

School of Public Policy

*In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Public*

*Policy*

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I, the undersigned Ana Maria Diez De Fex hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis.

To the best of my knowledge this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted as part of the requirements of any other academic degree or non-degree program, in English or in any other language.

This is a true copy of the thesis, including final revisions.

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# ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to explore, examine and analyze the phenomenon of growth of the Latin American debate movement using a mixed methodology comprising process tracing and interviews. The thesis applies social movements theoretical concepts to the Latin American debate movement case study and the findings show how three contextual forces lead by cultural philanthropy, student activism and governmental actors were fundamental to the formation of the movement. This thesis argues that the Latin American debate movement is an innovative form of civic participation that influence public policy.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to dedicate this work to the debate community in Latin America who with great effort and sacrifice are building the bases for an educational revolution in the region. That solidarity and fraternity continue to characterize us as a community.

I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, professor Kata Orosz, who guided me with patience and dedication in my first steps in research in social sciences, in a process that started at the beginning of the academic year.

I would also want to thank my classmates and professors in Central European University, who with their great heart inspired me throughout this master program and contributed to my personal and intellectual growth.

Finally, thanks to my mother, who is my constant inspiration to become a better person and to overcome the obstacles of life. Thanks to my family and to my friends who with the years became family.

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# List of abbreviations

CMUDE: Campeonato Mundial Universitario de Debate en Español (World universities debating championship in Spanish)

IDEA: International Debate Education Association

NGO'S: Non-Governmental Organization

OSF: Open Society Foundation

TODI: Torneo de Debate Interuniversitario (Interuniversity debate tournament)

WUDC: World Universities Debating Championship

WSDC: World Schools Debating Championship

# Introduction

*And if these difficulties, whose essence we share, hinder us, it is understandable that the rational talents on this side of the world, exalted in the contemplation of their own cultures, should have found themselves without valid means to interpret us. It is only natural that they insist on measuring us with the yardstick that they use for themselves, forgetting that the ravages of life are not the same for all, and that the quest of our own identity is just as arduous and bloody for us as it was for them.*

— Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

In recent years, Latin America has witnessed a dramatic hike in the number of debate societies and debate competitions. For practical purposes, debate societies are groups in schools and universities, set to the practice and promotion of competitive debate. On the other hand, debate competitions are formal contests of argumentation and rebuttal with certain rules or format, in which the participants compete among other teams and are judged according to different criteria (“What Is Debating? | The Cambridge Union” 2017).

Moreover, in the region one form of debate called educational debate is becoming more important both in high schools and universities. In that context, some questions arise: What characterized the formation process of the Latin American debate movement? What factors led to the growth of the movement? What are its historical origins? What are its current characteristics? Who were and are the main actors of the Latin American debate movement? Finally, what is the relationship between the Latin American debate movement and education policy?



## **Rationale for the research**

Previous approaches to the topic of competitive and educational debate have primarily, focused on the English-language debate circuit and in particular they have focused on the benefits provided by the debate practice, on measuring its impact, on actual production of educational materials, and described the forms of relationships that occur within the different communities of debate with the respective peculiarities of each case (For example: Willmington 1967; Warner and Bruschke 2001; Key 2014). Other relevant pieces of literature describe broadly the benefits of debate society for university students, situating debate as a learning tool that stimulates simulation, socialization and the creation of social capital, in addition to personal growth of competitors (Bartanen 2015).

This topic is especially relevant for policy makers in Latin America for two reasons: firstly because the Latin American debate movement works as an example of an implemented bottom up educational program (Darling-Hammond 1990; Sabatier 1986; Williams and Cummings 2015; OECD 2016), having special consideration on the manifestations of a policy change occasioned from the students is significant (Darling-Hammond, 1990), since in most of the cases the establishment of competitive debate teams is a student initiative without the early presence of central decision makers.

Secondly because the tendency of the debate movement is to keep growing and, to some extent, demand specific changes in educational policies in the region, such as the improvement of students critical thinking skills (Salazar-Xirinachs 2017). For this reason, the movement could also be analyzed in terms of coalition and collaboration between the movement and policy makers (McCammon, 2010). Moreover, considering also the fact that some members of this community have worked with policy makers, or will become policy makers in the near future (Crotty 2017; “Princeton Debate Panel” 2017).

Educational or competitive debate is an activity that occurs in most cases within formal education institutions. A large proportion of debate competitions belongs to the higher education circuit, modifying the higher education environment. This is why the debate movement has implications in the higher education sector. Hence, the challenge for higher education policy and research is to “build and renew the analytical bridges between environmental changes and organizational dynamics” in higher education institutions (Frølich et al. 2013). Therefore, the aim of this research is apply the concept of movements to the phenomenon of debate societies in Latin America, and to trace the process of this “movement”, understanding its relevance for the educational framework it is delivered in.

The Latin American Higher Education sector is characterized for deep inequalities regarding the quality of the education that is offered and the quality level of the teachers, in addition to the lack of involvement given to some sectors of the population (Lamarra 2009). Additionally, recently there is a special emphasis in institutional evaluation processes without and actual improvement of the quality of the learning process (Chiroleu 2011).

Academic literature is available regarding the European, United States and Anglophone sphere. For instance, some literature provide a methodology for generating a narrative around the Urban Debate Leagues in the United States of America, and how debate is used as an empowerment tool in youth (Warner and Bruschke 2001).

Nevertheless, there are no specific related works on this specific topic in Latin America. Considering that, this contribution will be very important for many members of this specific academic community that want to pursue changes in the educational public policies, in the higher education institutions around the region, and for the practitioners, teachers and debaters that want to incorporate a historical foundation to the work in debate and critical thinking.

What is more problematic about this topic is the lack of literature that describes and explains what happened in the last ten years in Latin America regarding the creation and expansion of the debate community. The work of previous researchers (Bartanen 2015; Driscoll, n.d.; Key 2014; Regan 2012; Snider 1982; Warner and Bruschke 2001; Willmington 1967) has not assessed the region, and has not explained the multiple causes that contribute to the expansion of the debate activity and more importantly, to the overall understanding of the phenomenon of the movement. This thesis will bridge the gap as a construction of an historic narrative of an educational movement that could also contribute to its further development. Therefore, a systematic examination of evidence is required.

My argument is that the transference of debate as an educational practice from the production sites, or places where the debate practice was originated, such as the United States and the United Kingdom to Latin America, created a specific debate culture of its own. This debate culture is what I frame as a movement, with different shared values of the debate community, including, a social service focus.

Therefore, the fundamental conclusion of this thesis is that the emergence of a social movement in Latin America around debate as an educational practice, is one that differs from other debate related practices in other regions. In order to support this conclusion, I will provide as a connection between the conclusion and the ground, different statements and theories, mostly provided in the form of literature review and theoretical framework. Also, I will provide evidence-based ground by analyzing several interviews. Finally, I will provide an analysis, discussion of findings and the conclusions.

## **Methodology**

The methodology used for this thesis is process tracing, which is a “systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analyzed in light of research questions” (David Collier, 2011). This method, is useful for describe social and political phenomena such as the debate movement in Latin America and to evaluate causal claims. The methodology will analyze, as a case study the Latin American debate sphere. For the purposes of this thesis, I will focus on the following Latin American countries: Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru. Even though other Latin American countries belong to the movement, I purposefully selected the countries that had a direct influence in the formation of the movement on its early stages.

The main form of data collection of this thesis are selected interviews. A total of 13 relevant and main actors were identified as part of the research process, such as: the former program coordinator of the Latin America program of the Open Society foundation, founders and members of debate Non-Governmental Organizations, founders of several debate societies, debate professors and researchers. The participants accepted that their names were published in this thesis, the complete list of participants is in the appendix 1.

These representatives were contacted to participate in semi-structured interview that could detail and trace some of the most important events on the whole process. The interviews were conducted in May 2017 in various ways: one interview was conducted in person, other interviews through video conference services and other interviews through instant message services. Most of the interviews were conducted in Spanish and some in English. The questions I asked during the interview are in the appendix 3 of this thesis. On average interviews lasted 40 minutes and prior the interview, the participants were asked to sing up an informed consent

form that could be found on the appendix 2. Additionally, the interviews were recorded and transcribed. I used for the analysis a manual method of coding.

### **Limitations**

As a researcher, I hold a strategic position, that is important to acknowledge since I am part of the movement that is subject of this study. Therefore, I have personally contacted some of the persons that were part of this process too. I saw it from a very early stage. In that sense, is also important to acknowledge at this point that I could have researcher selection bias. Finally, this piece of research does not pretend to generate conclusions that are applicable beyond the purposed framework and case study.

### **Structure of the thesis**

The first chapter of this thesis provides a review of the existing available literature regarding competitive and educational debate, its status quo and benefits, It also set the theoretical bases for the analysis of the phenomenon as a social movement, and interconnect this topic as public participation, civic engagement and education for citizenship. The second chapter explain some of the findings under the frame of social movement, and provide an analysis of the implications of the movement for the education policy. The third chapter properly analyze the findings regarding the contextual forces that serve as potential explanation for the development of the Latin American debate boom and its description. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the process tracing findings and explain the implications of this study for future research.

# **Chapter 1: Literature review and theoretical framework**

The practice of competitive debate in the context of higher education dates back to the 16th century, when different debate societies flourished in the United Kingdom (Aguirre 2016; “The Cambridge Union | Defending Free Debate since 1815” 2017, “The Oxford Union - The Oxford Union” 2017; Regan 2012;). In American Universities it started between the 17th and the 19th century in Harvard University (Regan 2012).

A high number of definitions of competitive and educational debate have been offered to account for the reasons why and how debate develops skills within students such as critical thinking and civic engagement. However, there is a gap in knowledge regarding the how educational and competitive debate and its ability to foster civic engagement and deliberative democracy, and therefore how debate related activities leads to the creation and strength of a third sector, different than the state and private business, that influences public policy. The Latin American debate movement is prime evidence for this influence.

Therefore, the purpose of this literature review is to give context to the reader in two ways. On the first hand, to provide an approach to the relevance of competitive and educational debate and the significance of this matter, and secondly, to frame it in the field of social movements, collective action, networks and civil society in order to explain the significance of this topic in the public policy field.

## **1.1 Definitions of competitive and educational debate**

Competitive and educational debate is a concept composed of the elements of debate as a formal discussion with a format, with relevance for both educational purposes that sometimes could be applied in competitive sphere between students and relevance for

democracy because of the values and attitudes it fosters. Therefore, is a complex phenomenon in which different spheres of it often overlap, in other words, there is no strict line to divide it, but still each component has its own characteristics.

The scholastic definition of debate, has at least three fundamental concepts: is a formal discussion about a particular subject, on which its participants opposing arguments are delivered, and since the arguments are opposed it means that they represent at least two different positions (Mamberti, Miller, and Bonomo 2010). In addition to that, debate understood as a formal discussion with a format, has a set of established rules, which are most of the times named as “debate format”(Driscoll, 2000).

Also, debate as a concept is constantly related as an essential activity in democratic societies and is linked to the origins of democracy itself (Driscoll, 2000.; Mamberti, Miller, and Bonomo 2010), reminiscent of the reunions of citizens in ancient Greece and within the evolution of democracy. Additionally, educational and competitive debate can be understood as a learning process (Mamberti, Miller, and Bonomo, 2010) and under that perspective, the concept of debate remains essential as a central tool in the model of education for civic education (Driscoll, 2000).

In this scope, debate plays a fundamental role in citizen’s education for democracy, especially in contexts of increasing multiculturalism, as a promoter of critical tolerance and active citizenship (Mamberti, Miller, and Bonomo 2010). Debate is a form of persuasion that does not produce immediate unanimity but over time it can produce consensus and is aimed to clarify the nature of conflicts (Driscoll, 2000).

Educational and competitive debate are characterized by formality of structure, restriction of conflict reflected in the resolution or debated thesis, that generate a focus on the issues of value that underlie in society and the competitive judgment that comes afterwards and

adjudicate the debate (Driscoll, 2000). A relevant difference is that in competitive debate participants argue both sides of the motion or not their personal preferences regarding any given topic, so they do not defend its personal interest. Participants in that sense, learn the value of tolerance and relativism, since there is no monopoly on the truth (Driscoll, 2000).

## **1.2 Purpose of debate: educational tool for democracy**

The relationship between the democratic assertion of debate and educational and competitive debate is clear as debaters think critically about questions that are important, real and relevant to society (Driscoll, 2000). The concept of enlightened political engagement, under which democratic citizenship rests, is composed of the assumption that individual citizens and their characteristics matter. Political engagement signifies the capability of citizens to “engage in self-rule and encompasses behaviors and cognitions necessary for identifying political preferences, understanding politics and pursuing interests” (Rosenberg, n.d.) (Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry, n.d.). In this sense, democratic enlightenment signifies the “understanding of democratic rule through knowledge” (Rosenberg, n.d.). On the dimensions of both political engagement and democratic citizenship, education remains vital to the capacity for self-rule and the acceptance of democratic rule.

Debate as an educational tool, is also relevant from the deliberative democracy perspective. Deliberative democracy is defined as a form of government that requires decisions in a process whereby citizens and decision makers give acceptable and accessible reasons that conclude in a binding decision open for modification in the future (Gutmann 2004). In this scene the concept influenced by rational choice theories, relies on the fact that the citizen is seen as a capable individual, that can also rapidly gain the required skills to interact in this context (Rosenberg, 2007). For this type of democracy, the training provided by competitive debate in educational settings is crucial. Not only as a skills provider for its participant, but



also since a wider comprehension of the public sphere is generated in a citizen approach. Therefore, competitive debate, as an educational tool is one of the means under which the educational process interacts with democracy through of democratic citizenship, deliberation and Enlightened political engagement. (Rosenberg, n.d.).

### **1.3 Current status of educational and competitive debate**

Competitive debate is a worldwide spread activity, according to recent measurements there are approximately 942 universities with debate societies (“World University Debate Rankings” 2017). In the last decade, Latin America has experienced sustained increase in competitive debate as a regular academic activity that is practiced by university students and teachers, who hold the role of coaches, professors and adjudicators and whom also promoted action.

This increase could be corroborated by the fact that, according to the web pages of various universities in Latin America, the biggest debate competitions have been held in Spanish: “Campeonato Mundial Universitario de Debate en Español”, (“CMUDE 2011” 2017, “Full Tab for CMUDE 2011 - Worlds in Spanish” 2017, “Home | CMUDE 2012” 2017, “Historia – CMUDE Córdoba 2016” 2017). This is the Spanish version of the World Universities Debating Championship, which has taken place in Ibero America (Aguirre 2016) since 2011 (“Colombia, Sede Del Torneo Internacional de Debate Universitario - Centro Virtual de Noticias de Educación” 2017) (“Colombia, sede del torneo internacional de debate universitario - Centro Virtual de Noticias de Educación,” n.d.).

This rapidly increasing activity involves different actors such as students, universities and organizations dedicated to its promotion. For instance, in Colombia, competitive debate increased drastically in the number of debaters and universities with debate societies in the last 7 years, having two debate societies in 2010 and having more than 20 different involved

universities by 2017. It has been practiced for around 10 years and the total amount of debaters oscillate between 500 and 1000. Less than 10 per cent of debaters have more than 5 years of experience in the competitive debate practice. The same phenomenon is observable in Latin America considering the participating institutions in CMUDE.

The available information on the subject of debate societies and competitive debate describes the university debate as an activity that has grown, particularly as practiced at the highest level (such as the World University Debating Championships (WUDC)), and “has evolved in recent years is not in serious dispute.” (“Monash Debating Review Vol 7 2009” 2017)(“Monash Debating Review Vol 7 2009,”). The WUDC has been held annually since 1981. Every year the WUDC takes place in a different country and is hosted by a different university and by different debate societies. The tournament gathers students from prestigious universities around the globe, featuring over 400 teams from around 90 countries.

Between the 1970s and 1980s the first competitive debate within universities took place, with the participation of mostly Anglophone students (“Monash Debating Review Vol 7 2009”). This practice has expanded rapidly across the globe since then. For example, in regions like Asia, different generations of debaters represent Asian institutions every year in different debate competitions (“Monash Debating Review Vol 5 2006”).

## **1.4 Benefits of debate**

Debate appears to be a beneficial activity according to several pieces of key literature. An increase in critical thinking ability (Bartanen 2015; McIntosh and Milam 2016; Warner and Bruschke 2001; Aguirre 2016; Regan 2012; Barfield 1989) seems to be the most mentioned and accepted benefit. More precisely, different approaches and evidence has been collected to achieve that conclusion. Quasiexperimental designs like the one conducted by Bardfield at the University of Alabama, through surveying a sample of students, revealed students gaining

critical thinking skills, reading skills, and increases in GPA as a result of two years of participating in debate programs. This study was important to understand the quantitative evidence of the benefits of debate, but still the quantitative evidence left behind important narratives to better understand the phenomena. Other studies, trying to provide inputs for explaining the increase in critical thinking, used more ethnographic and non-experimental approaches, for example: observations and interviews revealed a multigenerational community of debaters using debate as an access point to support youth in developing critical thinking skills (Cridland-Hughes 2010).

Analyzing debate as an educational game and position itself as a transformer of the educational paradigm, the benefits of the debating practice were: simulation (Bartanen 2015 Snider 1982), in the sense of being a platform where students put in practice their skills in order to improve them, through the paradigm of gaming as a human communication activity (A. C. Snider 1982). Socialization (Bartanen 2015), because debate is a group activity that requires participants to engage with other students and teams and results in the creation of social capital, (Bartanen 2015), which means a social structure created around the debate environment that facilitates actions and interactions of the actors and members. Also, another found benefit of the debate practice is that it increases civic engagement and cultural awareness (Regan 2012), since most of the debate formats require preparation and understanding of significant problems of society as well as policies.

One particular study regarding the purpose of studying competitive debate and debate societies found that the lack of debate was a failure of the American educational system as most students not only had trouble in the educational realm but the most gifted students were still unable to think on their accord and achieve the highest level of cognitive skills within the context of critical thinking (Barfield 1989). According to the author, Bloom's taxonomy

influenced American curriculum and the development of higher ordered thinking skills is the most common objective in higher education and this problem, according to Bloom, because the achievement of higher activities of cognitive domain require more activity and participation on the part of the learner. Consequently, the author recalls several studies on education in the decade of the 1980 in the United States that competencies in oral and written communication and critical thinking skills were being neglected in the majority of American schools. The claim is that debate is an activity able to produce the competency that is lacking in the educational systems (Barfield 1989).

Another study used a collective memories approach to conceptualize and analyzed the history of Arkansas intercollegiate debate team. The main claim of the work is that the legacy of the team contributed to the growth and development of the University as a whole, through the production and dissemination of debate relates stories that help the debate team of the university, connect with the past, present and future of the institution (Regan 2012).

## **1.5 Framing debate in Latin America as a movement.**

Two specific texts highlight debate as a movement in the United States (Louden 2010; A. Snider and Schnurer 2002). In the case of the book *Navigating Opportunity: Policy Debate in the 21st Century: Wake Forest*, based on the compilation of the Wake Forest National Debate Conferences and in the article “A Rationale for Intercollegiate Debate in the Twenty-first Century” the author refers to debate as a movement. This characterization is done through framing debate as part of “an enormous movement toward democratic participation and deliberative democracy in and out of the academy” (Keith 2010). Other than that reference, other characteristics of the movement itself are not developed. Similarly, there is a reference made to a movement called: “Debate Across the curriculum”, defined as a “global movement

to include debate as a pedagogical tool for classroom instruction” (Louden 2010), having an special emphasis on the use of debate as a methodology for different subjects.

The urban debate movement is also mentioned as an effort that has “matured over the past two decades to bring colleges, middle and high schools, as well as community organizations and philanthropic organizations together in fruitful collaborations designed to bring the virtues of a debate education to underserved urban communities”(Keith 2010). It is also framed as the “Urban Debate League national curricular reform movement”(Snider and Schnurer 2002). Neither of the academic productions that mention debate as a movement provide a conceptual framework around the concept of movement and the characteristics of those debate movements.

In that context, in order to conceptualize debate as a movement in Latin America, two concepts are central: 1) power deficit and 2) phases of expansion, transformation and contraction. Movements are actors and organization that seek to modify a power deficit, to effect social transformation and mobilize citizens for sustainable action in order to effect social transformations by mobilizing regular citizens for sustained political action (Amenta et al. 2010). Movements participate in political collective action, which is an extra institutional action. For collective action, is necessary to be understand not as an independent action from other events, but more as an interconnected action, therefore is relevant to consider the dynamic interaction among many contenders which are social groups or sectors(Koompmans 2007).

In this thesis I will argue that the Latin America Debate movement is a collective action, already in the expansion and transformation phase. In that sense, the transformation phase of the debate movement, lead to the creation of different non-governmental organizations in the region, conforming a network of organizations and constituting a new trend in civil society. Also, Koopmans identifies within collective action the phases of expansion, which is the strong

growth of discontent and disagreement across social groups and sectors that sometimes go beyond one country. This phase in the case of the debate movement is characterized by an overall discontent with the quality of education and lack of spaces that develop critical thinking skills. The second phase is transformation, meaning a shift in the identities, allies and cooperation strategies that surge in a context of continuous interaction. Finally, the contraction phase, which is the end of the movement wither because the problem is solved or the solution is adopted by the institutionalism or the third sector (Koompmans 2007).

A new phenomenon of greater citizen participation and action is multidimensional, meaning takes different forms to express and different themes and concerns that vary from place to place. According to the World Alliance for citizen participation, in the book citizens strengthening global civil society, this global trend coincides with the realization that neither the market nor the state can achieve many goals without the help of civil society organizations (Oliviera and Tandon, n.d.).

The Latin America debate movement could be seen as an example of conformation of regional coalitions and sectorial networks to address a specific theme (Oliviera and Tandon, n.d.): debate as a tool to develop education. In this sense it is clear that networks tend to operate horizontally (Oliviera and Tandon, n.d.) with different centers everywhere and in this case, debate non-governmental organizations, debate societies and universities themselves. Also with a constant shift in the leadership.

## **1.6 Debate movement as public participation and civic engagement**

One of the necessary consequences of analyzing competitive debate in Latin America as a movement, implies a reflection on the type of participation that is fomented. In this sense, public participation is anchored in private life and in private activities that debate competition represents. But also, political participation, is the “activity that has the intent or effect of

influencing government action—either directly, by affecting the making or implementation of public policy, or indirectly, by influencing the selection of people who make those policies“ (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba, 2001).

In this case, one could affirm that the debate movement has both direct and indirect impact in the policy process of education policy, in two different ways, firstly a direct impact through the participation in processes of implementation of educational policies advocating the introduction of educational methods of debate and critical thinking such as Chile, Mexico and Colombia, as a voluntary activity understood as the non-mandatory or extra institutional participation (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba, 2001), which is a major component of the debate movement. And secondly, an indirect participation, since some of the members of the debate community, are perceived as future leaders that could promote methodologies of debate in different areas.

In this way, some of the consequences of the political participation, voluntary activity and civic engagement, are the result of people that work together voluntarily. Therefore, democratic orientations and skills are fostered. The increase of social trust, norms of reciprocity and cooperation, and the capacity to transcend narrow points of view and conceptualize the common good (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba, 2001) are common gains that characterize voluntary civic engagement. This generates a virtuous cycle for the participation of others. Such participation could be also related to the inherent dynamics of the debate movement.

Debate societies are a form of citizen engagement in a non-institutionalized form. This makes a sort of a special political innovation (Smith, 2009) that directly engages citizens as citizens rather than because they claim expert authority or are the representatives of an organized group within society.

## 1.7 Education and citizenship

Finally, another important link to be addressed, is the relationship between education, citizenship and civic values. The relevance of this is that debate competitions and debate societies are informal education activities since they occur most of the times outside the rigid mandatory course environment but on the other hand, these activities also belong to a broader spectrum of formal education as most debate societies have institutional support. In this way, education, either formal or informal is, in a large extent crucial for the formation of an active citizenship (Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry, 1996).

This is especially so considering some characteristics of students that are fundamental for good citizenship, like how knowledgeable they are, how attentive they are, how active in politics they are, and more importantly for the topic of this thesis, how tolerant they are of the free expression of unpopular political views they are (Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry, 1996).

These are some of the aspects that make the debate an extremely important exercise in the promotion of critical tolerance and active citizenship. Many of the characteristics of the debate format are related to practices of democratic life, for instance, decision-making mechanisms and conflict resolution. The aptitude in practice of these mechanisms is necessary for active citizenship, that is, for the active participation of people in the debates and decisions that affect their lives and those of their communities. Debate consolidates leadership skills and shapes us as more independent citizens and thinkers (Mamberti, Miller, and Bonomo 2010). In this sense, there is a positive correlation between education and the exercise of a good citizenship. (Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry, 1996).



## **Chapter 2: Conceptualizing debate in Latin America as a movement**

In this chapter, I want to address the puzzle of the purpose, motivation and means of interaction of the movement, in order to identify if its characterization could make it fit into the social movement theoretical frame. I will analyze some of the findings and how some of the interventions contributed to the born of the movement. Finally, I will expand on the policy implications of the movement itself, regarding the educational policy in Latin America.

First of all, the concept of social movement denotes a collective action, with certain degree of organized sustained campaign that support a social goal, as a result of an “spontaneous coming together of people whose relationships are not defined by rules and procedures but who merely share a common outlook on society” (“Social Movement” 2017).

### **2.1 Perceptions and characteristics of the debate movement**

Not all movements protest. Several movements in the world do not, for instance, the open access movement (“Open Education” 2017), was established by a German research organization, who in 2003 generated a meeting to establish the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities (“Berlin Declaration” 2017), to set the goal having an open access policy and then, after that, created the open access movement. These academic movements, are similar in that aspect to movements such “Debate across the curriculum” and “Urban debate movement” (A. Snider and Schnurer 2002; Loudon 2010).

Nevertheless, as regards the conceptualization of movement, I found that in the Latin American debate community, there is not consensus about understanding the debate community as a movement, since some interviewees assumed that it implies a more structured

and coordinated organization. But in contrast, “a movement is a mixture of organization and spontaneity” (“Social Movement” 2017), therefore I support the theoretical characterization of this group as movement.

In that context, the perception of some of the members of this movement, seen it as people that share the idea that debate is useful or beneficial, but not all of them share the reasons why they consider it useful or beneficial. For instance, some find that is beneficial because it occasioned a better reasoning on those who practice, or better public speaking skills, a more critical mind, more engagement as citizen, or even some consider that just for the sake of being a competition is useful. Whatever the case is, the commonality is that people in the community tend to think that debate is useful for something worthy, that is worth working on, and motivated them to be involved in that practice. Even though people coexists under the same sense of community.

Competition was fundamental for the movement, because generated many benefits for universities such as publicity and networking. There is a clear intention of the movement of expansion, of teach it in new places where it has not been taught before. Some see this movement also as the evolution of mere debate tournaments into something larger, as a mechanism that empowers young people through mechanisms of expression and analysis and that could also in the future discover new leaders in the region. Several interviews also see the possibility of future involvement on institutional politics by the members of the community.

The way the individuals and organizations that are part of this movement is described as a cooperative, most of the times using mutual help and solidarity among members. This is reflected in the way teams work within the movement, creating spaces, events and also pedagogical materials, most of the times unpaid, in order to contribute, voluntarily to the movement and teach the next generations. Also, there is the impression that the movement

works as a platform, with common objectives, that transcend international philanthropy and used multiple sources to not only survive but expand.

## **2.2 Concepts to frame competitive and educational debate as a movement**

In this section, I will incorporate the findings with the provided theoretical framework in a way it stands as an argument in favor of the existence of the Latin American debate movement. The concepts I will address in the analysis will be: power deficit, waves of expansion transformation and contraction (Amenta et al. 2010).

### ***2.2.1 Power deficit***

Concerning the power deficit, it is perceived by the members of the movement in two ways, the first deficit relies on the fact that there is an absence of scenarios where competitive debate could be experienced by students, since the educational policy does not have a supply for an important demand related to competitive debate and others, in other words, the government does not foster the participation of students in debate competitions and do not have such scenarios. Therefore, within this deficit, there is an objective of creating a cooperative relationship.

Also, some members of the movement consider that part of the problem regarding the power deficit is related to the educational system itself, calling it a “conductist” or “passive” education where the role of the student is more like a spectator. In that context, for some members, the movement seek to solve this two gaps on the overall educational policy, providing spaces for the development of critical thinking skills and to contribute to an overall educational reform.

Furthermore, the power gap in the educational sector has a connotation the correct exercise of citizenship since debates fosters civic engagement and participation, because it influences the quality of engagement of people. This is in line with some of the purposes of some members of the movement whom seek to empower individuals, providing them with the skills that allows them also to become agents of change. In other words, debate permits people with common interest, mainly on social issues and who believe that deliberation is a method that enriches social dialogue, to discuss, deliberate and engage with public issues.

### ***2.2.2 Phases of expansion, transformation and contraction***

Moreover, when it come to the analysis of the phases of the movement, is important to recall that in respect of the phase of expansion, the boom represent to this respect the hike of dissatisfaction with the current educational status quo and that took the debate methodology to multiple scenarios in different countries in a defined period of time. The discontent with the quality of the education system has multiple causes, many of them rooted in the Latin American culture from the time of the colony. According to the perception of some interviews, in times of colonization, catholic church and the colony are inseparable institutions when it comes to school and education, generating a dogmatic passive education, under which critical thinking was undeveloped. A similar perception some interviews have regarding the influence of dictatorship and widespread violence in the absence of critical thinking scenarios in the region.

In terms of the transformation phase, the movement its experiencing a generational change that in some cases was fundamental for the conformation of debate related NGOs, since some of this members used to expand debate as part of its student life, but once out of those institutions there was a need to create an institutional framework that holed up their activities. Both the expansion and transformation a are interconnected in the sense that they could not be analyzed separately, because one hand there is still an expansion wave, but on the other some

of the organizations are moving to other forms of action and participation, such as NGOs. Some examples of this stage, according to some of the interviews are the creation of “Asociación Mexicana de Debate” with its origin on the competitive team of “Tecnológico de Monterrey”, or the creation of “Habla” with its origins on the competitive team of “Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú” and the conformation of “Liga Colombiana de Debate” as a program of “Centro INCIDE” with shared origins and founders with the debate society of Universidad del Rosario”. Therefore, one important characteristic in this point, is that the movement, has the capacity of procure the involvement of its members even in some periods of inactivity. At this stage, is not possible to talk about a contraction phase in the movement.

## **2.3 Policy implications of the movement**

In this section, I will analyze in deep the implications of the Latin American movement to educational policy. For that task is important to remark that for the purposes of this thesis, a policy will be understood as: “a course or principle of action adopted or proposed by an organization or individual” (“Policy - Definition of Policy in English | Oxford Dictionaries” 2017) in this case, to contribute to the educational sphere of society.

In this regard, the implications of the movement for policy are of several types, especially considering that some participants of this study affirm that there is a clear interest in transforming the movement into a policy. Moreover, the lessons that this movement can provide to policy makers and overall the educational sector are substantive. First, this implication needs to be analyzed through the lenses of the stakeholders involved and its relation to institutional politics. Second, this movement serve as a relevant exemplification of a bottom up implemented policy. Third, the relationship of the members of the movement and external actors is a successful example of coalition building and cooperation. Finally, the movement

bridge the gap, or the power imbalance regarding the educational system and its consequences for deliberative democracy, civic engagement and conformation of new forms of participation.

In order to further develop the first point of this analysis, is relevant to consider the stakeholders involved in the movement: students and debaters, former debaters, institutions, teachers, community around them, NGOs. From the institutional perspective, it is relevant to address that in some places people who belong to this community is very immersed in formal education. Since, in some universities the debate practice is very institutionalized, even in a very indirect way, if the institution takes the plan, is possible to affirm that it is part of the educational policy of that institution.

Furthermore, according to the interviews, I interpret that members of the movement expect that at some point, debaters and former debaters will have an influence on institutional politics and under those positions implement debate programs from the government side. It is a complete generation that shared competitions and events. In that sense, it could be it will be more impactful if the political class was confirmed by some education leaders of the movement. On the other side, the creation of NGOs itself has a direct impact on public policy, hence its goal is to fix power deficit of the educative sector in Latin America.

On the other hand, the Latin American debate movement is a bottom up implemented policy. This is because, the design and implementation of the policy, understood as the movement, was made by groups of students and non-institutional actors whom in most cases expressed its discontent with the educational status quo and act consequently creating spaces to gain relevant skills through debate practice. One of the lessons learned in this case is that structure support networks is crucial for the development of any bottom up policy approach.

Additionally, regarding the claim that the debate movement is an example of coalition building and cooperation, most participants agreed on the cooperative interaction between the

organizations, institutions and individuals that are part of the movement. Also, is important to stand that in some Latin American countries like Chile, Colombia and Panama this coalition is being achieved through direct collaboration between NGOs and the Ministry of education in some cases or the municipal authority in other cases. One of the lessons that can be learn of this example of coalition is that in some cases, beyond lack of political will, the state has structural flaws that can be solved through cooperation, so alliances can be structural in bridging the gap of the power deficit.

The debate movement also provide its members with a platform that serves them as a new way of participation, this is so, because, they engage in different public relevant topics, have augmented discussions and afterwards they replicate their knowledge and opinions to other members of their personal communities, making this movement not only relevant to its direct members but also to those who surround them. The principles of augmented positions and tolerance for others arguments are the ones that gives this type of new political participation in debate societies and circuits. In the long term, this movement might have a significant influence in the quality of democracy.

## Chapter 3: The Latin American debate boom

In this chapter, I propose to use an analogy between the Latin American literature boom and the Latin America debate boom. Both refer to very specific punctual moments in history, where the region witnessed a new trend, in this case, the birth of debate societies, competitions, and NGOs interrelated as a network, and self-recognized as debate culture.

In literature, the Latin American boom is defined as the phenomenon that took place in the second half of the Twentieth Century, consisting of a blossoming and flourishing of poetry, literature and overall critical spirit generating an exceptional international recognition and attention for the new ideas brought by the region's writers (McCammon, 1996). In other words, a boom, as the word connotes, is a loud, deep, resonant sound.

Therefore, the findings of the current research provide enough information in order to understand how the early interventions, which were born from different edges and at different times, for different reasons, ended up mostly united in what this thesis calls the Latin American debate boom. Under which the recent phenomenon of creation of some debate societies, and the main tournament for the circuit CMUDE was created.

### 3.1 Early stages

In order to understand the process of formation of the Latin American debate movement, it is important to trace the reasons for increase in the number of debate societies, debate competition, debate related NGOs and the insertion of debate methodologies in social projects by NGOs. In that sense, it is important to comprehend the contextual forces or outside factors (Council et al. 2001) that influenced the born of the movement. Therefore, the current case study of the Latin American debate boom, could be a product of the interrelated mixture



of three different contextual forces that nowadays are interrelated. These are: the social philanthropy, the student activism, and the government action.

### *3.1.1 Philanthropy as a contextual force*

Cultural philanthropy is the concept that makes reference to the role that philanthropic organizations have played in the unofficial public agenda, originally in the United States but nowadays worldwide (Arnove, 1980). An example of this is the power that philanthropic institutions such as Carnegie, Rockefeller, Ford, and nowadays Bill and Melinda Gates exercise around the world. In that way, “through the education programs they fund, foundations are able to influence the world views of the general public as well as the orientations and commitments of the leadership which will direct social change” (Arnove 1980).

In that direction, according to many interviewees, OSF in the past was very important to the movement in an indirect way, by offering consultancy to promote debate, or by funding organizations that implemented debate programs. This funding allowed the creation of several events that were fundamental to the debate community, such as, but not limited to: “*Academia Internacional de Debate en Español*” held in Bogota 2013, “*Foro Internacional de Debate en Español*” held in Irapuato Mexico 2013, “*Escuela Internacional de Debate en Español*” held in Trelew Argentina in 2014. One of the purposes of this contextual force, according to a former OSF program director, was to expand the means of participation, especially among youth. It opened up the previously mentioned academic spaces, which allowed this movement to flourish. But the initial support was very timid in a way. Nowadays, many universities are interested in this.

The first projects aimed at debate related to capacity building and occurred approximately between 2003 and 2004 according to some participants. Helped by the youth initiative in OSF, building on alliances with the National Forensic League and the Department

of State, that took some students and teachers, from Argentina to participate in an exchange in the United States. Later OSF funded different exchanges and it was in those exchanges that people from this community met and started building up the community.

Latin American debate differs from the Anglo-Saxon circuit in one important way. In the Anglo-Saxon circuit, those who participated in debate came from an elite social class. This was not the case in Latin America. In this way, the movement works as an opportunity not to belong to power, but to create a new one and question the existent one. According to one participant of this study, the Latin American debate sphere, different from other groups. This is so, because even though debate in Latin America looks for the Anglo-Saxon circuit, and take some of its traditions, like the world debating championship, it differs, because in other regions youths use debate as a means to participate in a certain elite, meanwhile in Latin America it is aimed to break to the traditional political elite and become a circle of opinion makers.

This contextual force took different roads, so, there is a scene of competitive debate that is not a coincidence that is very attached to high schools and universities, where this tournament existed but it became into a platform of technology of social change and transformation, and there is another scene in which debate is used by plenty of projects, for instance, debate in jails, hip hoppers with the initiative “rap debate”, which in the words of one of the interviewees “like a creative explosion with a sense of urgency”. Philanthropy as a contextual force was developed through several organizations, one very big one was IDEA, but philanthropy also financed “Liga Colombiana de Debate” and “Red sin Fronteras Patagonia”. These organizations promoted the creation and continuity of the exchange and events that were very relevant for the community. Uses of funding of this for several events that later became into the cornerstones of the circuit and also of the movement.

### *3.1.2 Student activism as a contextual force*

Student activism could be understood as an effort to promote change in their environment, moreover student activism focuses on how different problematics affect and are related to different functional aspects of their high school or university (Jacoby 2017). Furthermore, “Given that colleges are microcosms of society, the issues they address within the scope of the campus are indeed deeply embedded in one of society’s most important and influential institutions” (Jacoby 2017).

In that way, another big contextual force of the movement is student activism, which is academic in nature based, considering it was led by students, high school institutions, and established debate societies. One part of this group came at the same time from a previous existing circuit, the World Schools Circuit , in which schools from Argentina, Mexico and Peru participated, the latter was the host of the annual tournament of this circuit in Lima in 2003 (“About WSDC” 2017). These were some, private schools of Latin America that for several years have been debating in English, and focused their work within interschool debate in bilingual schools, even before some foundational points of this community. Some former members of this community now collaborate and participate in the CMUDE community.

On the other hand, around the year of 2007, some university teams in Venezuela made their way to participate in WUDC. Based on the account of one of my interviewees, in line to their participation in that event, the teams also registered for the debate academy in Slovenia, where they met relevant figures and academics of the debate world, like Alfred Snider, who convinced them to host the first CMUDE. Once they were back in Venezuela, they realized that no one has practiced debate before, so they began to founding debate societies and clubs, to teach what they knew. From student to student and student to teacher, they generated a student based knowledge. Once they created enough capacity, they launched the first

international competition in 2010, where they co-hosted “Comunidad de Debate de Venezuela” and AUDAS from Universidad Central de Venezuela, where they attempt to introduce Colombian and Peruvian team.

### *3.1.3. Role of the government sector*

Other interventions, made debate a component of citizen education in the curriculum. This is the case of Chile, disregarding a possible previous participation in other circuits such as world schools; the country has a very interesting perspective of intervention. Around/In 1994, one of the first known debate societies in Latin America was born, Debate Society (SDD) of the Diego Portales University, and with it part of the history of the competitive debate in Chile (“Historia” 2012). This debate society is not attached to any given circuit. Chile was a precursor of the movement, with different universities joining and forming debate societies at the same time, including military schools.

In the beginning of 2000, debate societies influenced the blossoming of some educational and competitive debate instances in Chile. In 2003 they incorporate debate into the curriculum. Between 2002 and 2005, the first debate society of Chile became a strategic ally of the Ministry of Education. For example, professors and other members of the debate society acted as direct advisors of the ministry of education, they traveled all over Chile, teaching debate to other professors, having in terms of one of the participants a “real impact”. The Ministry of education put debate in the curriculum as part of their work in the transversal unit, which is the unit in charge to accommodate contents across the curriculum. In a term of 4 years, between 2000 and 2005 have an influence in the curriculum of secondary schools, some relate this experience with the correlational born of student movements in Chile, that took place in similar time (Fuentes Bravo et al. 2004).

In 2005, the need arose to think of the debate as a mechanism for teaching and learning that transcends the curriculum and not as a mere competitive event. After 2005, that debate is in the curriculum, but professors took it as a regular course, with theoretical approach and no opportunity to put in practice, unlike people do when they go to tournaments.

In that sense, in Chile debate was a more developed academic activity than the other countries of the movement. In this way, the community used this prior experience as something very valuable, that the Chilean circuit gave left to the rest of the countries of the region. Nowadays, the experience and knowledge is better distributed among other countries, but at the beginning Chile played the fundamental role of academic leadership.

### **3.2 The boom**

Starting in 2011, the main boom of the Latin American debate occurred. Actors from Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Mexico and Venezuela were influential and found the way to expand in their own countries at their own rhythm, paying attention to their idiosyncrasies even at a very fast growing pace. The first exchange where different actors met and started having that sense of community was in the event held at Universidad del Rosario in 2011, called “Torneo Nacional de Debate Unidad y Participación”. In that event, participants from Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Guatemala and Venezuela, working on similar issues within debate gathered together and started feeling connected.

Also, in the context of that event, an organization was formed, named CIDE, or “Consejo Internacional de Debate en Español”. It did not prosper, but it lasted a short time. The most remarkable fact about that event is that different groups of people that have been working separately, started having more or less a sense of community. It was important, in this meeting a lot of discussions about CMUDE took place, about the rules, the conditions for participation, it was a preliminary interaction where some of the base for CMUDE were set.

In 2011 also, the event “Campeonato Panamericano de Debate en Español” attempt to be first CMUDE, held at Cornell University in the United States of America, this tournament migrated to be the middle point of encounter between the Latin American Spanish language speaking and the well-developed circuit. Nowadays, it remains as an additional tournament different than CMUDE.

Later that same year in Venezuela, members of the Universidad Central de Venezuela, using contacts from IDAS and WORLDS, including members of debate societies in Mexico and Chile, planned and held CMUDE in Caracas. Starting with this event a tradition that so far has 7 consecutive editions and that is considered by the majority the most important event of the Spanish debating world.

### *3.2.1 Cornerstones, construction of a common agenda and actors.*

In this section, I will address the explanation of the events that contributed to the cohesion of the movement, analyze the relevance of having a common agenda and the role that some of the actors played on its development. The community that formed after the boom is actually one of the first university debate community in Spanish, the biggest one and is the object of this study. The sum of the previous events and the way in which they began to join forces after the boom, created a common agenda, and that in function of this the schedule of the movement around these events would be organized.

The construction of a common agenda was very significant for this movement, since it provides sense of continuity. It is a very important point of connection between the community. Therefore, CMUDE is the event around which the community is built. This universities community is open, unstructured, diffused, disorganized. In fact, out of most exchanges and events, the most stabilized, uniform, persistent in time, and lasting event, it has been done for more than 6 years, at the same time, in a similar format, and growing shape. One of the most

remarkable things about CMUDE, is that it has included as part of the circuit a large part of the debate community in Spain, this being a true space for cultural exchange between both.

Apart from that central event, its members of the debate community also participate in other events such as national debate tournaments, TODI in Peru, “Pre-CMUDE,” and more recently “Dias de debate,” all of these represent important points of the collective common agenda and exchange moments where parts of the community bond, form ties and exchange further ideas. All of these events incorporate what they call “social” or communitarian track, which is a special part of the event dedicated to take debate to non-formal education scenarios or to non-students, as a result of the fusion and incorporation of debate in the movement. The Latin debate community tried to make social efforts, meaning discussion debate among non-formal education and other members of society. In this sense, according to the participants of this study, the community procure to “take debate out of the classrooms” which meant to stop debate from being very elitist. CMUDE and TODI are sometimes close to their wider communities, also the event “Dias de debate”.

To reach this point, some specific actors played also a fundamental role as initiators, by hosting debate events and spreading debate in their own countries. Most interviewees mentioned as actors that played a very significant role in the construction of this movement the following: “*Red sin Fronteras Patagonia*”, “*Liga Colombiana de Debate*”, “*Sociedad de Debate Universidad del Rosario*”, “*Tecnológico de Monterrey*”, “*Sociedad de Debate Pontificia Universidad Católica de Peru*”, “*Universidad Central de Venezuela*”, and “*Sociedad de Debate Universidad Andres Bello*”.

# Conclusions

This thesis has explained how the birth of debate societies, competitions, and NGOs interrelated as a network, and self-recognized as debate culture, conformed a debate movement in Latin America through three contextual forces of cultural philanthropy, student activism and governmental role. The contextual forces were born from different streams and at different times for different reasons, ended up united in what this thesis calls the Latin American debate boom. This combination characterized the formation process of the Latin American debate movement.

Different factors have led to the growth of this movement. On the one hand, the good coincidence that in several countries, at different rates, different actors were working with the tool of debate and keep shaping the process, on the other hand, it is undeniable that the influence of funds, provided by either philanthropy, educational institutions or private donations.

By the use of process tracing methodology and the employment of the framework of social movements composed by power deficit and waves of expansion and transformation, this thesis attempted to situate the Latin American movement in the social movements theory literature.

In this thesis, I addressed some of the underlying assumptions behind the uniqueness of the phenomenon in Latin America. First, there is a particular cosmovision or understanding of the world, which influences the reception and appropriation of debate theories and practices. The emergence of a social movement in Latin America around debate as an educational practice, is one that differs from other debate related practices in other regions.



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# Appendices

## **Appendix 1: list of interviewees**

Alejandro Duque  
Venezuela

Carlos Parra  
Colombia

David Alatorre  
Mexico

Ingrid Rodriguez  
Colombia

Hernan Bonomo  
Argentina

Jorge Albornoz  
Chile

Juan Mamberti  
Argentina

Luisa Salazar  
Colombia

Maria Eugenia Abuin  
Argentina

Miguel Reyes  
Chile.

Mirta Aguirre  
Argentina

Nicolas Palma  
Chile

Nicole Hansen  
Chile

## Appendix 2: Informed consent.

Dear participant,

Due to your work and experience in the Latin American debating circuit, you have been selected to participate in the Master thesis study “**Process tracing of the Latin American Debate Movement**”, as a partial fulfillment of the Master of Arts in Public Policy at the School of Public Policy at Central European University. The aims of this thesis are to understand the process of the competitive debate phenomenon in the region and to analyze its causes, consequences and implications.

This study does not involve any risk and will take from you between 40 and 50 minutes of your time. Your identity will remain confidential, unless you express the interest to be identified and the results will be shared with you.

Therefore, I ask you to sign this informed consent form.

---

Participant signature

### **Appendix 3: Interview protocol**

First of all, I want to thank you for acceding to conduct this interview as a member of the Latin American debate movement. I will not hesitate in sharing the findings not only with you but with the institution. In order to facilitate the interview, I will record your answers and I will be the only person with access to those.

The estimated time for this interview is 40 minutes. The aims of this thesis are to understand the process of the competitive debate phenomenon in the region and to analyze its causes, consequences and implications.

Now, let me proceed with the questions:

1. What is your relationship with the debate movement?
2. How would you define the Latin America debate movement?
3. What is its purpose?
4. What are the shared values of the members of the movement?
5. Who were and are the main actors of the Latin America debate movement?
6. What are the factors that lead to the growth of the debate movement in Latin America?
7. What is the relation between the organizations of the Latin America debate movement?
8. What is the relationship between the Latin America Debate movement and education policy?
9. What is the role of civic engagement and participation in debate societies?
10. How do you explain the emergence of debate related NGOs?
11. What is the future of the movement?