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## THE FUTURE OF INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS AS A STUDY FIELD

Marcos Amatucci<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

The field of International Business lies at a crossroads of analytical levels, themes and theoretical traditions, and it will probably remain at this point in the near future. This work follows five years (2001-2006) of the Journal of International Business Studies (JIBS) to analyse the scope and evolution of themes, methodologies and theoretical traditions in 199 articles. After this phase, it discusses, with the help of colleagues gathered in two workshops, the future of the area in terms of two hypotheses: the convergence hypothesis of the dominance of a theoretical and thematic mainstream, and the divergence hypothesis of a “theoretical quilt” configuration of the field. It concludes that the editorial preferences of JIBS favour traditional approaches to the field and that the second “future” is the most likely to occur, leading International Business to evolve as a social reference more than an epistemological entity.

**Keywords:** Future of International Business. *Journal of International Business Studies*. IB Methodology. IB Theory. IB scientific status.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The field of International Business (IB) studies attracts researchers from many different theoretical traditions. This is understandable given that it is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon. In addition to the different theoretical frameworks researchers bring to the field, IB can also be seen from different analytical levels: from the macroeconomic perspective, through several “meso” levels (such as industries, markets, cultures, countries), and down to the individual firm. The domain of IB crosses levels of analysis with managerial subjects (Buckley and Lessard, 2005).

Firm and production internationalisation can be studied based upon two basic perspectives: economic or organisational (Neumann and Hemais, 2005). Such theories, in general, began by trying to explain why and how companies make foreign direct investment (FDI), in comparison with alternative investments. This leads to the very existence of the multinational corporation (MNC) and then to its strategic and managerial problems.

With respect to themes, Buckley (2002) describes the IB research agenda as an evolution toward three large themes from the post-war period until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: a first theme of FDI explanation, whose climax happened in the first period, from the post-war years until the 1970s; the explanation of the existence, strategy and organisation of the MNCs, which was dominant from the 1970s to the 1990s; and the study of globalisation, from the 1990s to the 2000s. Buckley observes that this was the agenda of the past, and that IB should rethink its future, including taking themes it lacked, such as dealing with cultural differences, under its umbrella. In addition, there is a need to rethink the methodologies and focus of the field by exploring more specialized subjects such as Mergers and Acquisitions (M&A) and knowledge management, among others. In essence, however, Buckley expounds upon the idea that the field should rethink itself as a discipline.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Objective

This study aims to provide a critical discussion of IB as a field, developing a “map” of its current themes, theories and methodologies as represented in the most prestigious and focused journal of the area by describing the span and application of its theoretical traditions. This study will also present an idea, developed with the help of peer discussions, about the future trends of research in this field.

### 2.2 Data and Method

This study begins with a bibliometric study of five years of the Journal of International Business Studies (JIBS) and then puts forward a discussion about the perspectives for the future of the IB area.

JIBS was chosen because of its importance in the IB field. According to Werner (2002), JIBS is among the 20 most important journals dealing with academic research in the Business Administration field, as taken from a reference list organised by Gomez-Mejia; according to Balkin (1992), only one journal is exclusively focused on international issues: the *Journal of International Business Studies*. All the other journals on Gomez-Mejia’s list are accepted sources of expert information, but they serve the general Business Administration field. This criterion was used to choose the journal to be analyzed.

Articles from the *Journal of International Business Studies* from Volume 1 of 2001 to Volume 1 of 2006, inclusive, were reviewed. Only articles submitted and double-blind reviewed were considered in the study. Comment texts, editorial introductions, book reviews, and invited articles were excluded. Re-published award lecture articles were kept in the sample (three in total). In total, 199 articles were considered valid for this study.

The discussion section of this study was enriched by debates with peers on two occasions: a symposium in England and a workshop in Brazil.

At the first event, the results of a previous analysis were presented and discussed in the symposium “Futures of IB”, organized by professors Joanne Roberts and Ted Fuller, during the 2008 British Academy of Management Annual Meeting. Several useful insights were provided by the participants, mainly concerning critical aspects of IB production and JIBS’ publishing contents, as well as relevant aspects to be considered in thinking about future perspectives in the area.

For the second event, a workshop with seven professors was held in Brazil specifically to debate the present results and the future of IB trends using the Mental Time Travel technique of Markley (2008). Ten professors, currently IB researchers, were invited, and six agreed to participate. These six professors currently hold research appointments in: International Marketing (2), International Strategy, International Consumer Behaviour, International Organizational Behaviour, and Internationalization of Education. A visiting senior professor specializing in Management Education knew of the event and volunteered to participate, and was accepted by the group.

The Mental Time Travel method, meticulously described in Markley (2008), was adapted as follows: the seven participant professors were asked to sit as comfortably as possible in seven armchairs placed with a wall behind them (so that the participants could rest their heads), with another seven chairs in front of them (on which to lay their legs). The author presented the main results of the first part of the study, a briefing of the Mental Time Travel method (six of the participants had read Markley's article in advance), and Hypothesis 1 for the future of IB. Then, the lights were dimmed, and the relaxation procedure began. The participants were asked to visualize themselves in a congress of the field ten years in the future, attending paper sessions, talking to colleagues, and preparing a report about the state of the art of the field for presentation back home. After some minutes, they were invited to gently return to consciousness, the lights were turned on and we carried out a discussion about the first hypothesis. The process was repeated for Hypothesis 2. At the end of the session, participants were asked to provide feedback concerning the process.

Markley (2008) states clearly that any professional familiar with group facilitation methods should be able to conduct the process. The author, having such previous experience, felt comfortable acting as the facilitator, with the exception of the relaxation procedure, which was modified as follows: instead of having the facilitator read the relaxation instructions provided by Markley (2008), a relaxation recording by Chopra (2006) was used (because the author did not feel that he had the appropriate voice timbre for relaxation purposes), and then the specific visualization instructions were read.

### 3 RELEVANT LITERATURE

#### 3.1 Theoretical Roots Taxonomy

In order to classify the theoretical roots used in the articles, we used the categories detailed in Table 1 below. These criteria were adapted from Neumann and Hemaïs (2005) and Hemaïs and Hilal (2005). Each theoretical category is codified and explained further below.

As stated in the Introduction, Neumann and Hemaïs (2005) and Hemaïs and Hilal (2005) divided IB theories into economically-based theories and organisationally-based theories. The adaptation made here to their taxonomy consisted of adding new categories in order to accommodate data that otherwise would not fit in the original ones. The new categories are: an “others” category (SGEB in Table 1) for articles with a “generic economic basis”; an “others” category (SGOB) for articles with a “generic organisational basis”; the category (META) for articles discussing methodology or articles performing meta-theoretical discussion; a (SIEB) category for articles comparing or integrating two or more different theories from the original Hemaïs and Hilal (2005) list; and a category (CULT) for articles utilising cultural dimensions based on Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) or Trompenaars (1993). One article still did not fit in any of the categories and was simply classified as “other” and omitted from Table 1.

The theoretical categories are briefly explained below.

Hymer (1960), who was a pioneer of the modern economic view of IB, tried to explain FDI flow at the firm level as the firm’s motivation to enhance its market power and to overcome market distortions. However, no article utilising this theory alone was found in the sample set. Therefore, the HYME category is empty.

The VERN category (standing for Vernon) includes articles that explain the internationalisation processes of firms through international product life cycle management. Briefly, the firm maintains production in the country of origin (where the innovations were introduced) while it can benefit from an oligopolistic position due to the innovation. After a period of time, the technology spreads among competitors and production is shifted to countries with less expensive production factors (Vernon, 1966).

The BUCK category encompasses articles based on the application of transaction cost theory to the FDI explanation: firms set up an overseas business to internalise the transaction costs of intermediate markets, transforming them into bureaucratic costs and diminishing the uncertainty. This follows the work of Buckley and Casson (1997). However,

articles utilising transaction costs in general or in applications other than FDI explanation were classified in another category (see SGEB).

The DUNN category contains articles based on the eclectic paradigm of Dunning (1980), which explains FDI flow by combining three factors, i.e., Localisation (firms exploit advantages that are specific to the foreign country, such as government policies, technology, raw material availability, efficiency of factors such as labour costs, etc.); Ownership (advantages of control and property as in Hymer) and Internalisation (advantages explained by transaction costs).

These first four categories (HYME, VERN, BUCK, and DUNN) were classified as economic approaches by Neumann and Hemais (2005) and Hemais and Hilal (2005). Articles utilising two or more of these economically-based theories in an integrated or comparative way were grouped in SIEB.

The approaches classified as organisational views by these authors are presented below.

The JOVA group includes articles utilizing the Uppsala school ideas, using the work of Johansson and Vahlne (1977) as a paradigm. These authors, who in turn follow the tradition of Alexandre Herbert Simon, Richard Cyert and James March, opposed the idea of *limited rationality* to the classical economic assumptions of the *homo economicus* and described the organisation and its decision making process as a coalition-seeking process with political characteristics among a conflicted human existence. Johansson and Vahlne put forward a firm level theory that explains the internationalisation process of the firm as a process of gradual growth of knowledge about foreign markets and industries (Johansson and Vahlne, 1977; Neumann; Hemais, 2005; March and Simon, 1972).

The ANDS category refers to Andersson's (2000) entrepreneurship ideas, which seek to explain internationalisation through entrepreneurial initiatives from the managerial team of the firm.

*Studies with a "Generic" economic base (SGEB)* includes studies based on the principles of traditional economic theory, such as macro and micro economic theories, resource dependence theory (Pfeffer, 1982), or transaction costs theory, when not applied to FDI. Also included are articles that analyse, describe, compare or correlate data from two or more countries, industries or markets, drawing conclusions from statistical evidence with reference to general economic principles but not to any particular theory. However, studies in

the SGEB group differ from those in the SGOB group (see below) by the unit or level of analysis (SGEB is concerned with the meso and macro levels, that is, industries, markets or countries) or by their results<sup>2</sup> (not directly focused on or useful in decision making processes). As examples, we may cite studies of the Internet as an industry, industrial clusters' behaviour, macroeconomic effects of retailers' behaviour in a given country, UN studies on loans and FDI, MNCs' behaviour impact, and government policies' impact over business.

*Studies with a "Generic" organisational base (SGOB)* includes studies that utilise traditional administrative theories, such as contingency theory (which explains firm behaviour as a response to environmental demands), decision making models, and Marketing- or Finance-specific models utilised to analyse organisation or consumer behaviour. They differ from SGEBs (above) by focusing at the firm level and/or generating results directly involved in or useful for managerial decision-making. As examples, we may cite studies on firms' communication, the impact of Marketing policies on firm performance, country-specific consumer behaviour, the impact of decisions about structuring on firm management, and tests of traditional organisational theory's explanatory power in IB. The traditional organisational theories could have been individually identified in the sample, but as this study focuses on IB theories, they were all classified in this broad category.

In general, neither SGEB nor SGOB are related to a FDI flow explanation.

Other categories were necessary to classify the articles that were not originally classified as taking an economic or an organisational approach by the literature.

The CULT category groups together articles based in culture: *cross-cultural management*, cultural differences between consumer behaviours, differences in cultural adaptation of expatriate executives, etc. All of the articles in this category were based on the paradigms of Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), Trompenaars (1993), or Schein (2004).

The INST group was used for articles involving the neo-institutionalism of Meyer and Rowan (1977). Institutionalism studies the building and dissemination of "truths" regarded as valid for a group. In the reinterpretation of this idea as conceived by these authors, organisations are social actors and shape a normative environment in which they are legitimised and survive. Organisational behaviour is therefore explained by the rationalisation of these institutionalised norms.

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<sup>2</sup> This second criterion (type of results) was necessary to classify articles focusing on consumer behaviour, for instance, that are not exactly firm-level focused but are not a concern under traditional economic theory either, being more related to managerial theories.



The KNFL category is made up of articles that view MNC behaviour through the lens of knowledge flows, mostly based on the theory of Kogut and Zander (2003), which says that the *raison d'être* of the MNC is not to overcome market failures nor to internalise transaction costs, but to enhance knowledge flow efficiency by internalising it. Nevertheless, we included in this category all articles mainly focusing on knowledge flow, whether or not Kogut and Zander's assumptions are explicitly mentioned.

The META group was used to classify meta-theoretical and methodology-based articles, i.e., those articles in which the discussion is focused on theory itself, such as Buckley (2002).

Table 1 below summarises this taxonomy.

Approach	Code	Theory	Main Authors	Basic Idea of the Theory
Economic	HYME	Firm level FDI explanation	S. Hymer (1960)	<i>Firms directly operate abroad to in order to overcome market failures and control their assets so they can plainly use their competitive advantage.</i>
	VERN	Product Life Cycle	R. Vernon (1966)	<i>Firms innovate in local developed markets and transfer production to less developed countries when the technology is spread among competitors.</i>
	BUCK	Transaction Costs Internalisation	P. Buckley & M. Casson (1997)	<i>Firms internalise intermediate markets whenever bureaucratic costs are lower than market transaction costs (or other advantages in internalising).</i>
	DUNN	Eclectic Paradigm	J. Dunning (1980)	<i>Firms directly operate abroad in order to benefit from OLI (Ownership, Localisation and Internalisation) advantages.</i>
	SGEB	Studies with Generic Economic Base	-	<i>Empirical or theoretical studies based in economic aggregated data statistics; meso- and macro-level studies that draw results about industries, markets or countries, and not managerial decision making.</i>
	SIEB	Studies with Integrated or comparative Economic Base	Compares or integrates theories above	<i>Comparison or integrative use of the above theories.</i>
Organisational	JOVA	Uppsala	J. Johansson & J. E. Vahlne (1977)	<i>Firms will internationalise according to a gradual psychological distance between the home country and the host country. Activities held abroad also follow a pattern of progressive complexity, from representatives to manufacturing.</i>
	ANDS	Entrepreneurship	S. Andersson (2000)	<i>Internationalisation results from managerial entrepreneurship.</i>
	SGOB	Studies with Generic Organisational Base	-	<i>Empirical or theoretical studies based in firm level information or drawing results relevant to managerial considerations.</i>
Neither economic nor organisational in Hemais; Hilal (2005)	CULT	<i>Cross-Cultural Management</i>	Hofstede (2005) Trompenaars (1993)	<i>Studies about cultural differences involved in International Business; whether among expatriate employees, customers, or country citizens in general.</i>
	INST	Institutionalism	Meyer & Rowan (1977)	<i>Organisations are social actors that seek legitimacy through the construction of an “institutionalised” normative reality, i.e., defined as truthful and shared with other organisations.</i>
	KNFL	Knowledge Flow	Kogut & Zander (2003)	<i>Studies that consider knowledge flow between enterprises from the same corporation, industry or country.</i>
	META	<i>Meta-theoretical study or methodology discussion</i>	-	<i>Articles that debate theory in general and/or research methodology with none of the above theoretical affiliations.</i>

**Table 1** - Taxonomy of theoretical roots used in this study

**Source:** Adapted from HEMAIS and HILAL (2005:36), with additional categories developed for this study.

### 3. 2 Theme taxonomy

In order to classify the themes of the articles, we start with Buckley's (2002) historical description, adapting and unfolding the three themes he reported (FDI flow explanation, MNC management and strategy, and Globalisation) into more specific subjects according to the needs of the data (therefore, some subjects are more detailed than others). See Figure 1. The "hierarchical" appearance of the scheme does not mean that "parent" categories overlap with "child" ones; each article belongs to a single category. In Figure 1, the "parent" categories and their "children" are separated in "trees".

Buckley's Globalisation category was broadened into the category Environment Analysis (ENV), which includes studies on markets, industries, political crises, governmental measures and policies, all globalisation-related subjects, in addition to "globalisation" proper.

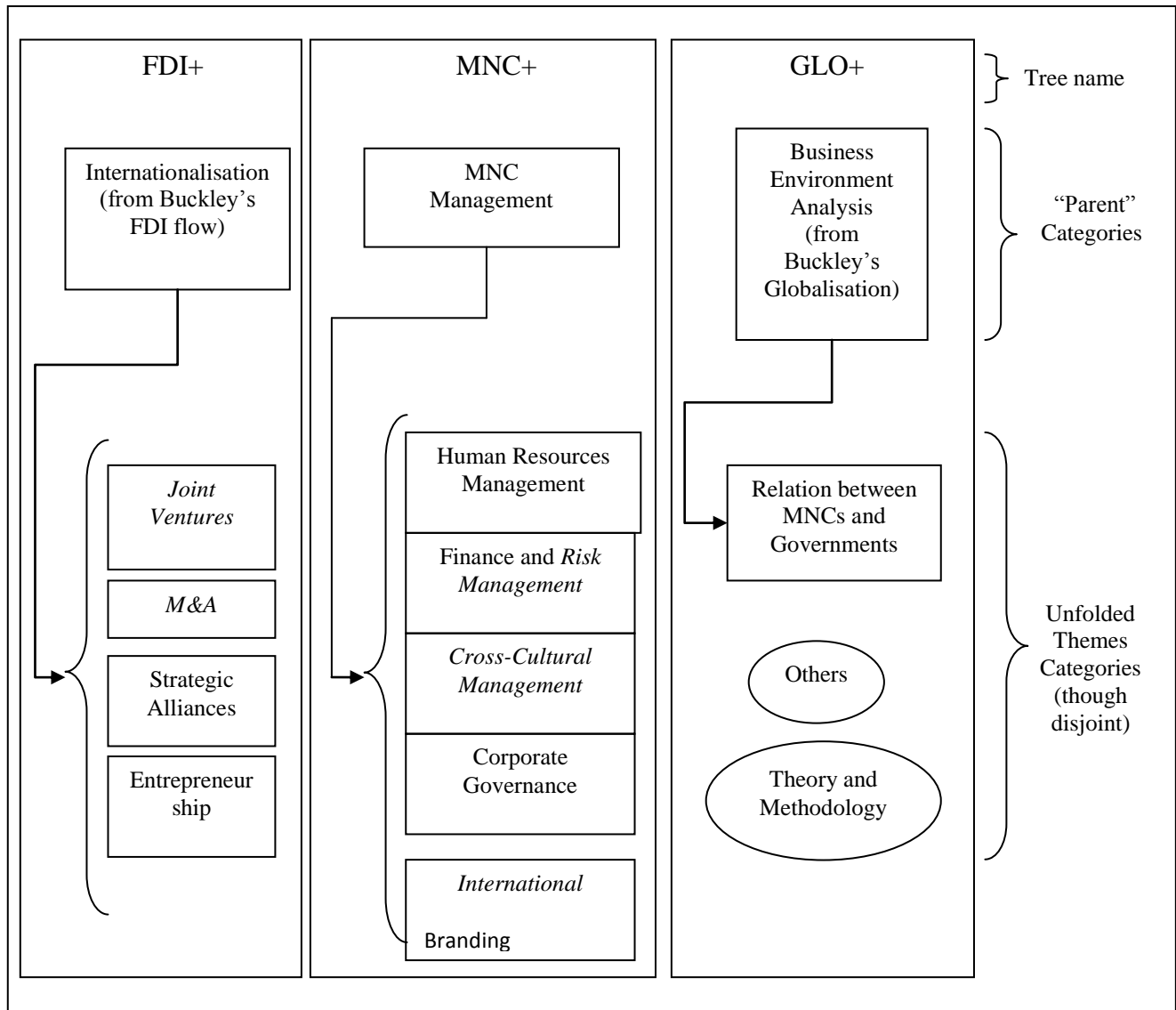
The management of MNCs was codified as a general category itself (MNC) and split into the categories of Human Resource Management (HRM), Finance and Risk Management (FRM), International Branding (IBR), Cross-Cultural Management (CCM) and Corporate Governance and Ethics (CGE). The "parent" category was reserved for articles discussing MNC management in general, such as strategy, structure, innovation and knowledge flow.

By the same token, FDI flow was adapted into Internationalisation (INT), which classifies articles discussing the FDI flow itself, but also entry mode in general or a comparison between different entry modes. This category was then divided into Joint Ventures (JOV), entrepreneurship (ENT), mergers and acquisitions (M&A) and strategic alliances (STA).

Articles discussing scientific methodology or IB theory were classified in IB Theory (IBT). Two articles that did not fit into any of the above theme categories were classified as "others". Table 2 shows the theme list, the codes and the respective proportion in the sample, in decreasing order.

The classification procedure for each single article regarding its theme and theoretical roots obeyed the following procedures: first, the title, summary and key-words, whenever available, were analysed. Most authors state clearly in the summary which theory they are going to use and the main subject of the article. Therefore, whenever the author declared his article's theoretical affiliation and theme, it was accepted for classification. If there was not enough information in the title, summary or key-words, then the introduction,

conclusions and references were analysed (references were particularly useful for determining theoretical roots). If this still did not provide enough data, the whole article was analysed in a general sense.



**Figure 1** - Theme categories' development and differentiation

**Source:** The author

Theme	Code	n	%
Internationalisation (FDI/Entry Mode)	INT	30	15,08%
MNC Management and Strategy	MNC	29	14,57%
Business Environment Analysis <sup>3</sup>	ENV	28	14,07%
IB Theory and Research Methods	IBT	23	11,56%
Human Resource Management	HRM	19	9,55%
Joint Ventures	JOV	18	9,05%
Cross Cultural Management	CCM	13	6,53%
Corporate Governance and Ethics	CGE	11	5,53%
Finance and Risk Management	FRM	10	5,03%
Relation between MNC and governments	GOV	5	2,51%
Entrepreneurship	ENT	4	2,01%
Merger and Acquisitions (M&A)	M&A	4	2,01%
International Branding	IBR	2	1,01%
Others	OTH	2	1,01%
Strategic Alliance	STA	1	0,50%
TOTAL		199	100%

**Table 2** - Taxonomy and distribution of themes in the 199 articles analysed**Source:** The author

### 3. 3 Taxonomy methodology

In order to classify the methodologies found in the sample, the criteria described by Scandura and Williams (2000) were adapted. According to Cerchiaro and Ayrosa (2005), these criteria are broader and more useful than the ones usually used in longitudinal studies in Marketing.

Scandura and Williams (2000) have adapted the work of McGrath (1982), who built a continuum scale ranging from precision at one extreme to context at the other. This criterion classifies a given methodology as a compromise between precision, mostly achieved by quantitative methods, and context, mostly achieved by direct observation of phenomena in the conditions and location in which they occur, but resulting in a loss in precision.

Scandura and Williams (2000) delineated nine research strategy types and four validation procedures to build 13 methodology types. Here we use only these authors' nine research strategy types because they are always available for analysis in scientific papers published in a double-blind review process. This is not always true for the validation procedures. In addition, for the purposes of this part of the study – mapping the methodological span utilised by IB researchers – the validation procedures are not important.

<sup>2</sup> Not to be confused with environmental issues.

In addition to the nine “pure types” of methodology from Scandura and Williams (2000), we add two other types of combined methodologies: one combining survey with qualitative procedures, and one for field studies combined with another qualitative technique. This was undertaken in order to meet data demands and with the intent of detecting potential new trends in research methodology.

This construct has resulted in the eleven methodology types summarised in the Table 3.

n	Description	Code
1	Formal Theory / Literature Review	THE
2	Survey	SUR
3	Experiment in Laboratory	LAB
4	Experimental Simulation	EXS
5	Field Study – Primary Data	FS1
6	Field Study – Secondary Data	FS2
7	Field Experiment	FEX
8	Judgmental Tasks	JUT
9	Computerised Simulation	COS
10	Survey Combined with qualitative techniques	S&Q
11	Field Study Combined with qualitative techniques	F&Q

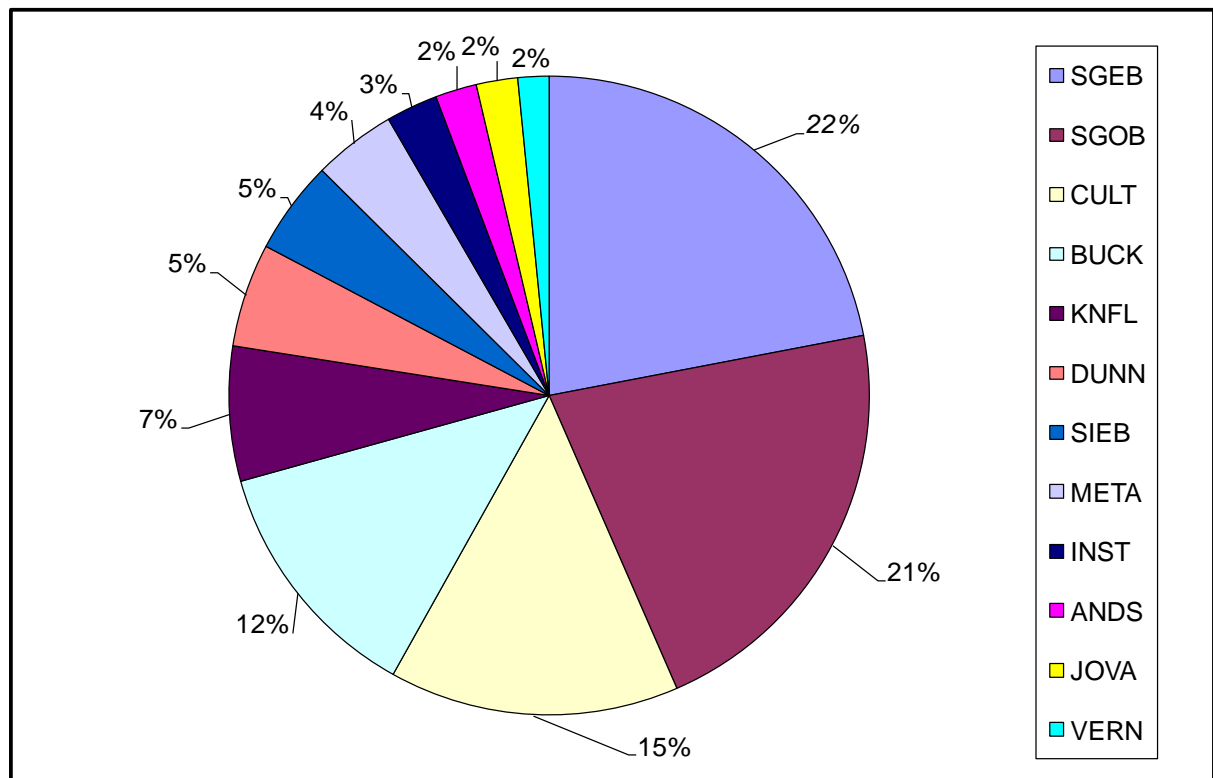
**Table 3** - Types of Research Methodologies

**Source:** Adapted from Scandura and Williams (2000).

## 4 RESULTS

Figure 2 shows that 43% of the articles classified do not use any of the main IB theories, but flow from generic economic principles (22%) and traditional organisational theory (21%). In third place (15%), we have studies based on models of cultural attributes, such as Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) and Trompenaars (1993). If we had not placed these culture studies into the realm of IB theory, we would have 58% of the articles unconcerned about “proper” IB theories, but deeply rooted in more traditional paradigms.

Stated another way, the main IB theories altogether were used less than half the time in articles published in the most important specialised IB journal in the period covered by our study.



**Figure 2** - Distribution of the types of theoretical roots in the sample

Only when one looks from fourth place on is it possible to see articles affiliated with the theoretical traditions usually associated with IB field research. These include studies based on Buckley and Casson (1997) – 13%; studies based on knowledge flow – 7%; studies based on Dunning (1980) and comparative/integrative articles (SIEB), with 5% each; closely followed by meta-theoretical articles (META) with 4% and studies based on institutionalism with 3%. Studies formally linked to Johansson and Vahlne (1977), Andersson (2000) or

Vernon (1966) were rarely observed, with 2% each. The time evolution of this distribution is shown in Figure 3.

The evolutionary graph shows three theoretical lines enduring throughout the whole researched period: the two largest categories, generic economic principles (SGEB) and traditional organisational theory (SGOB), and studies focusing on knowledge flow (KNFL). The presence of the third has been relatively small but constant. The dramatic increase in KNFL articles in 2003 and 2004 may be attributed to the decade award given to the Kogut and Zander (1993) article and a JIBS special issue to celebrate it. SGEB was featured in six to eight articles per year from 2001 to 2004, with a boost in 2005. In contrast, SGOB deeply decreases in the study period.

With respect to the other theoretical roots, it can be observed that meta-theoretical studies (META) had a modest presence from 2002 to 2005, while culture studies (CULT) show a respectable volume before 2003, reappearing in 2005. This year also marked the re-emergence of the other suspended categories, such as DUNN, BUCK and INST. Other lines are meaningless in terms of temporal analysis.

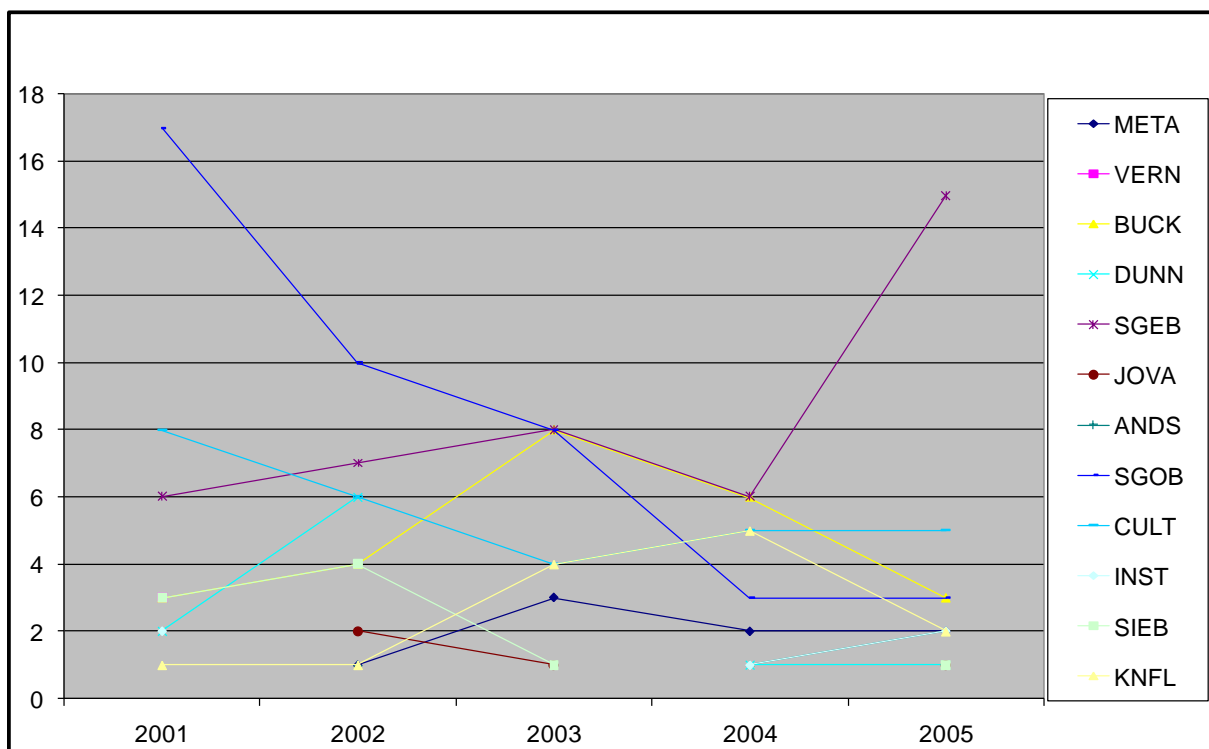


Figure 3 - Evolution over time of the theoretical roots used during the researched period

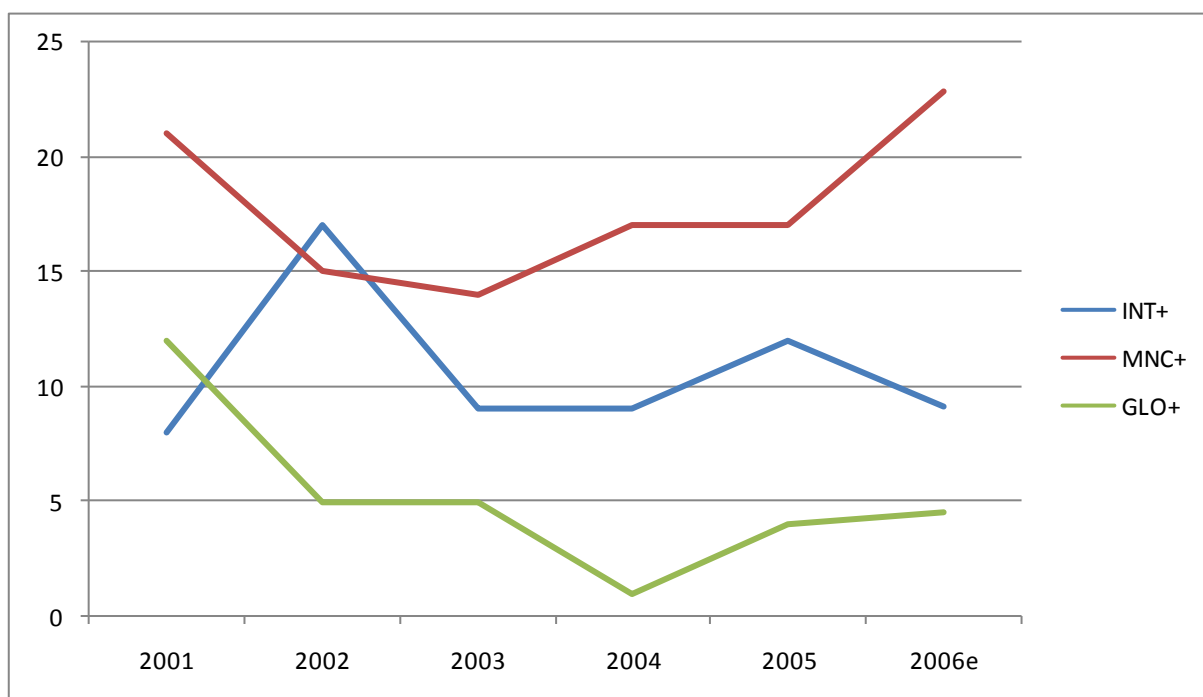


As for the themes, Table 3 (above) has shown their distribution in the sample in decreasing order. It is very clear that the three main categories described by Buckley (2002) still dominate the discussion in the IB field, and that their specialised subcategories are incipient. Additionally, the presence of theoretical discussion, which appears as the forth most frequent category in the sample, can be seen.

Nevertheless, temporal analysis shows that specialisation of the three main areas is becoming an increasingly important trend.

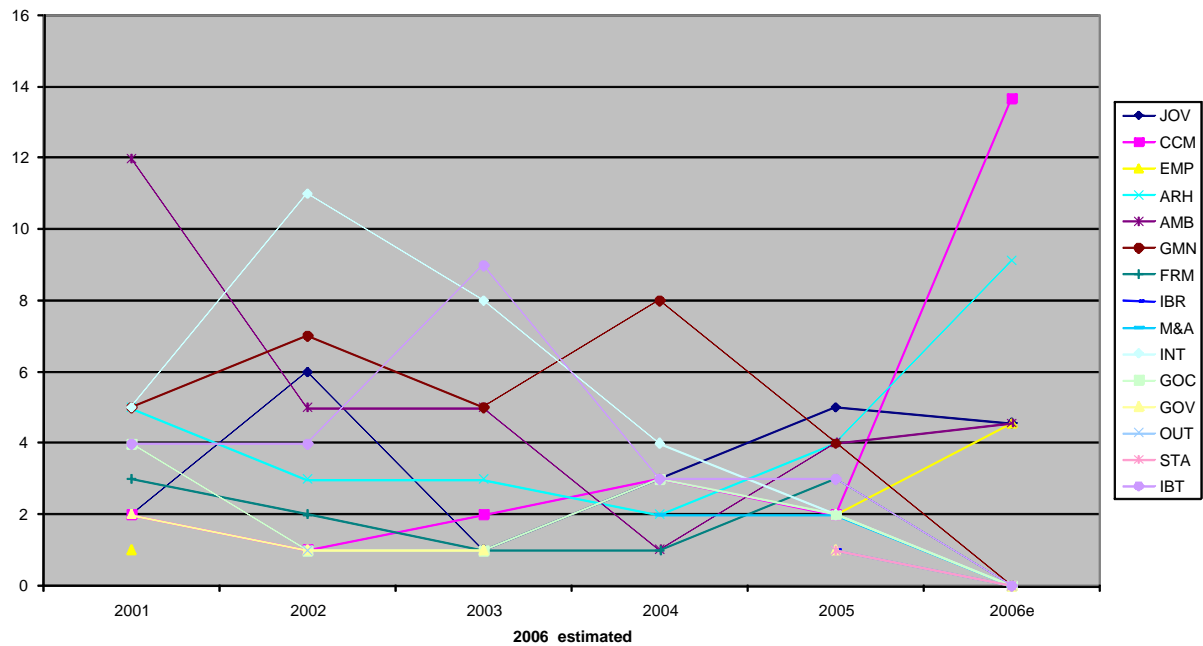
It takes two figures (Figure 4 and Figure 5) to fully understand the trend over time because two movements are involved.

First, all of the child categories with their parent categories are grouped together in their trees (see Figure 1) in Figure 4. For example, in Figure 4, “INT+” = INT + JOV + STA + M&A + ENT, and the same for the other two trees from Figure 1. It can be seen that Internationalisation (which explains FDI flows) has one peak in 2002 but, in general, varies slightly around an average of 10 articles per year. Studies on Globalisation have decreased from 2001 on, but MNC management and its particular issues appear to be experiencing a resurgence in 2006 (the value for 2006 was obtained by extrapolation of the first trimester), and other than its 2002-2003 “belly”, it has always been above the other trends.



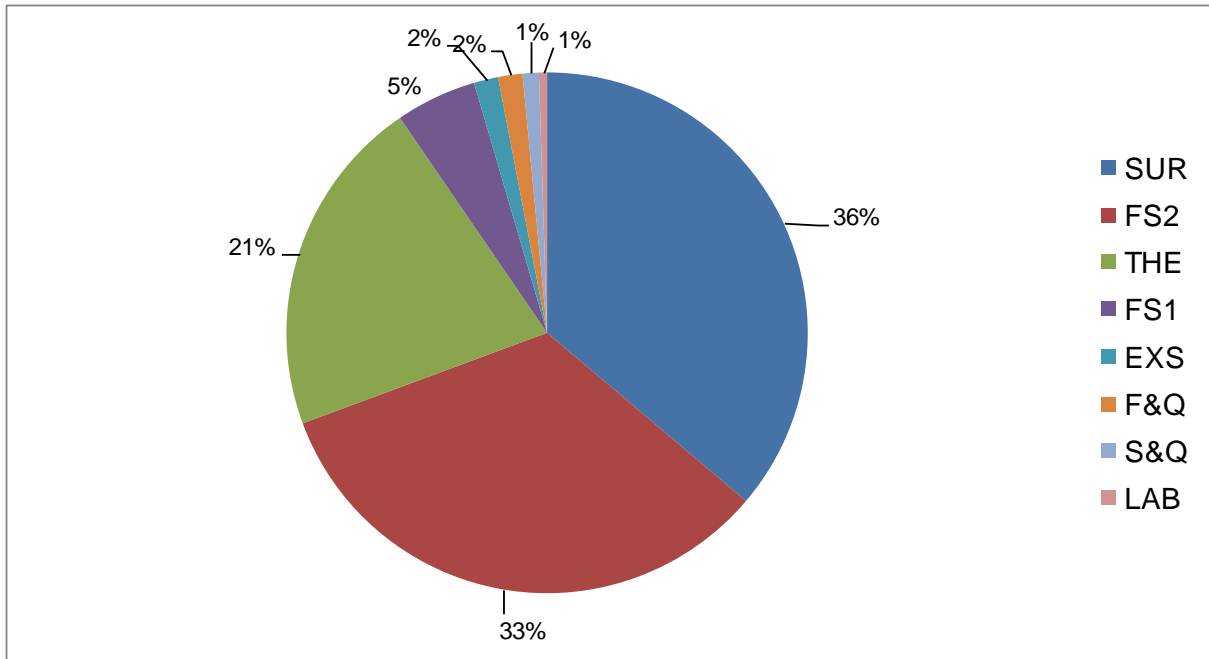
**Figure 4** - The evolution of thematic groups according to Buckley's (2002) main categories

In terms of the unfolded themes, Figure 5 shows a clear tendency toward specialisation of subjects: the three main themes decrease when separated from their child categories, while the specialised themes increase.



**Figure 5** - Evolution in time of the “unfolded” themes 2001-2005

The MNC management and strategy themes vary before 2004 and decrease in 2005, in favour of the development of cross-cultural management, international branding, corporate governance, and Finance and Risk Management. The Internationalisation theme increases in 2002 and decreases just as abruptly immediately after, while the merger and acquisition theme appears in the last two years and the joint venture theme, after a peak in 2002 and a decrease in 2003, slowly reappears in 2004-2005.



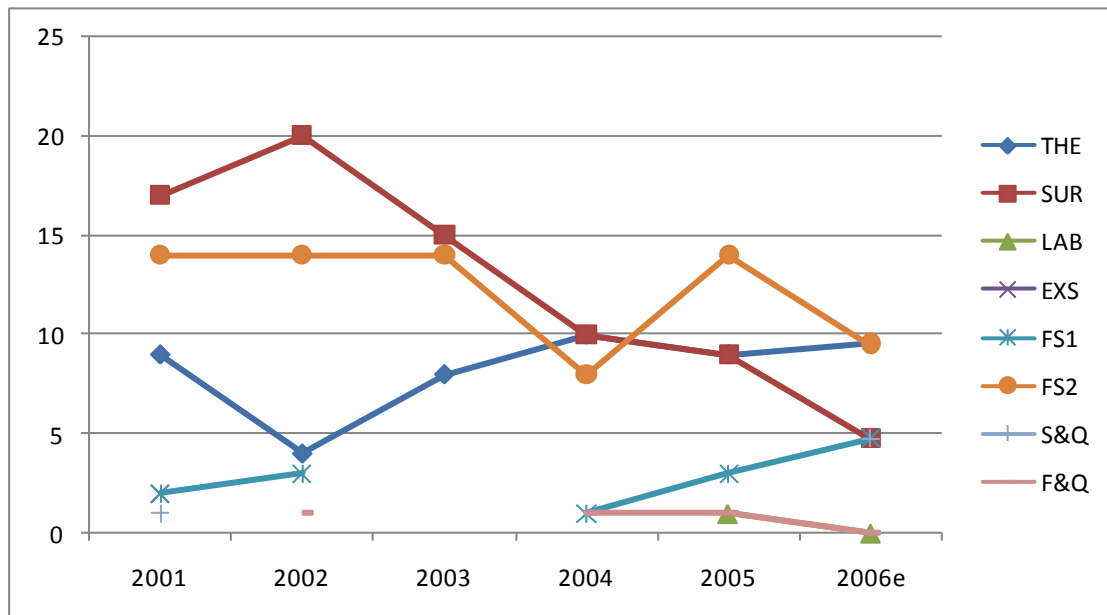
**Figure 6** - The distribution of methodology types in the sample

Figure 6 shows the distribution of the methodology types in the sample. It can be seen that survey is the most frequently used research methodology, being used in more than a third of the cases (36%). It is closely followed by field studies using secondary data, which accounted for another one third of the sample. Surprisingly, the third most used research methodology was theoretical, meta-theoretical and literature review articles, found in 21% of the sample. The other categories altogether were divided among 11% of the articles. Of these, field studies with primary data, almost all of which used qualitative techniques, totalled 5%. The combined methods are rare, totalling 3% altogether; and laboratory experiments accounted for one percent. The sample lacked three categories: field experiments, judgemental tasks and computerised simulation.

Again, it can be seen from a temporal analysis that these proportions are changing. Figure 7 presents the occurrence of the methodologies over time.

It can be observed that survey articles are severely decreasing throughout the entire period analysed. On the other hand, theoretical discussion and literature review, after a significant fall in 2002, returns to an increasing slope. Field studies with secondary data (mostly economic base studies) remained almost constant, with some variations in the last two

years. Again, the 2006 trend was extrapolated from the first trimester. The other methodologies do not appear with high enough frequency to draw trend conclusions.



**Figure 7** - Evolution in time of the methodology types used

## 5 DISCUSSION

Discussion at the symposium brought to the table the ideological aspects of having these themes, theories and methodologies in the main journal of the area, perpetuating the kind of research that privileges economic secondary data analysis statistically treated, on one hand, and MNC strategic and managerial issues on the other hand.

This dominance occurs to the detriment of SME articles, for instance. Although the taxonomy utilized in this study has not captured this aspect of the publication, colleagues at the symposium clearly stated that it is virtually impossible to have a study of SMEs published in JIBS. A quick glance over JIBS' online database will support this statement: a search for "SME" covering the reviewed period returns six articles (CHILD; TSE, 2001; CADOGAN; DIAMANTOPOULOS; SIGUAW, 2002; REDDING, 2005; KNIGHT; CAVUSGIL, 2004; JONES; COVIELLO, 2005; FERNÁNDEZ; NIETO, 2006), of which only the last three are properly *about* SME, one of them (KNIGHT; CAVUSGIL, 2004) being the famous article about born-global enterprises. That is roughly 1.5% of the 199 articles analyzed. In the taxonomy of this study, MNC+ "tree" management articles counted for 42.22% of the total (see Table 2, above); however, if we searched for "MNC or MNE or TNC" in the same sample, as we did with "SME", we would find 136 articles, or 66.8%.

Therefore, a statement saying that JIBS is about multinational corporations and their problems would be an accurate one.

Apart from the themes analysis, the methodologies utilized also demonstrate serious bias: one third of the studies were carried out through statistical analysis of global secondary data (Figure 6). This kind of data is provided by large global agencies, governments and banks, the interests of which drive the kind of data that will be gathered (at great cost) around the world. These studies are mostly instrumental, and very little within their findings is critical. Table 4 crosses methodologies and theories, and we can see that FS2 is the second most commonly used methodology, mostly applied over traditional theories (SGOB and SGEB).

In the same Table 4 we can observe that the main methodological group, survey, used in 36% of the articles of the sample, is also mainly used to test hypotheses based on traditional theories (SGOB, CULT and SGEB), rather than to test alternatives in the new theories of the field.

	META	VERN	BUCK	DUNN	SGEB	JOVA	ANDS	SGOB	CULT	INST	SIEB	KNFL	TOT
THE	6	1	9	2	7		2	4	6	1	2	2	42
SUR	2		5	2	10	1	1	24	15	3	3	6	72
LAB									1				1
EXS								1	2				3
FS1			1		1		1	2	2	1	1	1	10
FS2		2	8	6	25	3		11	5		3	3	66
S&Q							1	1					2
F&Q			1		1							1	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>199</b>

**Table 4** - Correlation between theories and methodologies (n=articles)

These figures may be counterbalanced by the 21% of theoretical discussion. This agenda, however, is deeply seated in the categories proposed by Buckley (2002), who in this regard may have “colonized” the future meta-theoretical discussion of the field. In spite of that, it must be acknowledged that JIBS offers space to theoretical, meta-theoretical and bibliographic-review discussions.

The theory distribution shows a clear preference for traditional research – economic-based studies and well-established organizational theory occupies a space incompatible with the richness of all the other co-existing theories in the IB field. Is it a sample of the intellectual production of the field, or it is an editorial policy filtering such production?

If the second statement is the more accurate of the two, researchers using minor theoretical references or themes other than MNC management (such as SME management, internationalization etc.), with methodologies other than quantitative (surveys or secondary data analysis), or researchers with more critical views of the field should be publishing elsewhere. Future research could verify this hypothesis by enlarging the titles examined in a study similar to this one.

Nevertheless, the diversity of theories increased with time in the analysed JIBS sample. Will this theoretical dispersion prevail in the field of IB in the future, deepening and enlarging its multiple theoretical references, or will some of the new theories establish themselves as a new paradigm, dominating the others and constituting a new mainstream? The same question can be asked regarding the themes to be approached: is the IB field going to narrow or expand what it understands to be its object?

To answer these questions about the future, we organized a workshop specifically designed to deal with the future perspectives. Ten Brazilian IB researchers were invited to participate, six of whom accepted, and a seventh visiting professor enrolled in the workshop.

To facilitate the future visualization, a future thinking methodology was applied: Mental Time Travel, suggested by Markley (2008). The procedures are described in the methodology section.

Markley (2008) recommends the future inquiry to be made by way of competing hypotheses or scenarios. The group “visits” both future scenarios after a period of relaxation and ends up discussing what is more likely to happen and the consequences of each hypothesis.

The hypotheses presented to the group of IB researchers covered the questions posed above: H1 is a *convergence or dominance* hypothesis for the field in terms of theoretical references and themes, i.e., the phenomena generally accepted as being part of IB studies. Therefore, it was formulated as:

H1: *“The IB field develops a single predominant theoretical view, in terms of theories and themes (objects), which is elevated to the status of ‘normal science’ in the field”.*

The second hypothesis addresses the possibility of *divergence or “hashing”* of the theoretical references, as well as a multiplicity of themes and realities for the field to embrace. It was formulated as:

H2: *“The IB field does not endorse a dominant theoretical view, and researchers follow diverse theories, references and themes, as in a ‘knowledge quilt’”.*

The Mental Time Travel procedures were applied twice, once for each hypothesis. Table 5 and Table 6 show the main statements of the participants after each of the “travels”.

Participants were asked to share their visions for each hypothesis about “*themes-theories*” of the future; “*changes*” in relation to the present time; and their insights, whatever they might be. Some participants had a more intuitive experience (as intended by the method), while others were more reluctant to use intuition and contributed a more “rational” kind of analysis. The natural inclination of each participant was respected, and the spontaneous contributions were classified in a broad category of “*feelings, insights or rational analysis*”.

It was clear in the discussion that convergence and *mainstream* were uncomfortable ideas to the group. This hypothesis appeared as the “bad guy” of the future, and most of the opinions related it with a broad *orthodox* view of the world: MNC research,

research focussed in great groups, no SMEs; traditional economic theories maintain and expand their spaces. The only specific theoretical framework that appeared in the Hypothesis 1 discussion was the cultural one (Hofstede's model and Shwarz's model specifically).

The necessity of variety in researching inside a dominant paradigm would have led the field to such a fine level of detail that theory would lose the big picture of the phenomena. The changes in this future hypothesis would be the kind of MNC being studied: emerging countries' MNC growth and subsidiary dynamics, instead of "conventional" developed countries' MNCs and subsidiaries. A dissonant view in this discussion was a relation established by one of the participants between convergence or dominance of one stream and the stability of the business environment, leading to a more human-centred kind of research: quality of life and sustainable development as the main theme of the field.

Another interesting view envisioned such a specialization in the scientific language in this field, with the corresponding isolation of research from the practitioners' world, that it would become obsolescent and substituted by a new discipline.

Regarding Hypothesis 2, most professors felt much more comfortable, and the future of the area seemed dynamic and vivid. Different perspectives, theories, levels of analysis, and lines of thought emerge, compete, co-exist, and some disappear. Some of the participants saw a fragmentation of the specializations, leading to a number of groups with very different languages and difficulties in communicating with each other; but innovation was also seen coming from this process.

Others saw the specialization deriving from regionalization of interests, leading to regional themes, research groups, and theoretical developments. The changes here are part of the natural dynamic of the research process: the birth of new thoughts and the death of non-functional ones. An interesting view was the idea of the field as a social reference to very different types of researchers; gathering people together in events and congresses to promote interchange of that very broad theoretical configuration.



Hypothesis 1 – Convergence or Dominance			
Particip- pant	Themes-Theories	Changes	Feelings, insights or Rational analysis
P1	MNC continues to be a relevant theme.	Emerging countries' MNCs are the predominant theme.	Difficulty in imagining this hypothesis.
P2	IB is discussing details – small details and focusing on parts of organizations, functions, processes, and not the whole, the big picture.		
P3	- Human being - Quality of Life - Sustainable Development	After years of turbulence, business environment reaches some stability	- Freedom of choice for people in the workplace. Normality only makes sense in a calmer world - The normal science – convergence hypothesis makes sense only in a stable environment
P4	- Enterprises have global dominance and are being studied - Power relations between parent co. and subsidiaries - Know-how and knowledge transferring Cross cultural management		Cannot see any current [in the present] theory dominating the others; no one with enough broadness to cover all the theoretical focuses
P5		Development of a particular language (researchers talk to researchers) leads the area to an isolated position, its obsolescence and the emergence of a new discipline (that in turn will suffer the same process)	- What would motivate Academy to promote a dominance of one stream over the others? There should be an interest driving to convergence. - Academic motivation: research problems come from inside Academy with intrinsic motivation
P6	Emergence of knowledge areas in the frontier of large groups' management. Large space of discussion of MNCs	Institutions have progressively less autonomy to choose their research themes.	Currently [in the present], IB is more like a discipline than a science itself. Efforts may have been made in the direction of concentration in a Normal Science basis, in order to lend credibility to its findings.
P7	Management of large groups (companies).		- Sameness – much of the same thing. Few critical perspectives, growth in detailing and loss of relevance. - Exclusion of researchers of other thought streams.

**Table 5 -** Main statements of Mental Time Travel participants for Hypothesis 1**Source:** The author

Hypothesis 2 – Divergence or Theoretical Quilt			
Particip- pant	Themes-Theories	Changes	Feelings, insights or Rational analysis
P1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Themes linked to exhaustion of natural resources</li> <li>- Culture is still a very important issue in the area</li> <li>- Hofstede is still being criticized – and utilized.</li> <li>- New potential and possibilities for Institutionalism</li> <li>- Transaction costs and their applications</li> <li>- Some themes have completely disappeared, such as knowledge management.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Two or three absolute new themes appeared as part of the field.</li> <li>- Emergence of new references to compete with the existing ones.</li> </ul>	
P2	Groups in Social Science, Geography, History, Politics, discussing international affairs in a broad way.		Extremely self-contained groups, focused on their truths with little or no interchange of ideas. Destructive criticism. Few researchers innovate by gathering exogenous knowledge to their groups. All the variety of Figure 2 is just one of such groups.
P4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Research centres hold punctual synergies, but <i>local focus</i> leads to regional specialization, causing the quilt.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Knowledge generation grows quickly, and researchers have easy ways to communicate their results</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Difficult exchange between researchers of different research lines</li> </ul>
P5	IB itself: What is “IB” then? What is the meaning of saying “I made a study in IB”? It is a large umbrella of divergent interests. It has a social function of gathering together people with some common interests; and a thematic identity function, serving as research reference.	IB maintains its interest but loses its epistemological consistency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Divergence or hashing will happen due to the very work process of research; researchers are faced with such diversity that we are forced to acknowledge the fragmentation.</li> <li>- In a post-modern world there is no place for great synthesis. Modern era brought great traditions but post-modern explosion is “big-bang” in a borderless world</li> </ul>
P6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- MNC management</li> <li>- Stakeholder management</li> <li>- Environmental themes, corporate governance, culture, power</li> <li>- Theoretical Quilt as a reflex of business quilt</li> </ul>		Easier to visualize this future report.
P7	Knowledge management		Dispersion as the result of lack of communication between different research lines.

**Table 6 -** Main statements of Mental Time Travel participants for Hypothesis 2

**Source:** The author

## 6 CONCLUSION

From the analysis of the theoretical roots of the articles, we may conclude that traditional organisational and economic theories are still intensively used in IB research, slowly yielding space to the “typical” IB theory. The second half of the period studied seems to bring a renewal of the theories of Dunning, and Buckley and Casson, along with knowledge flow based studies. In addition, data seems to show that “good old” economic principles and statistical inference will have a place in the discussion of IB in the near future. Also, a marked increase in the volume of theoretical discussion papers occurred soon after Buckley’s (2002) reflections on the field, as if researchers were responding to his appeal.

With regard to themes, the prophecies of Buckley (2002) by which the specialisation of subjects, the unfolding of the cultural theme, and the search for new theoretical approaches would take place clearly has happened. The promise of Buckley (2002), however, has not yet been fulfilled; the three main traditional themes of the IB literature are still the most common in publications. The emergent themes that represent specialised aspects of those three, though, point toward the actualisation of that promise in the future.

A critical view of the sample of JIBS articles shows such an editorial preference for themes like MNCs to the detriment of others that it can be stated that JIBS is about multinational corporations and their problems. The present study also reveals an editorial preference for methodologies like statistics over secondary data and surveys. These methodological preferences represent a dominant view of what science is and what the best way to represent the phenomena is, and this view drives future young researchers, spreading a mimetic effect over the future generations and inhibiting variation in the methodological span. Similarly, the predominance of traditional economic theory and traditional organizational theory shows the same orthodoxy and variation inhibition.

Acknowledging the space that JIBS opens to theoretical works, meta-theoretical debates and bibliographic reviews, we suggest that this space be used to discuss key issues in IB, such as social relevance of research in the field, relationship between the theories and the practitioners’ needs, economic proportionality between field activities and the correspondent publishing space, and, maybe most importantly, the social process of representation constructions in research and the veiled battle for the supremacy of some types of representation.

The future of the field is more likely to deepen these complexities of different theories and themes instead of IB developing itself as a normal science. The current configuration and the future trends characterize International Business much more like a discipline under which several paradigms coexist than a science in the “natural sciences” or “high sciences” sense. If this trend really happens, the odds are that we are going to see IB as a social reference with social functions more than as an epistemological entity.

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