

# University service-learning and public policy in Brazil: analytical intersections and pragmatic dilemmas

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the intersections between university service-learning in Brazil and the field of public policy discussions from a conceptual perspective. The objective is to discuss two dichotomies that organize Brazilian service-learning conceptions and practices. The first refers to the role of service-learning: an instrument for disseminating scientific knowledge or experience whose value goes beyond the teaching-research binomial. The second refers to the relationship between the different types of knowledge, namely scientific-universal on the one hand, and local knowledge on the other. These dichotomies are analytically explored by concepts coming from public policy theories, mainly those of community and networks. The conclusion is that the current curricularization process of service-learning is the largest project to overcome those historical dichotomies of the Brazilian university.

**Keywords:** university service-learning; public policy; curricularization of service-learning.

## 1 Introduction

Two dichotomies structure the dilemmas and challenges of extension in Brazilian higher education: the first concerns the internal dimension of extension, in which the *instrumentality-purpose* tension appears; the second concerns the external dimension, which appears in the *universalism-locality* tension. These tensions are intertwined in the debates on the role of extension, and more generally on the role of the university itself.

Aiming to contribute to this debate, this article aims to discuss the two dichotomies as structuring dilemmas of Brazilian extensionist conceptions. In this process, it is proposed that the concepts employed in public policy theories, mainly those related to public policy



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networks and communities, be the mediating elements of the discussion. Such mediation is fruitful due to the very nature of university extensionist practices, which aim to root the universality of scientific knowledge in the particularities of the local circumstances under which higher education institutions operate.

The article presents a literature review and a theoretical discussion. In the argumentative path to be presented below, we can see a diversity of contact points between the specific discussions in the field of extension debates, especially those related to rural extension and solidarity economy on the one hand, and the discussions of more theoretical dimensions of studies on public policies. Thus, after presenting an extension overview in Brazil, we explore the contact points between this pillar of national higher education and the concepts that gravitate around the notion and theories dedicated to the study of public policy communities.

Finally, some final considerations are made connecting these lines of argument. It is essential to mention that the contribution of this article is not limited to theoretical discussion. There are also other dimensions of this field of debate which have been highlighted by the effort made in the first decades of the 21st century to curricularize extension in Brazil; in other words, to make it an effectively integral part of higher education in the country, and not just an optional and accessory activity. In this effort, thinking about the challenges of extension in general and systematically contributes to this debate that involves the very future of Brazilian higher education.

## 2 University extension in Brazil

Higher education in Brazil is based on the “inseparability of teaching, research and extension”, as stated in the famous article 207 of the 1988 Federal Constitution (Brasil, 1988). The original meaning of extension consolidation as inherent to that stage of education implied the explicit requirement for direct provision of services to society by universities<sup>1</sup> (Canavesi *et al.*, 2021; Fraga, 2017; Gaviraghi; Goerck; Frantz, 2019). However, with the pluralization of perspectives reopened in the 1980s in Brazil, extension as a service began to be crossed by a dispute over meaning organized from the opposition pair emancipation x welfare. Extension was traditionally conceived as an activity with localized impacts, and therefore more directly visible and measurable. In this conception, extension would consolidate the “social” meaning of higher education, expanding the bases of its legitimacy through executing deliveries or end activities (Carbonari; Pereira, 2007; Gavira; Gimenez; Bonacelli,

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<sup>1</sup> In other countries, university extension is called “service-learning”, “community-engaged courses”, “community-based learning”, “*aprendizaje-servicio*”, “*educación experiencial*”, explaining the dimensions of service and popular participation (Gavira; Gimenez; Bonacelli, 2020).

2020; Incrocci; Andrade, 2018) in different temporalities in the short, medium and long term (Deponti *et al.*, 2018, p. 9)<sup>2</sup>.

Extension as direct provision of services appears clearly in article 43 of the LDB (Brasil, 1996), guided by at least three general values or objectives: popular participation, dissemination of achievements and benefits, and improvement of basic education. In addition to these more general mandates, the 1988 Constitution cites extension as a strategy for training human resources in two very specific contexts: technological extension (§3º of Art. 218) and rural extension (item IV of Art. 187) (Brasil, 1988).

Another key concept alongside service for understanding the role attributed to university extension is that of interdisciplinarity (Fernandes *et al.*, 2012; Incrocci; Andrade, 2018). In order to make full sense, extension as an “outward” service would require internal mobilization that would overcome the disciplinary archipelago formed by the diversity of isolated knowledge areas, each in its own university departments (Silva; Amorim, 2022). The movement towards extension curricularization refers to this challenge of mobilization and to a change in perspective through which extension ceases to be an additional and optional activity and becomes a mandatory curricular component<sup>3</sup>, being interwoven into the basic training of higher education in the country.

The central question of this entire debate refers to the first of the dichotomies mentioned in the introduction of this article, that of instrumentality-purpose, which can be formulated as follows: on the one hand, to what extent is extension, an instrument and/or mediation process; and on the other, to what extent is it an objective, a product or result with value in itself? There is shared protagonism between academics and external partners as mediation. In the second case, a provision of services and/or return of benefits to society (Freitas; Freitas; Vieira, 2020, p. 12).

If extension is limited to delivering products and reduced to a generic social commitment that the university must assume, its “services” end up being limited to an abstract engagement aimed at complementary welfare: the teaching-research binomial is established as being the very definition of university work and extension as a “return” to society for its investments in higher education, meaning an accessory and complementary action to that binomial (Riedo; Ribeiro; Calarge, 2019), the fruit of a “guilty conscience” (Dagnino, 2015; Fraga, 2017) at this moment when it is growing and keeping little adherence to the ongoing democratization scenario, is an urgent task for the leftist segments of the university commu-

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<sup>2</sup> Such deliveries in the Statute of Brazilian Universities of 1931 (Brasil, 1931), a legal document in which extension appears explicitly for the first time, were restricted to a diffusionist conception by which the extension would fundamentally consist of courses and conferences (Incrocci; Andrade, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> The forecast of curricularization has been a goal since the 2001 National Education Plan (Brasil, 2001), having been repeated in the National Education Plan (2014-2024), and is still currently in the implementation phase (2024), indicating the difficulty of institutionalizing such a forecast.

nity. Contrasting to the productivism-scientism-innovationism syndrome, favoring Extension function of the university as the channel that can reduce its dysfunctionality and insulation, revisiting the peripheral anathema of "quality versus relevance" to modify its Research and Education agendas, the argument withstands the dogmatic conception of neutrality and determinism of technoscience frankly predominant among that segment. Recognizing the need to compete for hegemony with those who favor a policy of alliances with the business sector, increasingly "financerized" denationalized, "deindustrialized", mimetic and environmentally irresponsible, we suggest a rapprochement to the Solidarity Economy and its undertakings. "Sociotechnical Adequation" and the development of Social Technology are proposed as vectors of a university praxis capable to (re) that dependence on visible, measurable and short-term deliveries can generate (Freitas; Freitas; Vieira, 2020; Monteiro, 2017).

Extension, as a rule, is an activity conditioned by research and teaching activities previously conducted by university institutions rather than by the problems or needs of their social environment. This refers to the way in which the socio-technical division of academic work is structured, meaning in terms of departments and disciplines. It also refers to the motivations that engage teaching careers, whose greatest opportunities and resources are generally located in the field of research, rather than extension.

Therefore, the teaching-research binomial is typically organized by disciplines, while extension often requires inter/trans/multidisciplinary approaches oriented to problems and context (Dagnino, 2015). In this case, the field of extension work is not something ready to receive the university's "services", but rather as actors in an interaction and tension process between which it is necessary to build mutuality and cooperation scenarios.

As the teaching-research binomial has defined the university for centuries, extension is added to this historical basis additively and by overlapping: the university is not redefined or refounded, it is simply expanding the range of functional duties of its human resources, which do not necessarily recognize or recognize themselves in extension (Incrocci; Andrade, 2018). This is largely the result of extension being a top-down public policy, as "extension was the result of the normative orientation of higher education policy and not of the maturity of the institution in terms of fulfilling its social functions" (Carbonari; Pereira, 2007, p. 25).

Finally, teaching and research are generally permeated by universalist perspectives resulting from operating methodological validation rules which allow replicability, or at least verification of the results obtained in each study. The research topics may be specific, but the methodology makes them universal. On the other hand, extension deals with specific situations that require tailor-made interventions in order to enhance the results. Such interventions may even serve as a benchmark for other actions or similar situations in other locations and inspiration for other actors, but they are not universalizable in themselves. Thus, a second fundamental dichotomy emerges, structured by the tension between universalism and locality.

One can cite the efforts of the UN (United Nations) to mobilize national societies around globally shared objectives. Examples of these efforts are the Millennium Development Goals<sup>4</sup> and the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals)<sup>5</sup>. The proposal is that such objectives be locally detailed and implemented, aiming to overcome the universalism-locality dichotomy, summarized in the motto “think globally, act locally”.

However, initiatives such as those of the UN allow us to observe that the instrumentality-purpose and universalism-locality tension pairs lead to the sustainability problem, in at least two senses: the consistency and continuity of extension actions beyond “specific and fragmented actions” (Fernandes *et al.*, 2012) of a welfare nature (Arroyo; Rocha, 2010); and the impacts on the socioeconomic matrices of society (Azevedo; Netto, 2015; Silva; Amorim, 2022).

A fertile field for observing the challenges of sustainability in the two senses outlined above and their relationships with the two dichotomies presented herein is that of rural extension. Historically, the two teaching and research centers which initially stood out in the field of Brazilian extension were the *Escola Superior Agrícola de Lavras* (currently the Federal University of Lavras) and the *Escola Superior de Agricultura e Veterinária, in Viçosa* (currently the Federal University of Viçosa), both inspired by the model of university extension in the United States (Dagnino, 2015; Fraga, 2017).

The extension model based on the tripod of diffusionism-developmentalism-welfare prevailed until the 1980s. The first dimension referred to the reduction of rural extension to the “diffusion of technical recipes and technological packages” (Nunes *et al.*, 2022; Silva; Amorim, 2022), while the second corresponded to the major objectives of national modernization at all costs, socially and environmentally. Finally, the last pillar of the tripod implied passive reception by the target audience of the actions and programs formulated by the government and universities; extension as an end, not as a means. Manifestation of the abstract universal of supposedly neutral and more efficient science over a “local” conceived as a passive recipient of progress.

With the crisis of the 1980s and its consequences in the following decade, there was an effort to rebuild rural extension that led to the National Policy of Technical Assistance and Rural Extension (*Política Nacional de Assistência Técnica e Extensão Rural – PNATER*) (Magalhães; Oliveira, 2020). Parallel but in conjunction with this, extension itself was also being redesigned within the Brazilian university environment, with family farming occupying a relevant space in extension actions (Almeida; Peres; Figueiredo, 2016).

The formation and strengthening of cooperation and research networks was encouraged, in which the university occupies a key position of mediation between civil society and

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<sup>4</sup> Verify at: <https://brasil.un.org/pt-br/66851-os-objetivos-de-desenvolvimento-do-mil%C3%AAnio>.

<sup>5</sup> Verify at: <https://brasil.un.org/pt-br/sdgs>.

public authorities in the implementation of public policies (Canavesi *et al.*, 2021; Guimarães; Santos; Costa, 2023). The growing protagonism of civil society has thereby contributed to reviewing the role of universities in Brazil, especially in relation to the instrumentality-purpose dichotomy.

Then regarding the universality-locality dichotomy, the debate around territoriality stands out as a broader phenomenon than the classic distinction between rural and urban. This involves a rescue and reaffirmation of the category (analytical and of self-attributed identity) of peasant and/or “peasant culture” (Saquet, 2014) as a recognition and location process, meaning to construct a “place” through weaving a set of territorial relations based on relationships of generalized interpersonal trust (Saquet, 2014) and by varying degrees of resilience (Oliveira *et al.*, 2021).

The territory is not just another setting and cannot be reduced to a raw environment, ready to be occupied, cut up and transformed. Appropriation of the territory, or transforming it into a “place”, is the continuous and incessant process of its conversion into a space of living, memory, work and identification historically constructed by the succession of generations (Canavesi *et al.*, 2021; Saquet, 2014).

Territoriality and temporality are intertwined through the different rhythms dictated by the socio-environmental configurations engendered by the intergenerational constitution of intra- and inter-family, community, political and economic relations, etc. The difference between “rural” and “urban” is not purely and simply spatial, it is also temporal: it contrasts rhythms of social life, as well as the ways of appropriating collective heritage and memory.

The formation of networks and the foundation of the practices which constitute extension actions in interdisciplinary social technologies and inter-knowledge (academic and local) contributes to overcoming hierarchical relations between science and traditional knowledge. Thus, it also contributes to enriching the debate around the two dichotomies discussed in this work. The symmetry of relations engenders another profile of synergy between the various participants in the process, as summarized in the expression “solidarity economy” (Riedo; Ribeiro; Calarge, 2019) and exemplified in and by agroecology.

Agroecology is intrinsically interdisciplinary in that it is multidimensional: it is not limited to food production or agricultural inputs, but is performed in the economy of solidarity exchanges, in activities based on mutualism (collective efforts, associations, cooperatives, etc.), in cooperation with the government and in socio-environmental sustainability (Azevedo; Netto, 2015; Rocha; da Silveira, 2014; Saquet, 2014; Silva; Amorim, 2022). This systemic dimension of agroecology is an example of the more general paradigm of extension (re)construction as the formation of permanent collaboration networks between university and society, beyond specific and reactive actions that are exhausted in the cycle of a single project.



### 3 University extension, networks and partnerships

In the same direction that rural extension has been heading, Federal Decree No. 6,495 of June 30, 2008, represented both a legal and historical milestone in the history of Brazilian extension by establishing the University Extension Program (*Programa de Extensão Universitária – PROEXT*). Its main objectives were to administratively and financially promote extension, as well as to stimulate the coordination and optimization of resources at the national level. The aim was to extend the time horizon of the actions by allowing long-term planning, as recorded in the aforementioned Decree in item II of its first article.

The first call for proposals was published in 2007, even before enactment of specific legislation. There were successive calls for proposals until 2016, when major changes in Brazilian politics interrupted the continuity of a series of public policies, including the *Proext*<sup>6</sup>. In any case, this was an experience marked by a project to build and consolidate the systemic dimension of extension in Brazil. This project to institutionalize extension as a public policy aimed to stimulate consolidating collaboration networks with other public policies at the local and regional levels.

Another important initiative was to create the National Forum of Pro-Rectors of Extension at Brazilian Public Universities (*Fórum Nacional de Pró-Reitores de Extensão das Universidades Públicas Brasileiras - PROEXT*). This is a network structure *par excellence* and was part of the movement to strengthen Brazilian civil society in the 1980s. This consolidation is related to the context of civic effervescence in the throes of the 1964 dictatorship, and in the case of universities it stimulated mobilizing their internal audiences (teachers and students), engaging higher education institutions in the political process underway in the country at that time.

Despite their limitations, municipal councils are also permanent spaces, and public hearings as open events are also spaces for articulation and visibility for the extension movement. Such state spaces gain even greater prominence when occupied by representatives of traditional communities, frequent partners of universities. We can also mention the agencies that provide financial and/or scientific support and development, such as CNPq (National Council for Scientific and Technological Development), Embrapa (Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation), and Emater (Technical Assistance and Rural Extension Company), which are not only fundamental for broad provision of scientific and objective knowledge, but also of ideational and discursive resources through them.

Thus, the transition from the 20th to the 21st century saw a movement in both society and the State towards projects to overcome the dichotomies of extension. However, it was also noted that the challenges are great and sensitive to factors linked to the leaps and

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6 All relevant information and documentation can be found at: [http://portal.mec.gov.br/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=12241&ativo=488&Itemid=487](http://portal.mec.gov.br/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=12241&ativo=488&Itemid=487)

turbulences of political situations. In any case, these two movements, one in society, the other in the State, converge and meet in incubation (by the government) and in the solidarity economy (by society).

Entrepreneurship incubators generate extension practices while fostering small-scale economic activities, whether solidarity economy or not, through the use of university infrastructure. As solidarity economy also involves an informal socio-educational process based on the exchange of experiences and practical and local knowledge (Gattai; Bernardes, 2013), universities can directly contribute to systematizing and enriching such knowledge and practices.

The actions of social economy incubators have the potential to further expand the role of universities. Going beyond the provision of resources (training, consultancy, etc.) and directly committing to the results of their actions (economic viability of entrepreneurial activities), they connect and strengthen collaboration and cooperation networks (Gattai; Bernardes, 2013; Gaviraghi; Goerck; Frantz, 2019) and the third sector through developing and/or improving social technologies.

The notion of social technology is at the heart of these initiatives, as it is based on three fundamental ideas: innovation, interaction and inclusion (ITS, 2004; Moretto Neto; Garrido; Justen 2011). Innovation because it involves converging the university's standard technical knowledge with the know-how accumulated by people in their daily professional practices; interaction because it not only involves disseminating knowledge produced at the university, but also a mutual learning process, and consequently collective and dialogic construction of new knowledge; and last but not least, self-sustainable inclusion as the main objective, reducing social inequalities and fostering the autonomy of the most vulnerable segments of the population. In addition, new shared management standards are also emerging that articulate and value active participation of the public in a paradigm of "dialogical extension" (Moretto Neto; Garrido; Justen, 2011) or "intention"/ "exvestigation"<sup>7</sup> (Dagnino, 2015).

The shared management process aligns with the self-management ideals of the solidarity economy (Dagnino, 2015; Riedo; Ribeiro; Calarge, 2019) at the same time that it is in tension with the typical work pattern of academia – academic freedom, meaning the relatively high discretion of professors-researchers in the selection of their research topics. Expanding the autonomy of partners-participants in university extension projects may be placed on a collision course with the autonomy of academic partners regarding the topics and methods of knowledge construction (Dagnino, 2015, p. 319-320).

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<sup>7</sup> Dagnino (2015) proposes this neologism to emphasize his central argument: if extension is or should be inseparable from teaching and research, then the knowledge production itself should be outward (exvestigation), and not inward (investigation). This is a dialogue with the conceptions of problem-based teaching (Simon; Franco, 2015), according to which technique and practice should not be separate and distinct moments of the pedagogical process (learning first, applying later), but rather intrinsically combined (learning by applying).



Therefore, the notion of “third sector” may be insufficient to describe the entire complexity of the phenomenon. This is because the solidarity economy is oriented towards market activities, but based on societal arrangements built on associations/cooperativism. Furthermore, when public universities act decisively, a Market/Civil Society/State network is formed that reduces the “[...] distance between the economic, social and political” (Gattai; Bernardes, 2013, p. 57).

At this point, we return to the problem of interdisciplinary and inter-knowledge construction. Methodologies such as action research aim to overcome this problem by combining “explanation, application and implication” (Gattai; Bernardes, 2013; Oliveira *et al.*, 2021). The process may also involve construction of an “ethnoscience perspective” (Freitas, Freitas; Vieira, 2020, p. 15), or at least the use of participant observation techniques (Oliveira; Soares, 2015), of collective subject discourse (Fernandes *et al.*, 2012), “experiential learning” (Landini, 2020), and “solidarity technoscience” (Figueiredo; Oliveira Junior, 2023).

Therefore, there is a growing stock of scientific knowledge production methodologies which seek to interconnect teaching-research and extension, reconciling the universality of the scientific method with the locality of the problematic intervention objects; and in this sense, the university provides instruments that are not neutral, but rather contextualized for purposes jointly defined by the group of actors involved in the extension practice. It is a collective effort that necessarily involves public and private sectors. Therefore, the notion of a community of public policies and networks can be very useful in understanding such interconnections of knowledge, practices and actors.

On the other hand, it is common and reasonable to only associate public policies with state action. Public policy would be the “State in action”, implementing “a government project, through programs” (Höfling, 2001, p. 31). However, beyond this type of demiurgic view of the State’s role in producing public policies, the movement of private and community interests within civil society does not merely represent a scenario in which the government acts or simply supplies a source of resources mobilized by state agents according to and for their interests alone. It also represents the formation of alliances in varying degrees of formality with the capacity to not only mediate implementation of public policies, but also to influence their very constitution.

A variety of terms are used to account for this dimension of public policies, such as policy communities, advocacy coalitions, public policy subsystems, and policy networks (among others). Since these are situations formed on an informal level, at least in their initial moments, it is important to emphasize the centrality of sharing common values and convictions as an element of initial integration.

The diversity of terms used to deal with the societal dimension of public policies is related to the various possible approaches and analytical descriptions of the phenomenon.

Using expressions such as “community” or arena to describe the fabric of expectations and interests implied in and by public policies refers to the broader context of such policies. These are generally more informal and spontaneous relationships between actors who are differentiated from each other and whose relative positions refer to the interests present in the context of a certain social “problem” to which the public policy is addressed.

#### **4 From policy communities to university extension curricularization: ways of dealing with dichotomies**

Communities are not only the context of the “problem”, but also of the consequences and implications arising from implementing public policies, which tends to alter relative positions and therefore the interests in dispute (Lowi, 1964). However, the construction and analytical use of the concept of a public policy community not only involve societal actors, but also governmental ones. Its structuring axis is the interest and/or link that some actor, regardless of their sphere of activity, maintains with a certain public policy. Its extension and composition are contextual, strongly depending on the configuration of concrete situations entangled with the processes and management of resources which compose various government programs (Cortes, 2015).

One of the classic definitions of a public policy community (Pross, 1993) emphasizes its structure in concentric circles: in the wider circle there are the political system actors, whether they are leaders or not. Since it is rare for political actors, especially those with an elected mandate, to all be full-time engaged in a specific public policy, there tends to be a narrower circle, mainly formed by front-line public servants, meaning those more directly involved in managing a certain public policy. Nevertheless, between these two circles there is a diffuse public that does not require a certain attention focus and monitoring of public policy, even though they are not part of the decision-making process that triggered its creation, like the highest-level political actors, nor of the professionals directly engaged in its active management. This public forms the basis of pressure groups when organized with the objective of influencing the direction of public policies (Pross, 1993, p. 154-155).

Such groups are pressure groups precisely because they are external to the direct management of policies. However, their generally informal nature allows them to move between the various civil society organizations and between the various government departments and agencies with a level of ease not permitted to public officials, as officials are limited by their positions, functions and commitments. In other words, this intermediary circle not only forms an informal network itself, but also extends this network even among more formally institutionalized actors, creating new contact points between them (Pross, 1993, p. 155-156).

The term interest group is often taken in a pejorative sense to designate situations in which certain actors only aim to instrumentalize public resources to promote their strictly private interests. Although the concept constructed by Pross (1993) is not limited to this possibility, other analytical categories have been put forward to deal with the complexity of the problem. Among them is that of advocacy coalitions, often referred to simply as Advocacy.

Thus, three of the elements emphasized in the approach to public policy advocacy coalitions stand out. The first is the centrality of normative perspectives as a binding element, and therefore constitutive of those coalitions, defined as “[...] *groups of actors sharing policy core beliefs and coordinating their behavior in a nontrivial manner*” (Weible; Nohrstedt, 2013, p. 127). Sharing certain core beliefs is the central element of coalitions. They promote diverse interests, whether material or symbolic, but these interests are formatted, presented, and outlined based on certain worldviews, expressed in terms of values, and articulated pragmatically in coalitions.

However, the emphasis on values could hinder the analysis, since values are more difficult to change over time. Therefore, a second analysis element comes into play to account for the dynamics of public policies, and within them, for changes in the position and actions of coalitions themselves, namely: learning (Ma; Lemos; Vieira, 2020). Since learning is a process, it can and should be analyzed over a certain period, often in the medium and long term. Furthermore, it not only involves formal and scientific data and results, but also accumulated experiences which impact the collection of values and persuasive arguments available to each coalition. Therefore, coalitions are formed around certain values, but these are not completely fixed, but rather open to change through learning.

Finally, the third element is the dynamics of change itself, meaning that if values can change through learning, how does this happen? If public policies are treated as “translations of beliefs” in the field of public action (Weible; Nohrstedt, 2013, p. 147-148), and if it is possible to differentiate basic values which involve the community and/or coalition as a whole, giving it cohesion from accessory values, referring to the more technical aspects of policy formulation and implementation, then it will be possible to assess the magnitude of changes in public policies depending on whether they occur at the level of fundamental values or accessory values.

Describing these competing interests based on concepts such as interest groups and advocacy coalitions implies that it is no longer a question of analyzing scenarios, but rather strategies and mobilizations, values and resources. The concept of interest groups refers to a more general and typically pluralistic perspective of analysis and a longer tradition in political analysis (Olson, 1965). The conceptual scope of advocacy coalition is more limited to the field of public policy analysis. The aim in both cases is to describe and explain the trajectory of public policies as a result of some balance between change and stability. More

precisely, between groups pursuing change versus groups engaged in preserving a certain policy configuration.

The discourse and deliberation concepts in this dispute process are also incorporated into the discussion (Campbell, 2002; Fischer; Gottweis, 2012; Wolfe; Jones; Baumgartner, 2013). The discourse concept is generally used to describe the process of articulating ideals, scientific information, values, and other elements that can be used in a persuasive process. In turn, deliberation refers to both the discussion and persuasion process and the decision-making process. Advocacy coalitions need to mobilize discourses if they intend to advance their positions in the deliberative process. This perspective therefore goes well beyond more rationalist perspectives of interest group analysis, as it goes beyond the very notion of interest as the central driver of agents' behavior.

Finally, two very important associated notions are those of subsystem and network (Weible; Nohrstedt, 2013). By definition, the notion of subsystem implies the existence of a broader system which it is a part of. In this sense, public policies would be influenced by the logic of their implementation area (education, health, public safety, etc.), but also by the dynamic results of neighboring areas.

Another idea associated with the subsystem is that of learning and specialization: as society mobilizes and creates obligations for state power in the form of citizenship rights, there is not only a quantitative expansion of state action, but also qualitative intensification of the demands placed on the public agenda, to such an extent that state capacities can be challenged to the limit. In succession, societal actors need to specialize more and more in order to carry out their demands and perspectives, which requires investment in learning.

However, this is not a purely scientific process, whereby the best reasons are made explicit in discourses and prevail in deliberations. Scientific knowledge is intertwined with values, norms, traditions, and previous experiences, and there is a greater chance of success as these elements are combined. Then, the network concept is often used to describe the governance structures of public policies (Agranoff, 2006; O'Toole, 1997). Contrary to the place that the notion of competition occupies in analyses centered on interest groups and advocacy coalitions, it emphasizes their interdependencies and convergences, even when conflicting. This concept has increasingly appeared in analyses with the advent of globalization as the ultimate event of the very idea of a network. The intricate relationships between the local level of public policies and the transnational flows of information, people and resources have been given a closer look due to the emergence of this concept. It is also clear here that the instrumentality-purpose and universality-locality dichotomies are central and it could not be otherwise, since extension is a public policy and its dilemmas are not exclusive to it.

It has become clear throughout the text so far that the trajectory direction of Brazilian university extension is based on a conception which practically nullified the role of external partners and relegated extension to the condition of an accessory part of the university machinery. Based on this condition, mobilizations both inside and outside universities, connected by diverse cooperation networks and by activating communities articulated in this way have been driving the process of restructuring Brazilian higher education in the opposite direction: instead of organizing extension based on teaching, the reorganization of teaching itself, albeit only partial, is being planned based on extension.

The first explicit and official movement to promote extension curricularization is included in the National Education Plan (*Plano Nacional de Educação - PNE*) (2001-2010), which was the first formulated after publication of the Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education (*Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação – LDB*, 1996): “[...] 10% of the total credits required for graduation in higher education in the country will be reserved for students participating in extension activities” (Brasil, 2001, goal 23). This goal was not implemented in the 2000s, and was again included in the *PNE* (2014-2024), in Strategy 12.7: “to ensure at least 10% of the total curricular credits required for graduation in university extension programs and projects, primarily directing its action towards areas of great social relevance” (Brasil, 2014, strategy 12.7).

The second step was to regulate such a device, which only occurred in 2018 with the Resolution of the National Education Council (Brasil, 2018) No. 7/2018. In its fourth article, Resolution 7 establishes: “Extension activities must compose at least 10% of the total student curricular workload of undergraduate courses, which must be part of the curricular matrix of the courses” (Brasil, 2018). The challenges intrinsic to such a goal, added to the negative impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic (2020-2022), directly contributed to a slow and truncated implementation of extension as a curricular component (Fontenele, 2024). It is noted that the 10% goal remained the same over the decades while the formulation was changing, making it clear that extension must be in the curricular matrix of the courses, meaning at the core of the student education itself and not just laterally or as a complement.

From this perspective, the extension curricularization process in the first decades of the 21st century has become one of the central chapters in the transformation dynamics of the Brazilian university system when analyzed from the perspective of the two dichotomies discussed in this text. This historical process places extension curricularization in a complex web of correlations with other movements of qualitative and quantitative transformations, both in the public and private sectors of national university education.

The quantitative dimension is mainly reflected in the intense expansion of the public education system through creating new universities and campuses, especially during the validity of REUNI (Program to Support Plans for the Restructuring and Expansion of Federal

Universities) (Brasil, 2007) and through the creation of the network of Federal Institutes, whose main function is secondary education, but which can offer (and often do offer) higher education courses, in this case being equated to universities (Brasil, 2008). At the same time, stimulated by federal incentive programs such as the University for All Program (*Programa Universidade para Todos - PROUNI*) (Brasil, 2005a), and by favorable regulatory changes such as the flexibility in the offering of courses in the Distance Education modality (Brasil, 2017), the number of courses and vacancies in the private market *also* increased in the country. One of the consequences of this quantitative expansion was greater internalization of higher education in Brazil, whether in person or remotely (Fontenele, 2024); in other words, the university and its campuses became physically closer to large portions of the population that had previously been literally distant from higher education.

However, reducing the physical distance was not enough. Therefore, the Quota Law (*Lei de Cotas*) (Brasil, 2012) aimed to diversify the profile of those entering higher education as much as possible, while the *PNAES* (Brasil, 2010) worked to reduce dropout rates motivated by material deprivation. The Tutorial Education Program (*Programa de Educação Tutorial*) (Brasil, 2005b) stimulates collective innovation by encouraging planning and execution of activities in groups and integrating teaching-research-extension, in contrast to the more typically individualistic and competitive profile typical of the university environment.

Although the Science Without Borders program (*o programa Ciências Sem Fronteiras*) (Brasil, 2011) was episodic and discontinued, it was an experience in expanding undergraduate education to international horizons. Furthermore, the Rondon project (Brasil, 1975), with its focus on providing services, provides students with opportunities to travel around the country, expanding their professional and educational experiences.

From a curricular perspective, there is growing interest in active methodologies, such as Problem-Based Learning and Project-Based Learning (Simon; Franco, 2015), especially in health courses, aiming to integrate theoretical training as much as possible with the ability to apply curricular knowledge in a technical-practical manner. If the adoption of such methodologies is the result of spontaneous decisions by each undergraduate course or university institution, inclusion in the curriculum of subjects related to the education of ethnic-racial relations (Brasil, 2003), environmental education (Brasil, 1999) and the study of sign language (Brasil, 2005c) has become mandatory in a convergent movement with the adoption of quotas for university admissions.

In turn, the National Higher Education Assessment System (*O Sistema Nacional de Avaliação da Educação Superior - SINAES*) (Brasil, 2004) aimed to institutionalize a more dialogued evaluation and self-evaluation process of universities in Brazil. Its paradigm was based on processes that avoided formulating rankings and/or comparisons that would induce competition. Thus, instead of negative incentives based on punishments or cuts



in resources, the proposal was to enable monitoring and control the fulfillment of goals based on public commitments formulated by the university public itself, complemented by external evaluations.

## 5 Final considerations

The complexity inherent in socio-ecological systems requires the university to make a greater effort towards interdisciplinarity and also requires that actions and projects have governance built on coordination mechanisms that are as horizontal as possible (Oliveira *et al.*, 2021). This article has therefore mobilized concepts which emphasize the collaborative, but also conflictual nature of public policies in general (public policy community, interest groups, advocacy coalitions, networks, etc.), and in particular the arrangements present in extension activities.

In addition, the dichotomies that permeate Brazilian extensionist conceptions and practices cannot be analyzed as if they were watertight. These are processes which on the one hand are based on the tensions generated by the opposition between university and locality, and instrumentality and purpose, while on the other gain momentum and historicity through debates, legislation, projects and various practices, as could be clearly observed in the analysis of extension insertion in the curricular matrix of undergraduate courses in Brazil.

It is therefore clear that extension curricularization is one more piece, albeit of central relevance, in the puzzle of Brazilian higher education in the 21st century. A puzzle in motion, and a movement endowed with meaning – that of the democratization of higher education. Democratization in the full sense: in the (self)management and (self)assessment that mobilize all university audiences (teachers, students, technicians); in the profile of new and graduating students; in the curricular components; and in the training experiences inside and outside the classroom, etc.

The central question then suggested for future research based on the considerations made throughout this article is whether extension curricularization could be the convergence vector of the set of programs and projects mentioned above, consolidating the democratization process of the university in its broadest sense. In more general terms, it is the challenge of overcoming the instrumentality-purpose dichotomy by structurally redesigning undergraduate education itself in the country. If such an overcoming is observed, then the tendency is for extension to not only be strengthened as a service that is provided or a product that is delivered, but also as a learning horizon which expands in multiple directions. Then, the universality-locality dichotomy can also be questioned in these different directions, repositioned, and ultimately even reinvented, with consequences and developments for higher education in Brazil as a whole.

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