

# The Community Higher Education Institutions in Brazil Mission and Vision

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**Abstract** This text analyzes community institutions and their role in community development. It presents a qualitative approach, using the analysis of content, graphics, and document analysis to point results. In the history and trajectory, it highlights the representation of twelve percent of higher education enrollments in Brazil. The social role of universities in Rio Grande do Sul state, reveals the connection of institutions with local and regional communities, the commitment to social responsibility and the results of practices and services related to education, research and extension.

**Keywords:** *community institutions, social responsibility, local and regional development.*

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## 1. Initial Considerations

In Brazil, after 2003, despite the effort to guarantee higher education to an increasing part of the population and the advances attained from that period onwards, exclusion is still relevant for most of the Brazilian population regarding the entrance and persistence of young people in entrance age. Compliance with one of the basic rights listed in the 1988 Constitution is still insufficient and there is no prospect that, in the short and/or medium term, this right will be provided by the Brazilian State.

Considered late, Brazil is, according to Rossato [18], the last of the American countries to establish, in the early twentieth century, the first higher education institutions in a setting that is “colonial, dependent, late, class and disengaged from the national reality” (p. 23), with a predominantly ecclesiastical education. From the beginning of the century until the 80s, many institutions have been created, and, as pointed out by Longhi [12], in the 90s, there is a significant increase in the number of isolated Schools and private universities, including the community ones.

Those institutions have emerged, in the Brazilian setting, due to a lack of public power, especially in the interior of the states, with a differentiated nature, organisation and functioning. The initiatives of new structures hold “new social meanings” ([10], p. 18) and, due to the quality of their work, begin to have local, regional and national relevance.

The support of the community institutions occurs, first and foremost, through the 1988 Federal Constitution,

when it enables cooperation in education present in Title VIII, of The Social Order, more specifically in art. 205. In that way, it enables, through legislation, the participation of the civil society and the private sector in the provision of public services in the social field “through a set of legal mechanisms to private persons or private not-for-profit organisations, access to state resources” ([20], p. 24).

Subsequently, the Law of Directives and Bases of National Education – LDB No 9.394/96 – establishes, in art. 20, that community institutions “[...] are established by a group of individuals or by one or more legal entities, including teachers and students unions that include in their sponsor entity representatives from the community”.

Nevertheless, community institutions, which have always had a public, non-state nature, due to the fact that they are not-for-profit, have been considered by the State as private institutions. It should be stressed that public means “what is common, what belongs to everyone” ([21], p. 661), and private, according to Schmidt and Campis [20], “is what is not public, what is individual”. And, although being considered community institutions because they are not-for-profit, those institutions operate on the basis of the tuition paid by their students.

Due to the fact that it is included in the law, but has not been regulated so as to define who is covered by the concept of community institutions, in 2006, a large movement carried out by the Brazilian Association of Community Universities – ABRUC, culminated with the approval of Law 12.881, of November 12, 2013, which provides for the definition and purpose of community institutions and grants the qualification of community higher education institution on the basis of the fulfilment of a number of requirements, including: being organisations of the Brazilian civil society; established as

association or foundation; legal personality under private law; declare assets belonging to civil society entities or to the State Authority; be not-for-profit organisations and have administrative transparency. Upon termination, the assets of the institution should be aimed at a public institution. Law 12.881/13 provides for the transfer of public resources, through public notices, to institutions classified as community ones.

On the basis of the panorama presented, this article discusses a study on the history and trajectory of Higher Education Community Institutions (HECI) in Brazil, characterising, from among the academic institutions, the Community Universities located in Rio Grande do Sul, based on the following question: What is the social role of Gaucho<sup>1</sup> Community Universities in the development of the communities where they are located? So as to answer the question, the purpose of the research is to analyse, on the basis of the mission and vision of those institutions, their importance in the development of the communities where they are located.

To that end, we used the methodological triangulation, involving content analysis elements from inducing words, such as trajectory of community institutions, mission and vision; and document analysis of the statutes of Gaucho universities, analysing whether the mission and vision are being experienced. The analysis of experience, through semi-structured questionnaires with the rectors of those institutions. The results attained point towards the importance of active participation of the institution in the area it operates and possible inducers of teaching, research and extension, which, directly and/or indirectly, favour that development.

### 1.1. Methodological Referrals

By opting for the qualitative approach, it is understood that this option clearly represents this research work, taking into account that Minayo [13] proposes that

Qualitative research (...) is concerned [...] with a level of reality that can not be quantified. That is, it works with the university of realities, meanings, motives, aspirations, beliefs, values and attitudes, which corresponds to a deeper space of relationships, processes and phenomena that can not be reduced to the operationalization of variables (p.21-22),

The qualitative approach is concerned with the world of meanings of actions and human relations, not found in numbers, averages and statistics, and highlights the complexity and contradictions of natural phenomena, the unpredictability and creative originality of interpersonal and social relations ([4], p.78), part of the plea that there is a dynamic relationship between the real world and the subject, a living interdependence between the objective world and the subjectivity of the subject ([4], p.79). According to Baquero ([1], p.9), “quantitative and qualitative data are related to each other”. In this sense, the figures shown on the map, charts and figures collaborated in the qualitative analysis, which as regards the history and trajectory of community institutions. The research carried out through a case study, which, in the design of Stake ([22], P. XI) “is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case”, represents the complexity, the peculiarity and the uniqueness of the

community institutions located in Rio Grande do Sul. For such work, the selected subjects were the Rectors. The technique and the instruments of data took place in a semi-structured questionnaire, ensuring that the script used would enable the presentation of considerations about the reality of each institution. In addition, the Statutes were used, Pedagogical Institutional Projects – PIP, Institutional Development Plans – IDP, with the objective of verifying the mission and vision. Data analysis by methodological triangulation involved content analysis of elements departing from inducing words such as the trajectory of the community, mission and vision, documental analysis to verify if the mission and the vision are being experienced. The results obtained point to the importance of active participation of the institutions in their area of coverage, being inducers of teaching, research and extension, which directly and/or indirectly favor the development.

### 1.2. Community Higher Education Institutions: History and Trajectory

The community higher education institution is “part of the construction and expansion of the public sphere spaces, in which the educational duties and rights should be discussed and constructed” ([10], p. 72). According to Longhi [12], it is worth pointing out that the universities considered as community ones start their processes as higher education Schools, or as isolated Faculties, and, later, they establish as community universities, being differentiated by their nature: denominational, philanthropic, foundation or association, but that have some common features that ascribe them their own identity, which is visible in the vision and mission.

To reflect on this institution means placing it in time and space and involves, first and foremost, seeking the roots of its designation. Community, from the Latin *communitarium*, regards the community, considered either as fundamental structure of society, or as a specific type or form of grouping and has its roots in community schools brought by European immigrants. Notwithstanding the polysemic term, Longhi ([12], p. 133) argues that the concept encompasses several conceptions, and, thus, different initiatives may be considered as community ones. In this sense, the administrative categories affiliated to ABRUC fall within the designation of faculties, university centres and universities.

Due to the fact that its history has been born to fill a gap left by state public institutions, which have settled in large cities, hindering the entrance and persistence of students from the inland regions of the country, especially students from the working and low-income strata, Dalbosco [6], classified the “community” university as the one that has an involvement of the community in its establishment and administration, meaning, in that sense, to be present in its community movement and to contribute to the construction of the academic space that liaises the local and regional community.

The following map shows the geographical distribution shaping those institutions in the Brazilian setting (see Figure 1).

There is greater concentration of community institutions in the South and Midwest region, and the states of São Paulo and Rio Grande do Sul have a

<sup>1</sup> The name Gaucho is used to refer to people born in Rio Grande do Sul.

concentration of more than half of these institutions, as depicted Figure 2. This takes place considering the associative spirit of the European immigrants established in those regions, who have a trajectory of “joining in

unions or associations with economic, sports, recreational, cultural, charity and mutual aid purposes”, as reported by Vogt ([23], p.57).

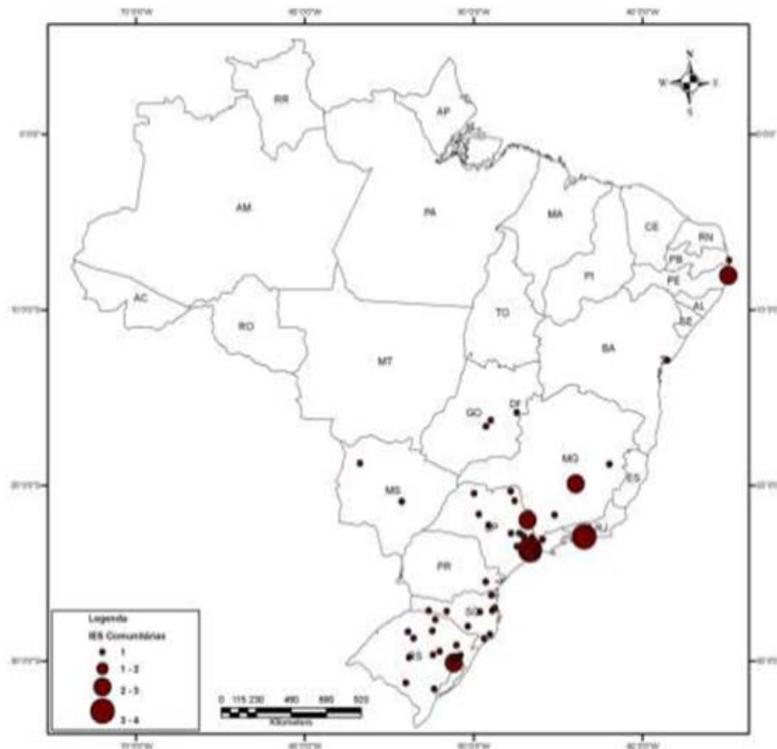


Figure 1. Map of the distribution of Brazilian Community Higher Education Institutions, affiliated to ABRUC (Source: Laboratory LTIG of PUCRS)

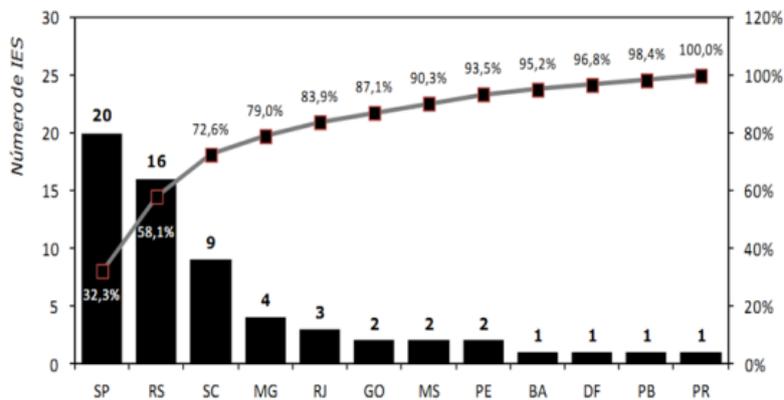


Figure 2. Distribution of the number of Community Higher Education Institutions by Federation Unit (Source: Inep/MEC)

The phenomenon creates a significant community social capital, which, according to Durston (2000, p. 21), “makes up the group cooperation institutions. It lies [...] in

those complex systems, in their regulatory, managerial and sanctioning structures”. This represents social control, relationship of trust and cooperation among all.

Table 1. General statistics of higher education, by administrative category – Brazil – 2013

| Basic Statistics                     | Administrative Category |           |           |         |         |                  |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|---------|---------|------------------|
|                                      | General Total           | Public    |           |         | Private |                  |
|                                      |                         | Total     | Federal   | State   |         | Municipal        |
| <b>Number of Institutions</b>        | <b>2.391</b>            | 301       | 106       | 119     | 76      | <b>2.090</b>     |
| <b>Higher Education - Graduation</b> |                         |           |           |         |         |                  |
| Courses                              | 32.049                  | 10.850    | 5.968     | 3.656   | 1.226   |                  |
| Enrolments                           | <b>7.305.977</b>        | 1.932.527 | 1.137.851 | 604.517 | 190.159 | <b>5.373.450</b> |
| Total Entrances                      | 2.742.950               | 531.846   | 325.267   | 142.842 | 63.737  |                  |
| Graduations                          | 991.010                 | 229.278   | 115.336   | 82.892  | 31.050  |                  |

Source: Inep/MEC.

Table 1 depicts a summary of institutions and enrolments by administrative category. In the period of the presentation of data, Community Institutions were still classified as private.

Table 2 sets out the number of Higher Education Institutions and the number of graduate enrolments by academic organisation - Brazil - 2013.

**Table 2. Number of higher education institutions and Organisation – Brazil – 2013 number of undergraduate Enrolments, by Academic**

| Academic Organisation | Institutions |               | Undergraduate Enrolments |              |
|-----------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------------------|--------------|
|                       | Total        | %             | Total                    | %            |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>2.391</b> | <b>100,0%</b> | <b>7.305.977</b>         | <b>100,0</b> |
| Universities          | 195          | 8,2%          | 3.898.880                | 53,4         |
| University Centres    | 140          | 5,9%          | 1.154.863                | 15,8         |
| Faculties             | 2.016        | 84,3%         | 2.131.827                | 29,2         |
| Ibs abd Cefetsets     | 40           | 1,7%          | 120.407                  | 1,6%         |

Source: Inep/MEC.

The analysis of the tables presented shows that, from the total private institutions, 65 are community ones affiliated to ABRUC, representing around 12% of enrolments in higher education. This percentage is a relevant factor in the context of higher education, considering that community institutions participate in the life of the communities through teaching, research and extension.

### 1.3. The Role of Community Universities in Rio Grande Dosul

Considering the recurring transformations in higher education institutions from their implementation – with all the difficulties –, as well as the stages they have been through in the course of their trajectory, Rossato [17] argues that, from a “uniform institution tends to a multitude, so its structure or organisation is very diverse, depending on the season or on the country where it is located and of the economic, social and cultural policies [...]” (p. 11). These policies Rossato refers to – for the university as a whole – in Brazil, have to do with the implementation of a new university model, and very particularly, this model is very active in Rio Grande do Sul. As for that particularity of Rio Grande do Sul, Silva and Frantz ([10], p. 17) reiterate that

[...] certainly more than in other Brazilian States, rooted in historical traditions, community and regional universities have been born and developed. Their organisation and functioning take place within the space of the expansion of the public sphere. They are new and different experiences, in the Brazilian academic setting and, therefore, challenging ones [...].

Rio Grande do Sul has fifteen (15) community institutions, being eleven (11) Universities and four (4) University Centres. All of them are associated with the Consortium of Gaucho Community Universities – COMUNG. Officially established in 1996, it is governed by a Statute and aims at facilitating the individual strengthening of institutions in an integrative way, through the planning and promotion of joint actions; the assurance in the defense of the educational interests in the administrative spheres and of the organised

civil society; the representativeness before international funding bodies, through the capacity of political-institutional integration; the joint operationalisation of arrangements, agreements and protocols with institutions and government and private bodies, both national and international; the engagement with public bodies, at all levels, and/or private bodies, especially in the area of Science and Technology, ensuring the active presence of the Consortium in the implementation of Technological Poles and in the organisation of joint events.

The vision and mission of the Gaucho community universities are shown in the connection of the institutions with local and regional communities, with the commitment that the results of their practices and their services related to education, research and extension are facing the supported communities, since those higher education institutions are strongly committed to social responsibility, both in the education of citizens and in the identification of the community problems and regional development.

Because most of the community universities are located in the interior of the State, they play a leading role in the context in which they are located and articulate “with the real and collective interests of the local and regional community, considering the social and political significance of their work [...]” ([11], p. 1).

Community Universities have the public in their nature and complete the gap that the State failed to fill, especially in our State of Rio Grande do Sul.

Franco ([9], p. 6) posits that the sponsor entity of institutions may be regarded as a private foundation, an association or a civil society. Neves [14] discusses the legal separation between sponsor entity and sponsored entity, where the first holds the assets, employment contracts, and where the idea of community is reflected in the composition of the General Assembly; the second holds autonomy in the relationships with the academic issues, although some still maintain the concentration of the rector in the management of the sponsor and the sponsored.

When defining the term, Neves [14] seeks to show the consensus on the differences and questions that arise: “it is a private university, sustained and managed by lay or religious groups, but non-state public in nature, geared towards the exclusively educational interests” (pp. 207-208).

So that ideas may ground the clarity of the conception and the practice of the institution, it needs to be understood as an important academic space, that articulates its local and regional community, as its history is born to fill a gap left by public institutions that have settled in large cities, putting aside the students, many of which are workers who have interest in attending university, but who did/do not have the means to move to and survive in a big city.

With the concentration of state universities in large cities, the entrance and persistence of students from the interior, especially working and low-income students, turned out to be hindered. Thus, community universities emerge as an alternative model, because they have, as their principle, the reality and the environment where they are located, and also because they have affordable monthly tuition fees, extending the possibilities of ensuring higher education to a greater number of people. It is noteworthy that, in Rio Grande do Sul, community universities are mainly due to a project of extending

higher education in the form of *multicampi*<sup>2</sup>; they are also due to the commitment of the religious orders and diocesan-mitres, laymen, teachers, independent professionals of local leaderships, as well as to the support of political leaderships.

In the defense of that heritage, Longhi [12] advocates that discussing its complexity should be on the agenda of anyone that is concerned with the development and, also, with the democratisation of Brazilian higher education and as a result of an effort on the part of communities to constitute their spaces of social mobility, of alternative ways of living conditions of their inhabitants.

Regional insertion cannot happen only through the participation of the community in the sponsor institution, but also in the evident commitment of these institutions with their space-time. The region is the geographical environment composed of social groups that share common culture and interests, configured as locus of institutional action.

Due to the fact that they are inserted in a social, cultural, economic and political reality, they need to be a collaborative tool in the education of every citizen. In this sense, Lauxen ([11], p. 1) argues that

[...] The education of the student as a citizen is linked to the real and collective interests of the local and regional community, and considers the social and political significance of its work and how it can contribute to the education of subjects with better conditions to interfere in the community [...].

The analysis of the Statutes of Gaúcho Universities allows clearly realizing, in their mission and vision, the consolidation and implementation of democratic decision-making processes and where the production and dissemination of knowledge through teaching, research and extension activities present, as brand, the innovation, the solidarity action, the interaction with the community, the quality of their services. Those processes are always focused on the educational, cultural, socioeconomic, technological, health, ecological and environmental perspective, aimed at solving local and regional problems; their main goal is the quality of life of the population where they are located.

According to the report of Rector (A), the higher education institution is fulfilling its mission, insofar that integration takes place when “some work initiatives come from the institution, from research and extension activities, whereas others are the result of requests from the community itself”. Another Rector (C) adds “the concern and commitment to the local and regional levels, which is at the heart of strategic decisions”. These statements embody the dimension that institutions represent to their own purposes.

In this sense, Rector (F) emphasises the university extension as one of the differentials of the work carried out by community universities, given that, according to Silva ([21], p. 105), “the extension has always been linked to the idea of social function of the university and to the way it could intervene with the social sectors surrounding it”.

<sup>2</sup>According to Encyclopaedia of University Pedagogy, Glossary, v. 2, 2007, *multicampi* means the university with an organisational structure distributed in several geographical areas, without the establishment of order of importance to any of them.

## 2. Final Remarks

The characterisation of higher education institutions in Brazil, named community institutions, shows, in their history and trajectory, an important social role in the development of the communities where they are located. It is also noteworthy the democratic and participatory nature in the management of HECIs. This is due to the fact that, in general, these institutions are rather focused on local development – hence the designation of “community” institutions – providing various interactions and services to the communities surrounding them. The public interest of their action would reside in that point, albeit the educational service may not be necessarily free.

Community institutions are confronted with the challenge of continuing to be present in the lives of local or regional communities, of structuring and valuing their instruments and means of insertion in the broader context, in the world of cultural, political or economic relationships, yet keeping the power of control, as far as possible, with their protagonists. As stated by Milton Santos ([19], p. 252), “The concrete history of our time relocates the issue of place in a central position”. The author addresses the strength of the place. The community organisation is the expression of the strength of the place, that is, it translates the strength in social relationships, especially in the diverse spaces of local or regional development.

Community institutions have, at the core of their vision and mission, the commitment to regional development and the qualification of the populations’ lives. This principle is present in their official documents since their establishment. Responsibility for producing knowledge that is useful to society, in an innovative way, has caused, little by little, that community universities are recognised at the national and international level for their teaching, research and extension.

Thus, community institutions have been born and raised with autonomy, with their own identity and have met the main goals considered vital to the development of a world made up of fairer countries and with equity.

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