

EXPANDING THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES TO PROMOTE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE TERRITORY: A NEW MANAGEMENT PARADIGM AT RIO DE JANEIRO STATE UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The present work deals with the management experience at Rio de Janeiro State University– UERJ, where a new management and governance model was adopted in order to strengthen university autonomy. This new model has given rise to the expansion of universities' responsibility and has reorganized management sectors in a process that involves the renewal of internal legislation with the view to regulate and guide the university's action in the process of knowledge transfer to society through services.

The result of this new regulatory framework is the improvement and increase in the spectrum of partnerships between universities and governments, the strengthening of pre-existing partnerships, and, finally, the attribution of new responsibilities to the so-called supervisory units or “supervisory bodies of the central administration of the university”.

Great part of the efforts aimed at rearticulating UERJ's internal system points to the need to overcome the historical internal fragmentation, redirecting management to an articulated system which is able to reflect the political will of the authorities involved, in the sense of an autonomous and radical evolution of the institution's internal governance.

It can be stated that the transformations seen at UERJ are part of a broader process inscribed in the scope of the current management strategies to bring universities closer to the demands of society. Its main characteristics are, as follow: the integration of disciplines and thematic areas that enhance knowledge in the face of regional development; the prioritization of partnerships with the public sector, the valuing of innovation and projects with the potential for technology transfer, the expansion of the role of universities to promote social and economic development of the territory; the strengthening of the role of universities for the planet sustainability; the financing associated with academic results (publications and students' involvement), the sophistication of monitoring, management systems and their indicators; the encouragement of regional action and the implementation of correlated management and governance models. This work, therefore, presents a brief balance of this experience based on systematized data between 2020 and 2021.

Keywords: *Higher education, education management, university and society.*

1. Introduction

The strategic theme of University-Society integration as a premise to combat institutional isolation and as a desirable university model has clear recognition from UNESCO – World Conference on Higher Education (CMES), held in Paris - 2009.

Understood as public goods by the participating countries, universities are expected to make commitments to expand opportunities for access and implementation of flexible research systems that can be useful to society, and to seek greater integration, avoiding isolation. (Dilvo Ristoff, p. 284)

This commitment, however, involves the issue of university autonomy. Established as a principle and a necessary condition for the freedom of academic works, autonomy implies a social commitment and, in this sense, both must necessarily walk together. Such an institutional dimension must not exist by itself. Autonomy can only be justified by quality, pertinence, effectiveness, transparency and social responsibility.

In this sense, socioeconomic, cultural and political reality forms the substrate of social demands, involving the great challenges of the present moment and its potentialities, as well as the lack of existing knowledge without disregarding the future that needs to be thought, rethought, created, formulated and made possible. (idem, p.288)

Departing from this perspective, Rio de Janeiro State University has made efforts to reorganize its management, through actions that range from new internal regulatory frameworks to greater openness to incorporate responsibilities and services that expand the constitutional tripod of “teaching, research, extension”, especially valuing institutional participation within the scope of public policies in the State of Rio de Janeiro.

2. Discussion: The strategic character of university-society interface for the promotion of citizenship

The expansion of university-society integration interfaces – aimed at strengthening its strategic character in promoting citizenship – is not limited to partnerships to develop services. Furthermore, it is worth looking at direct actions of inclusion, as part of the search for greater integration and realization of the institution's emancipatory purpose. In Brazil, this potential is seen in a paradigmatic way from the approval of the so-called quota law – Law 12.71 of August 2012 – which reserves 50% of vacancies in admission exams to universities and federal institutes for students who have completed high school at public institutions. Defined percentages of these vacancies must be reserved for black, brown, indigenous students and those from families whose average monthly income does not exceed a minimum wage and a half. In a short time, this radically altered the spectrum of the university, whether in its academic routine, or in the establishment of new challenges of democracy. It is worth noting the pioneering role of UERJ in this process, since it is the first Brazilian public university to adopt the quota system.

Wrana Panizzi (2015) states that the university can be understood both from an instrumental dimension, whose foundation is the idea that it must unilaterally meet the interests of the market versus the anthropological dimension of the university, where the conception is sustained by the subjects and their experiences as holders of citizenship rights.

This idea is also defended by Chauí (2003), when she states that: “[...] Education and culture came to be conceived as constitutive of citizenship and, therefore, as a right of citizens, causing, in addition to the vocation republic, the university would also become a social institution, inseparable from the idea of democracy and the democratization of knowledge: either to realize this idea or to oppose it”. (Chauí, in: Wrana, p.311)

The principle of autonomy, considering it as a basic condition for sustaining a democratizing institutional project, reveals that the university is “marked by constant tension between autonomy as a *sine qua non* condition for the production of knowledge and innovation, and its social responsibility, which translates into the necessary commitment to the exercise of the right to education that imposes limits on this autonomy”. (p. 335)

It is important to stress that university autonomy cannot be understood as a means for universities to avoid the necessary relationship with society, to which they are accountable. Therefore, autonomy, in this case, would gain a relative meaning, with the constant need to establish a dialogue with the field of social rights, namely the social responsibility of the university.

Based on the principles of autonomy and the university's social responsibility, and with the need to overcome the conflict of quality dissociated from relevance and pertinence, a model of university radically linked with society is envisaged, stating that it is up to universities to develop projects aimed at satisfying social demands, whose result should have immediate implications for increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of public policies, engendering orientation for the research agenda reflected in a vision of curricula and in a more effective extension practice. (p.338): “The university system must identify, in the large blocks of government investment, the knowledge demands that can be satisfied by mobilizing its research potential, through the formulation of projects promoted by the public sector”. (p. 339)

If on the one hand, the neoliberal winds blowing throughout the 1990s and still continues in the present, imposed budget reduction and a new rationalization to manage universities and knowledge production bodies, on the other hand, contemporary challenges, especially those linked to the effort to mitigate the consequences of the capitalist production model and its impacts on nature, the higher education system is urged to bring its internal agenda closer to social and economic demands.

Thus, universities assert themselves on the global stage as one of the strategic instruments to face issues involving environmental resources, poverty eradication, health and well-being, infrastructure, gender conflicts, migratory processes, etc.

The understanding of such experience permits to expose a model which allows the public spirit, ethics and transparency to preside over their actions, preserving the great public mission of universities and research centers, but, at the same time, that such establishments can act in the process of society development.

Paradeise (2013) calls this process a virtuous circle between “autonomy, resources and a balanced governance model”, an indispensable circuit for such a model to produce positive results, generating mutual trust between academics and institutions, executive legitimacy for managing projects and partnerships, attracting of material resources, solid reputation as well as attraction and retention of talent (professors and students).

This strategy became a sensitive factor of transformation in universities' life, since such alliances generated new opportunities, especially when it comes to the establishments' new positioning in the territory, constituting new identities in terms of their mission in the face of society's demands.

3. Conclusion: UERJ's experience

With this point of view, UERJ instituted in the last biennium (2021-2021) a set of actions, such as integrating disciplines and thematic areas which enhance knowledge on regional development; prioritizing partnerships with the public sector; valuing innovation and projects with technology transfer potential; expanding the role of universities to promote social and economic development of the territory; strengthening the role of universities for the planet sustainability; financing of activities associated with academic results (publications and student involvement); promoting the sophistication of monitoring and management systems and their indicators; promoting the encouragement of regional action and the implementation of correlated management and governance models. In order to illustrate the results, three cases follow below:

Environmental Management and Education (2021) - The project involves professors from the Faculty of Engineering (FEN/UERJ) in partnership with the Department of Roads and Highways of the State of Rio de Janeiro (DER/RJ), where UERJ guides DER/RJ inspectors in the adoption of new attitudes towards specific aspects of the monitoring of works, introducing new routines.

In this way, UERJ supports DER/RJ so that – parallel to the knowledge transfer – the works in progress are already monitored in terms of respect for the current environmental requirements, thus configuring a scenario of “in-service training”.

For this, the University works in field services, carrying out periodic inspections in the works, observing the fulfillment of the environmental requirements and the conditions imposed in the licensing.

Additionally, UERJ uses its specialized technical staff to prepare Studies, Reports and Assessments, which require short-term contracts by the DER/RJ, for continuity and compliance with licensing processes. The University also acts in environmental education actions with the workers involved and provides communication material which allows it to act in the dissemination of environmental awareness to society, as well as to account for the efforts it has been making, generating preservation and social transformation.

Public Health Assessment and Management (2020) - Comprised of professors from the Institute of Mathematics and Statistics (IME/UERJ), the project has the participation of retired professor Narcisa Maria Gonçalves dos Santos, one of the greatest national references in the treatment of statistical data, in addition to encompassing professors/researchers and the University's student body in all its stages. With the purpose of evaluating the satisfaction of patients treated at 64 Health Units in small towns located in the State of Rio de Janeiro, the project aims to give voice to patients who use the Unified Health System in these towns. Through this quantitative research, UERJ developed an inferential results platform that allows the identification and referral of parameters on the image and performance of the services provided by the Health Units linked to the SES/RJ and the alignment of activities relevant to the Management Excellence Program of the Secretariat, creating conditions for permanent improvement of public health services.

Education and the Indigenous Peoples (2021) - The project aims to carry out the course “Cultures and history of indigenous peoples: subsidies for the implementation of Law 11.645/2008”, which will be held by the Center of Studies on Indigenous Peoples, Interculturality and Education at Baixada Fluminense Faculty of Education (FEBF), under the coordination of Professor Kelly Russo (FEBF), within the scope of UERJ. This course is justified by the need to offer subsidies to elementary and high school teachers on issues related to indigenous peoples in their relationship with Brazilian cultural diversity, the inclusion of indigenous themes in national school – with a view to apply the Law

11.645/2008 – as well as training education professionals in the municipal network of Duque de Caxias, with the aim at improving the approach to themes of cultures and history of Indigenous Peoples in pedagogical and curricular proposals.

The project aims to strengthen the partnership and integration between the university and the basic education network in order to improve the quality of education; guide the production of didactic-pedagogical strategies to deconstruct mistaken and prejudiced notions about indigenous peoples; encourage practices which value multiethnicity and cultural plurality as a heritage of indigenous peoples and Brazilian society; promote theoretical-practical training for teachers on contemporary realities of indigenous peoples in Brazil; and expand, through Distance Learning (EAD), access to educational technologies for teacher training.

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