UNIVERSITY EXTENSION BEYOND THE EDUCATIONAL AXIS: CONTRIBUTIONS AND
CHALLENGES FOR THE EMPOWERMENT PROCESS OF THE WORKING CLASSES IN
BRAZIL

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ARTICLE INFO & ABSTRACT \\
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Article history: & Objective: The objective of this article is to identify the contributions and challenges of the University Extension to the process of empowerment of the popular classes in Brazil. \\
Received 17 October 2023 & \textbf{Theoretical Reference:} The authors studied point to the possibility of the University Extension proposing dialogs and transformations between the university and various sectors of society (Soares, 2011). Maciel (2010) clarifies that the University Extension contributes to the approximation of the university with society, which contributes to the democratization of knowledge and development of the critical sense of the population. However, there are still challenges and difficulties regarding the implementation of the extensionist actions, both in relation to the implementation of the actions, as well as the continuity of the proposals developed. \\
Accepted 16 January 2024 & Design/Methodology/Approach: We research and study the articles on University Extension, from its genesis to the present day. A survey of articles on education in the capitalist society model was also carried out. The research was carried out from academic sites and periodicals. \\
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Keywords: & Results: Although there is a significant contribution of the University Extension to the process of empowerment of the popular classes in Brazil, there are still difficulties as to the continuous and effective execution in this process. Both as regards long-term actions, as well as the impact of the contradictions that exist in this model of society, which still persists inequalities, injustices and arbitrariness. \\
University Extension; & \textbf{Research, Practical and Social Implications:} We suggest researches and in-depth studies on the theme, that make possible strategies for the Extension dialog with the community and be effective in a continuous and democratic manner. \\
Popular Empowerment; & \textbf{Originality/Value:} The studies point to significant importance of the University Extension in terms of a dialogical relationship with society, as well as collaboration in the process of empowerment of the popular classes in Brazil. \\
Popular Classes; & Doi: https://doi.org/10.26668/businessreview/2024.v9i1.4222 \\
Extension. & \\
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EXTENSÃO UNIVERSITÁRIA PARA ALÉM DO EIXO EDUCACIONAL: CONTRIBUIÇÕES E
DESAFIOS PARA O PROCESSO DE EMPODERAMENTO DAS CLASSES POPULARES NO BRASIL

RESUMO
\textbf{Objetivo:} O objetivo deste artigo consiste em identificar as contribuições e desafios da Extensão Universitária para o processo de empoderamento das classes populares no Brasil.

\textbf{Referencial Teórico:} Os autores estudados apontam a possibilidade de a Extensão Universitária propor diálogos e transformações entre a universidade e diversos setores da sociedade (Soares, 2011). Maciel (2010) esclarece que a Extensão Universitária colabora para a aproximação da universidade com a sociedade, que contribui para a democratização do conhecimento e desenvolvimento do senso crítico da população. Entretanto, ainda há desafios

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e dificuldades no que se referem à implementação das ações extensionistas, tanto em relação à execução das ações, bem como da continuidade das propostas desenvolvidas.

**Desenho/Metodologia/Abordagem:** Pesquisamos e estudamos os artigos sobre Extensão Universitária, desde sua gênese até os dias atuais. Também foi feito um levantamento de artigos sobre a educação no modelo de sociedade capitalista. A pesquisa efetivou-se a partir de sites acadêmicos e de periódicos.

**Resultados:** Embora haja significativa contribuição da Extensão Universitária para o processo de empoderamento das classes populares no Brasil, ainda há dificuldades quanto à execução contínua e efetiva nesse processo. Tanto no que concerne a ações de longo prazo, bem como o impacto das contradições existentes nesse modelo de sociedade, que ainda perdua desigualdades, injustiças e arbitrariedades.

**Pesquisa, Implicações Práticas e Sociais:** Sugerimos pesquisas e aprofundamentos sobre a temática, que possibilitem estratégias para que a Extensão dialogue com a comunidade e se efetive de forma contínua e democrática.

**Originalidade/Valor:** Os estudos apontam significativa importância da Extensão Universitária no que concerne a uma relação dialógica com a sociedade, bem como de colaboração no processo de empoderamento das classes populares no Brasil.

**Palavras-chave:** Extensão Universitária, Empoderamento popular, Classes Populares, Extensão.

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**INTRODUCTION**

University extension in Brazil is relatively recent compared to other countries. While in other countries the existence of universities dates back to the 16th century, in Brazil universities were created in the 20th century (Paula, 2013).

As a result of various structural changes in politics, economics and education, university extension has also undergone significant changes throughout history. A country that has
suffered torturous processes that have tarnished its history, such as the military dictatorship that began in the 1960s and was a landmark of violence and torture, has seen university extension collaborate in the fight for social transformation, specifically from the 1950s to 1964, when there were significant struggles for structural reforms in the country (Paula, 2013).

Over the years, the structure of university extension has evolved in response to changes in government plans and political strategies.

The objective of this paper is to demonstrate how university extension can contribute to the empowerment of the working class. Based on bibliographical reading, a dialog was sought with the authors studied in order to understand the trends, contradictions and possibilities of University Extension beyond the educational axis.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
A Brief History of University Extension in Brazil

University Extension in Brazil was born late compared to other countries. According to Paula (2013), the creation of universities in Brazil took place in the 20th century, whereas in several South American countries universities had already existed since the 16th century. The author explains that these institutions were governed by religious orders, never aimed at freedom and were elitist and segregated in nature, with no links to the lower classes.

The first official university in Brazil was the University of Rio de Janeiro, created in 1920 (Araújo, 2011). In the 1930s, Decree 19.851/31 established university extension, as this legislation laid the foundations for the Brazilian university system. It was during the Revolution of the 1930s that university extension first took hold in the country, where the government dominated not only the field of economic policy, but also social policy. In the Vargas era, with the Francisco Campos Reform, the concept of education as a social function and state task was established (Freire, 2011). According to the author (Freire, 2011, p. 10)

> We can thus see that it was within a dictatorial government, with elitist conceptions, that an attempt was made, for the first time in Brazilian history (through extension), to bring the university closer to society. A rapprochement that did not take place at this juncture and which was perpetuated over the years by maintaining this distance.

In 1962, the Second National Seminar on University Reform took place, providing a platform for significant debates and discussions, culminating in the Paraná Charter. In the late 1950s, a spirit of struggle for university reform emerged, in which criticism and questioning of the university's structure were in evidence, in a clear proposal for significant changes to the
institution's current model. As Paula (2013) points out, this manifestation of social movements, representatives of organized society and various institutions, was configured into two groups that aimed to combat misery and poverty, as representative fronts: the reformist strand, which was represented by ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) and ISEB (Higher Institute of Brazilian Studies) and, as the author points out, are institutions that configure Brazilian national developmentalism. On the other hand, there is the video-political manifestation of anti-capitalist and socialist movements, which are focused on the grounds that the peripheral and dependent capitalism that prevails in the country cannot be overcome except by overcoming the capitalist mode of production (Paula, 2013).

For Freire (2011), the questioning movement for university reform accentuated the critical debate, however, within the government, this process stagnated, since Law 4.024 of 1961 characterized extension as a simple course modality, disregarding its objectives and purposes. Paula (2013) points out that university extension was of considerable importance in the struggle for social transformation in the country, specifically from the 1950s to 1964, when there were significant struggles for structural reforms in the country.

In 1962, the II National Seminar on University Reform took place, a space for important debates, discussions and recommendations, which were concretized in the Paraná Charter. The movement for University Reform was the result of the meeting of student movements and general struggles for social change, which characterized a worker-student alliance and a worker-peasant alliance. The student mobilization itself sought to bring together and take hold of other social demands (Paula, 2013).

In 1967, Extension was mentioned and conceived in Decree Law No. 252, which, according to Freire (2011, p. 10) "highlights the complementary nature of extension in relation to teaching and research, in order to give the latter the sense of 'social usefulness' that they do not possess".

During the dictatorial period, characterized by violence, torture, and suppression of opposition, university extension played a role in addressing emerging social problems, "without interfering or threatening the interests of the regime" (Freire, 2011, p. 11). According to the author, after the fall of the dictatorial regime, there was a process of disinterest in university extension, which took the circuit of new discussions and interests from the 1990s onwards, mainly under the Fernando Henrique Cardoso government.

(...) The premise for restarting the discussion on extension in the 1990s was the university's shift towards the "privatizing mentality" promoted by the neoliberal structural reforms,
which focused on deregulating markets, opening up trade and finance, privatizing the public sector and reducing the size of the state. (Freire, 2011, p. 11)

In 1987, the Forum of Pro-Rectors of Extension of Brazilian Public Universities (FORPROEX) was created, which was crucial for the extension policy that exists today, both in terms of the construction of instruments for evaluating and monitoring extension activities, the institutionalization of extension as a university activity and also as a mediator in drawing up and defining public policies to stimulate extension (Paula, 2013).

The 1990s were marked by the implementation of neoliberal logic, in which the market took precedence over the state, which was supposed to interfere minimally and randomly in social problems and demands. The process of privatizing the public sector is taking place in a light-hearted manner and education is no different. The expansion of private education is significant and, as Paula (2013) explains, compared to the present day, it is the majority of public education.

The Fernando Henrique Cardoso government obediently followed the dictates of international organizations, such as the World Bank and the Washington Consensus. It was a government that oriented its policies in a way that was subordinate and associated with international organizations, defenders and administrators of the globalization of capital, whose central objective was the ideology of the free market as well as the immutability of its laws (Frigotto and Ciavatta, 2003). For these authors, the FHC government's economic and social project assumed and supported various assumptions, drawn from the Washington Consensus, which were summarized as follows:

(...) The polarities, the class struggle, the ideologies, the egalitarian utopias and the state policies based on them are over. The second main idea is that we are in a new era - of globalization, competitive modernity, productive restructuring and re-engineering - in which we are out of step and to which we must adjust. This adjustment must take place not through protectionist, interventionist or statist policies, but in accordance with the laws of the globalized, worldwide market (ibid, p. 106).

The authors point out that, for the first time in our history, the FHC government transformed the business and mercantile idea of school education into state policy. By dismantling the sense of the public, the state began to exercise private functionality: "it is a question of adjusting school education to serve productive restructuring and organizational changes and the technical-scientific base to the new international division of labour" (ibid, p. 107). In this sense, Freire points out (2011, p. 12) that
The adjustment promoted by neoliberalism has made higher education a promising market that has aroused business interests. (...) Based on the logic of the market, the installation of a new educational establishment is no longer guided by national development, but by the possibilities of being profitable for its owner. (...) As in a diploma factory, what counts in the end is having consumers for the product on sale: education.

The process of privatization of what should, in short, be public, free of charge and serve the various social strata, affects various sectors of society: housing, health, culture, leisure, education, sanitation, among others. What was supposed to be the state's responsibility went through a process of transferring power and civil society was invited to fulfill its obligation as a citizen and volunteer. In this period, which continues to the present day, the growth of the Third Sector and Non-Governmental Organizations is significant, where the State adopts the discourse of inefficiency and incapacity, and consolidates responsibility for social problems to the individual and civil society. These are the "Friends of the School", "Criança Esperança", and other social projects, often headed by public figures such as artists, teachers, shopkeepers, among others, who, even with good intentions and responsibilities, defragment the actions that should be the state's, making the effectiveness of the projects questionable, since the continuity of the projects cannot be guaranteed. The dismantling of public social policies and their respective services removes from the state its responsibilities in terms of "preserving the right to life of broad social segments, transferred to the eventual solidarity of citizens, that is, to the leftovers of their time and income" (IAMAMOTO, 2001, p. 16).

In this space of consolidation of the mercantile logic, in which (almost) everything can be bought, financed and acquired through capital, university extension loses its strength as an agent of the possibility of societal transformation. According to Freire (2011, p. 13), "the strength of this paradigm inspires university actions that are unconcerned with a rationale beyond market criteria".

In order to contextualize university extension in the current Brazilian context, it is necessary to reflect on the role of extension in society, its impacts, possibilities and challenges, which will be addressed in the next topic.

**University Extension: the Bias of Possibility**

Extension is one of the two essential pillars of a university or educational institution, working in conjunction with teaching and research. The role of extension goes beyond the activities inherent in teaching and research. As Soares (2011, p. 567) points out, "the university must be a driver of social change and transformation, and not just an instrument that supports the current status quo". Still according to the author, it is university extension that "best
translates the possibility of this dialogic and transformative relationship between the university and these sectors of society” (Soares, 2011, p. 567).

One of the main challenges for university extension is to avoid passing and welfare actions (Soares, 2011). Still according to the author, "extension cannot be transformed into poor programs for the poor, just to appease the university's 'bad conscience' about its social role" (Soares, 2011, p. 567). It is essential that the university dialogues with society and the three branches of government (executive, legislative and judiciary) so that a similar agenda can be drawn up between the branches for the benefit of the population (Maciel, 2010).

The Forum of Pro-Rectors of Extension (FORPROEX) defines university extension as contributing to societal change. According to Soares (2011), since its inception, FORPROEX has emphasized the role of the university in consolidating the democratic process and actions that promote social development. By assuming the character of a university geared towards the interests of the working classes - the majority of the Brazilian population - the very concept of extension

This includes, but goes beyond, its traditional understanding of disseminating knowledge (courses, conferences, seminars), providing services (assistance, advice and consultancy) and cultural dissemination (holding events or artistic and cultural products), pointing towards a conception of the university in which the relationship with the population is seen as a necessary oxygenation of academic life (Soares, 2011, p. 569).

This oxygenation is essential not only for academic life but also for the consolidation of a democratic society, aimed at overcoming social inequalities and extreme antagonisms between social classes. For Maciel (2010), university extension helps to bring society and the university closer together, generating the expansion of knowledge and the development of the population's critical sense, mainly for the process of providing information and knowledge to the population. For the author, in addition to the traditional condition of consolidating knowledge, extension enhances the analysis and study of major social problems in the country, contributing to popular participation as subjects and, via teaching, extension can be a way of dialoguing and serving the population through critical education. According to Paula (2013, p. 21), with regard to extension actions, 

(...) it is not a question of imposing, prescribing, dictating, but of sharing, dialoguing, interacting, which are the references of the principles that govern university extension today: I) the inseparability between teaching, research and extension; II) dialogical interaction with society; III) inter- and transdisciplinarity as the organizing principles of extension actions; IV) the search for the greatest impact and social effectiveness of actions; V) the affirmation of the ethical and social commitments of the university.
The role of extension should not be centered on activities inherent to the university or primarily linked to actions that go beyond the academic bias. Extension means going beyond the walls of the school and of knowledge, breaking down the hierarchical barriers of knowledge and languages. Dialoguing, in a democratic and linear way, with society, especially with the working class. The importance of giving a voice to the working classes is highlighted, in a dialogue that does not favor the imposition of a voice and knowledge, but the construction and deconstruction of reality, with the central objective of overcoming the antagonisms between the classes, especially poverty, misery and social exclusion.

It is the task of extension to build a relationship of sharing between the scientific and technological knowledge produced at the university and the knowledge held by traditional communities. It is the task of extension to promote dialogic interaction, openness to otherness and diversity as a condition for self-determination, freedom and emancipation (Paula, 2013, p. 20).

Extension, if directed towards a dialogical relationship with society, can make a substantial contribution to the process of empowering the working classes. The theoretical perspective that underpins our understanding of popular empowerment is based on Freire's conception of social class empowerment. Freire, in dialoguing with Shor about the term *empowerment*, emphasizes its conceptual understanding, which is not limited to the community, individual, psychological or merely social sphere. Empowerment, for Freire, is a concept linked to social class (1986) and has a collective dimension. For the educator,

The question of social class *empowerment* involves the question of how the working class, through its own experiences, its own construction of culture, strives to obtain political power. This makes *empowerment* much more than an individual or psychological invention. It indicates a political process of the dominated classes seeking their own freedom from domination, a long historical process of which education is one front in the struggle. (Freire, 1986, p. 72)

Meirelles and Ingrassia (2006, p. 7), when studying the theoretical perspectives on social class empowerment, emphasize the importance that "the process of awareness takes on, alongside dialogue (dialogical education as an epistemological stance) and situated pedagogy (pedagogical practice situated in the real conditions of each group)". Empowerment should be understood as a process and result of social interactions and actions in which individuals, based on social relations with other individuals, take ownership of their lives and their stories, building criticality towards their reality, the capacity for social and personal construction, which enable changes in social power relations (Baquero, 2012). The author, based on Freire's theory, explains that empowerment requires a process of awareness that is characterized by a change
from "naive thinking to critical awareness. Awareness is a process of knowledge that takes place in the dialectical relationship between man and the world, in an act of action-reflection, that is, it takes place in praxis" (Baquero, 2012, p. 9).

University extension can be an effective element in the process of empowering the working classes, since it provides the opportunity to develop actions that work on critical exercise, the process of raising awareness and information about social rights, access to goods and services, political organization, among others. Care must be taken not to construct an extensionist identity that characterizes the role of university extension as a supposed second state. As Araújo (2011, p. 7) states, "as the state also moves away from its public functions, the social deficit increases and the university is called upon to respond to a variety of demands, with university extension being the best way to do so". This caution requires actions that are clear in their purpose, as there is a risk that extension will be dressed up as activities and commitments that are essentially obligations of the state. University extension must be geared towards meeting, responding to and dialoguing with the interests of society, not capital. Soares (2011, p. 568) points out that the work of extension must "build shared knowledge with the public that funds it: ultimately, the target public of extension itself". (...) Extension activities cannot be commercialized".

In this discussion, Freire (2011) points out that rights are not guaranteed and won simply through access to the labor market, but through universal and egalitarian public policies. In order to think about this more broadly, it can be said that guaranteeing rights must begin with guaranteeing the conditions for the active participation of the working classes and society, in an incisive, coherent dialogue that corresponds to the desires and needs of the working class.

University Extension promotes an exchange of knowledge between the University and society, since it looks to society for imminent problems and the solutions that the population employs to deal with them, and when it returns to the University it must promote its feedback for new knowledge and research, with a view to collaborating in the solution of difficulties, effectively participating in social reality. (...) Responsibility for transforming the lives of their fellow human beings, without replacing the responsibilities of the State, but rather promoting science that is directly applicable to society. (Araújo, 2011, p. 7)

Thus, the role of Extension has functions of extreme significance that go beyond the character of teaching which, according to Paula (2013), houses bodies and enhances activities that unite scientific culture and the culture of the humanities, such as the role of theaters, libraries, galleries, museums, which are "indispensable vehicles of mediation between the
producers of knowledge and symbolic goods and the recipients of these actions, be they students or the various subjects outside the university (Paula, 2013, p. 22).

Dialogue about the role of Extension and its potential must also take place with society, because Extension is not for society, it is with it. And if directed with clear purposes that are not linked to the commercialization of education and the capitalization of knowledge, Extension can make an extreme contribution to building a fairer, more critical and more equal society.

METHOD

This article is a qualitative study based on a literature review. The research consisted of a search for theoretical content on the subject in books, periodical websites and academic consultation sites. After researching the material, the aim was to analyze the theme based on epistemological assumptions, founded by the authors mentioned throughout the paper.

RESULTS

University extension has significant potential to contribute to the empowerment of the working class. Although permeated by the countless contradictions and adversities imposed by the capitalist system, the implementation of extensionist practices aimed at expanding information, knowledge about rights, political understanding and its consequences, political rights, representativeness, among others, can have an impact on the way in which the working classes can demand that their rights under the law are enforced, as well as articulate themselves so that no rights are violated. Extension as an educational axis beyond the school can break down barriers that are often blocked in teaching and research: language distance, level of education, access to information and technological resources, bureaucratic academic obstacles, among others. Extension can and should speak the language of the working classes and engage in dialog with them. University extension has the considerable capacity to learn from and learn with those it works with. It is a process of exchanging knowledge that can significantly change the social environment and the way society is structured and organized.

DISCUSSION

Throughout history, university extension has played a crucial role in constructing a dialogic and democratic society. Although, for a certain period, it maintained the character of attending to social problems without confronting them critically, gradually, with the process of democratization in the country, it gained space and a political and social voice.
Currently, university extension faces a common challenge: overcoming the influence of capital, hurting the mercantilist spheres and becoming effective in a critical and coherent way with society. Extension holds significant potential to contribute to the empowerment and upliftment of the lower classes, since its actions are directly linked to the community. Thus, rethinking and reconstructing the idea of Extension consists of considering it not just as a propellant of knowledge, but as the collective sounding of popular cries. To consider Extension as a contributor and potential developer to the process of empowering the working classes is to deconstruct the idea of working for the community, but with it. To extend is not just to go beyond teaching and research, but to strategically reach what needs to be discussed and strengthened: the multiplicity of voices of the working classes that make up Brazilian society.

REFERENCES


