

Indigenous representation in higher education: promoting health and sustainability beyond territories

Representatividade indígena no ensino superior: promoção de saúde e sustentabilidade além dos territórios

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ABSTRACT Indigenous peoples' access to Brazilian universities has had an exclusionary history. With the aim of analyzing implications and consequences of their presence in these spaces, a federal university was the object of this intervention study due to its pioneering spirit. Indigenous students, teachers, and managers exposed, in focus groups and interviews, 'unsaid' aspects of indigenous higher education. It was verified how their contemporary movements leave the territories and reach the sector, dialoguing with the proposals for health promotion, sustainability, and Sustainable Development Goals. Advances, difficulties, contradictions, and cultural contributions reveal their importance and favor broader issues, offering new perspectives on the processes developed.

KEYWORDS Sustainable development. Interdisciplinary practices. Affirmative policies. Health promotion. Health of indigenous populations.

RESUMO O acesso dos povos indígenas às universidades brasileiras teve um histórico excludente. Com o objetivo de analisar implicações e desdobramentos de suas presenças nesses espaços, uma universidade federal foi objeto deste estudo de intervenção por seu pioneirismo. Estudantes indígenas, docentes e gestores expuseram, em grupos focais e entrevistas, 'não ditos' do ensino superior indígena. Verificou-se como seus movimentos contemporâneos saem dos territórios e chegam ao setor, dialogando com as propostas da promoção da saúde, sustentabilidade e Objetivos de Desenvolvimento Sustentável. Avanços, dificuldades, contradições e contribuições culturais revelam a importância destes e favorecem questões mais amplas, oferecendo novos olhares a processos desenvolvidos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE Desenvolvimento sustentável. Práticas interdisciplinares. Políticas afirmativas. Promoção de saúde. Saúde de populações indígenas.

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Introduction

Emphasis on health as a fundamental right and a global social goal has been given since the Alma-Ata Conference¹. Similarly, concerns about environmental and social issues worldwide have grown significantly, culminating in the agreement on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030². It has been concluded that to achieve these premises, action and interrelation of many other social and economic sectors are necessary, opening up also greater possibilities to verify potentials of the education-health interrelation.

The paradigm of health promotion³, as a broader look at health justifications and outcomes, had already signaled the importance of peace, education, housing, food, income, ecosystem stability, social justice, and equity for health through healthy public policies, favorable environments, by strengthening community actions, and developing personal skills. More recently, this perspective has given greater emphasis to the socio-environmental determination of health, relating to the need for health promotion and sustainability actions in the territories⁴.

In the educational sector, as effective measures to reduce inequalities, the World Declaration on Education for All occurred in the 1990s, justifying the universalization of access to education and promoting equity through improving its quality⁵. When it comes to the cultural diversity of Brazil, especially the scenario of indigenous school education, this aspect has not yet fully consolidated.

Through struggles and due to a historical debt, the Law of Guidelines and Bases (LDB) of 1996⁶, in its art. 78, establishes the duty to ensure indigenous people the recovery of their memories, the reaffirmation of their ethnic identities, and the appreciation of their languages and sciences as a form of empowerment. At the same time, the LDB states that access to information and technical and scientific knowledge from other societies should be facilitated for them.

Thus, indigenous school education has been transforming and enhancing as an instrument for valuing and systematizing the knowledge and traditional practices of these communities, accessing Western knowledge, reducing inequalities, and guaranteeing rights⁷.

The compulsory schooling of indigenous children, now with the right to respect for their ways of life, was an establishing step in indigenous empowerment issues in the sector, as well as generating new questions about how to reconcile different worldviews at their various levels and how to reconstruct a historically colonizing space. Contemporary society does not value the practices and knowledge of the various indigenous peoples, still imposing on them the culture of capitalist society.

The dismantling of the State in several countries, after the advance of neoliberalism, highlighted these exclusions of groups in various sectors, the growth of social inequalities, and an increase in concerns about the distribution of wealth within social formations and the inclusion of more disadvantaged population groups⁸. Poverty and inequalities, in this sense, present themselves as expressions of neoliberal agendas that prioritize economic development to the detriment of social and human development.

To contemplate all that was proposed in this new configuration of the indigenous educational sector, the need for indigenous teacher training arises. The figure of the indigenous teacher, speaker of the language and knowledgeable of customs, was raised as essential to achieve these premises and to break the colonizing-missionary pattern, as a mediator and manager of traditional knowledge and the transmission of Western knowledge⁹.

This facilitated the access of Brazilian indigenous peoples to Higher Education Institutions (HEI), initially, to undergraduate courses aimed at teaching elementary, middle and high school, starting in 1998. Since then, offers of indigenous higher education training aimed at teaching in indigenous education and Indigenous Undergraduate courses for middle and high school have emerged¹⁰.

Through the National Education Plan of 2001¹¹, objectives and goals were established for a differentiated, intercultural, bilingual, and quality indigenous school education. It is also noted that there were different moments of offering vacancies for various areas of knowledge, and other policies emerged for these peoples' access to higher education, such as the proposal of affirmative actions¹².

'Indigenous school education' favored indigenous access to universities, supporting the need for differentiated epistemological and pedagogical treatment, as well as exposing a Eurocentric profile of education, even in a multicultural country like Brazil¹³.

These events justified and justify various social movements in 'territories'⁴ marked by the histories and life experiences of populations, seeking effective answers and resolutions to their particular problems and colonizing models. For example, education has still been a privilege of few and has been inaccessible to Brazilian indigenous peoples for a long period⁹.

According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE)¹⁴, in HEIs the indigenous category is non-existent among Brazilians aged 25 or older with completed higher education, with a difference of 4.7% of blacks and 5.3% of mixed-race individuals against 15% of whites. The absence of indigenous representation in HEIs reveals profound social issues that also relate to the exclusion of knowledge and possibilities for social changes or tools for promoting health and sustainability through a holistic conception of intersectorality, empowerment, social participation, equity, and multi-strategic actions¹⁵.

In Brazil, the constitution of rights for indigenous peoples, such as health and education, occurred concurrently with global moments^{6,7}; it envisaged their inclusion – at least documentarily – ensuring their right to school education and considering their cultural specificities. However, despite normative advances in education rights, these are still without the desired effectiveness and specificity.

Struggles and movements from territories and collectives, as well as education, continue to be necessary. Moreover, the involvement of groups in inequalities can favor empowerment for solving various problems experienced by them, such as the environmental impacts that reflect in other sectors like health. Furthermore, ensuring 'sustainable and healthy territories'⁴ can be a potential aspect for resolving larger issues such as achieving the SDGs².

This study aims to present a result excerpt from doctoral research¹³ that verified how indigenous representation in higher education can promote health and sustainability beyond territories, dialoguing with current world premises.

Material and methods

Research field

This work was developed in a co-participatory manner, having as its object of study the Federal University of São Carlos (UFSCar). The choice of this university was because it was the first federal institution to implement affirmative policies exclusively aimed at indigenous people in all higher education courses, not only in teacher training, since, before that, these people had access to HEIs mainly through state and local policies.

This institution was analyzed by researchers who were not involved in its political-pedagogical proposal. Thus, the project was submitted for approval by the Research Ethics Committees with human beings (CEP) of the two involved HEIs, Universidade de Franca and UFSCar, with the Certificate of Presentation of Ethical Appreciation (CAAE) No. 21774619.4.0000.5495 from the coordinating center, under opinion No. 4.690.243; and the CAAE No. 21774619.4.3001.5504 from the co-participating center, under opinion No. 4.192.614, in accordance with Resolution No.

510, of April 7, 2016, of the National Health Council (CNS), for the human and social sciences.

In 2005, a Commission for Affirmative Actions was established at UFSCar to collectively build proposals for the Affirmative Actions Program (PAA). Through debates about issues related to educational, economic, social, and racial inequalities that constitute Brazilian society, an internal policy on the subject was created¹⁶.

Since the beginning of national affirmative action policies in 2008, through the PAA, the selection process for these people occurs in 64 options of on-campus undergraduate courses with exams applied in strategic cities such as Cuiabá, Manaus, Recife, and São Paulo. This process requires applications with a declaration of ethnicity and link with the indigenous community, the socio-educational questionnaire, and the completion of entrance exams for the various campuses¹⁶.

The collective of indigenous students at the institution is currently composed of more than 400 students from various indigenous peoples. The initial proposal of this study involved indigenous scholarship students in the health area, but, at a second moment, it was expanded to the entire collective of students at the institution from all fields of knowledge; and, at a third moment, the group of professors directly linked to the training of these students and the management of the PAA was added, for a better understanding of the context and the role of these social actors in promoting health and sustainability¹⁷.

Methodological procedures

Due to the global pandemic of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), the data collection methodology was adjusted from face-to-face focus groups to an online format in a total of four meetings of two hours^{18,19}. The data collection was carried out with groups of indigenous students and professors/managers and complemented with virtual semi-structured interviews²⁰.

As criteria for including research participants, the student should be part of the group of indigenous students, with the exclusion criterion being the participant's minority (under 18 years old). Similarly, for the inclusion of the participating professor, they should be part of the group of professors linked to indigenous training, and the exclusion criterion was the non-involvement with the training of indigenous students of the HEI under study.

The sample of indigenous students who signed the Free and Informed Consent Form (TCLE) was heterogeneous: undergraduates from various fields of knowledge, ranging from the health field to the human and exact sciences. This group was composed of five female and three male students, of which seven effectively participated – four female and three male students. Of the total participants, five indigenous ethnicities were represented, one of them symbolized by three students.

The sample of professors who signed the TCLE was heterogeneous regarding gender, with two females and one male. Their functions at the HEI were also heterogeneous: one was a professor/manager in the education field who experienced the entire institutional political consolidation of vacancies for these groups; another had recently joined the health faculty; and the third was a health professor with current management roles in the institutional PAA.

For the analysis and treatment of this data, the Content Analysis methodology of Bardin²¹ was used without software resources. The classification of categories started with 'floating reading', pre-analysis, applying the rules of exhaustiveness, representativity, and homogeneity in the transcribed content of the communications and the principles of pertinence, adapting them to the research objectives and exclusivity.

In the end, the data were coded into registration units to select the categories, as forms of thought that reflected this pioneering reality of 'indigenous higher education' mainly in this work, emphasizing here the importance

of these social actors in these spaces for the promotion of health and achieving the SDGs². From the initial 39 categories, 4 final categories on the theme were reached, proposing, in the current work, to address in greater depth the fourth category, which concerns the contributions of indigenous higher education for promoting health in communities and planetary health.

Since the present study involved human beings, as previously mentioned, the project was submitted for approval by the CEP of the involved HEIs.

Results and discussion

The first category is related to the advances in access and student retention of indigenous people at the university, the configurations of these HEIs, and their internal policies that favor this rightful access, while also revealing collective movements of the indigenous people and their communities, and the political empowerment of these peoples to occupy spaces previously denied to them.

The ordinances of the documents from the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI)^{22,23} show that there has been a demand for various modalities of qualified professional exercise, in the field of indigenous public policies and projects aimed at the communities, to be increasingly occupied by their members, in the most diverse fields of knowledge. This was also confirmed with the inclusion of indigenous people in the University for All Program (PROUNI) as part of a broader policy for access to HEIs in the country²⁴, in addition to the possibility of equity in access to HEIs for indigenous people through affirmative action recorded from Bill No. 180/2008 and approved in 2012 in the form of Law No. 12.711/2012²⁵.

Regarding the advances in the amount of resources offered and innovations for the retention of indigenous students in 2008, in the state of Paraná, which had state affirmative policies in a single 'Entrance Exam for Indigenous

Peoples of Paraná', aspects of the retention policies for indigenous students showed that most declared that the assistance offered was insufficient²⁶.

UFSCar has a Student Assistance Program, including Food grant, Housing grants, and Activity grants currently extended to incoming indigenous students. Additionally, in the first two years of the PAA, it was funded by the Ford Foundation for scientific initiation scholarships. Currently, to support the retention of incoming students through reserved seats, there is the Institutional Program of Scientific Initiation Scholarships – Affirmative Actions (PIBIC-AF), PET/Knowledge Connections, and PET/Health Actions and Tutoring.

This was an aspect that almost did not need to be raised during the discussion with the students participating in this research, but despite the advances, it was also noted that, in a comparison between periods, there were setbacks in proposals already institutionalized in this HEI, as well as throughout the country.

In more than ten years of affirmative actions in federal HEIs, it can also be said that there have been improvements in student life for these groups thanks to the indigenous student movement itself, including new integrations into institutional proposals. Their protagonism was present as resistance, as reported by the manager participant:

When they came to make suggestions for increasing the number of seats, their admission method, which was completely different from what it is today, we implemented everything in the university as they asked us. [...] We made a book to say how the process of implementing indigenous affirmative action was [...] with chapters written by the indigenous people who went through the process along with the teachers who accompanied them. (Manager participant).

Such institutional improvements, in addition to aiding the retention and training of indigenous students, also enable empowerment through these collective social forces

that have been incorporated over time, even in the formation of an Indigenous Cultures Center (CCI) at the HEI¹⁶.

The second category is related to the difficulties faced by indigenous students and in working with these groups, such as issues related to learning gaps, stigma, prejudice, and discrimination, reproductions of the national reality itself.

It can be considered that the organization of various HEIs in Brazil to receive these groups is irregular. This often occurs without deeply considering their specificities, resulting in dropouts and suffering of these students already described in the literature²⁷, as well as present in the results of the second category of this study, as highlighted by the data below:

[...] and also facing racism, exclusion, recognizing that we do not have the same openings to talk to teachers, to ask questions, often teachers are not prepared to receive these students [...] being the only indigenous person in a class of forty students, this puts a lot of pressure on us, we feel very different, very highlighted from the others, and there are many eyes on us, so sometimes it's difficult. (Indigenous participant).

The access issue does not only involve intrinsic matters of those arriving, such as low education, but also the institutional development itself to deal with the cultural issue or promote interculturality, aspects that should be incorporated into curricula, training, events, and wherever else they fit²⁸.

These points reflect the role of universities and indigenous representation in these spaces, dialoguing with the achievement of some of the SDGs, such as SDG 10, which addresses the reduction of inequalities, SDG 4, on access to quality education, and SDG 16, in promoting peace and justice².

The third category is related to the contradictions and contributions of scientific knowledge and traditional indigenous knowledge in the HEI and the institutional ways of dealing with these issues. The current study

reveals that the 'meeting' of diverse world-views between indigenous and non-indigenous people and the most diverse ethnicities questions the epistemology of the predominantly Western institutional university environment, as well as some rigidity in modifying this structure.

It was expected that the university space opening (or being opened) to the various indigenous peoples would be characterized as "a strategic place [...] for the defense of indigenous rights, for the management of territories, strengthening organizations"²⁸⁽⁸⁾, relating possibilities of autonomy and collective empowerment. These spaces have made progress in including these groups, as well as reveal muzzles or contradictions for these prophecies by not recognizing or dialoguing with indigenous traditional knowledge.

Despite these aspects, a key point highlighted in this investigative process, and which is emphasized in the current work – as it breaks with the idea that seats for indigenous people only benefit an excluded minority – is the fourth category found. This last category is related to the contributions of indigenous higher education for promoting health and sustainability in indigenous communities, as well as in the world, dialoguing with the achievement of the SDGs for 2030².

The access of various indigenous peoples in Brazil to education, more specifically at the higher level, repositions these groups and individuals as sociopolitical actors, giving voice and considering their propositions more directly and reflecting in their territories²⁸. For example, the training of teachers who ensure the preservation of culture or other professionals in the field of land tenure and sustainability.

However, as the literature has already indicated, depending on how this institutionalization of indigenous higher education occurs, these points and the perspective of interculturality, the training of non-indigenous people for the ethnic-racial issue, are favored or not²⁶⁻²⁸. We are facing a possibility of change for other

sectors of society, to rethink the rigidity of HEIs and to apply the real concept of the term university as a universe of knowledge.

To strengthen this finding, in 2014, the National Education Plan, through Law No. 13.005, of June 25²⁹, directed the promotion of the principles of respect for human rights, diversity, and socio-environmental sustainability to overcome educational inequalities, promote citizenship, and eradicate discrimination².

In 2017, the Ministry of Education, together with the Ministry of Justice and Citizenship, launched the ‘University Pact for the Promotion of Respect for Diversity, the Culture of Peace, and Human Rights’ for adherence by HEIs and supporting entities³⁰.

By emphasizing the issues of cultural contact and the joint construction of solutions for global development and health, it can be understood that access to higher education and professional qualification for the various indigenous peoples of Brazil means ways to combat poverty, promote prosperity, and well-being for their communities, but also reflect on the benefit of all².

[...] the presence of indigenous people here does not arise from the HEI's policy, you understand. So, the indigenous people who are here are not here because they were sensitized by the HEI's policy, they are sensitized by the indigenous militancy for the indigenous person to be in universities in general, regardless of whether the internal policy provides the benefit to the communities or not, because this is much greater [...] being at the university is a collective implication, not an individual implication. (Manager participant).

It can be said that there is, in practice, an overlap of purposes: *“[...] they do not aim to train and so give back to the community, but they do, it's funny because they come here, and they end up giving back” (Manager participant).*

When motivated to discuss the purposes of higher education and whether they thought it had any relation to health, all the indigenous participants brought a perspective to their

communities of origin, or with this collective indigenous movement, and the health-education intersectorality:

[...] help our relatives to improve the quality of education [...] and with that they will be able to pass the entrance exam and take another course like nursing, which has to do with health, right [...]. (Indigenous participant).

Other statements also reveal how education is used for cultural preservation and problem-solving, consequently for promoting health. In this sense, there was an indigenous student report of appropriation of the Permanent Health Education modality³², a national policy that also links the health and education sectors, for the training of indigenous health agents, but on topics of their own traditional culture:

[...] we have traditional medicinal knowledge, that's what we are trying to revitalize because for some time it was forgotten, so what we are doing, we are trying to train indigenous health agents so that they can also learn about the medicinal plants that our community has. (Indigenous participant).

For the social actors in this study, there is a recognition of this intersectoral proximity, regardless of their field of training, due to their worldviews: *“[...] we are very attentive to health issues [...] education closely follows health, indigenous education” (Indigenous participant).*

Additionally, there is the role of the indigenous higher education student as an educator in their reality, as they often have the highest level of education and receive social responsibilities because of this³³. All activities experienced in the academic realm will inspire educational actions in their home realities, as illustrated by a student's account.

In the first years of their undergraduate studies, they developed activities at the Social Assistance Reference Centers in the university region, aimed at the elderly public in the field of occupational therapy. The indigenous participant reported gaining a full

understanding of the physiological changes that occur in the elderly, such as loss of taste, muscle, vision, and smell alterations, which interfere with their lives and how their families deal with these changes.

After developing this activity in the course and returning to her community during the holidays, she invited another indigenous student from her community to take this knowledge and learning to their people. The elders were very happy and admired to know that the students had already learned these things and taught the community about all these changes that happen with the elderly. Even before graduating, she managed to apply this health knowledge in an adapted way and promote health in her community³³.

Despite the reverse path of knowledge promotion, the LDB⁶, in two articles (Title VII, arts. 78 and 79), officially points to a type of differentiated education for indigenous people that ensures the recovery and reaffirmation of their specific knowledge, in addition to access to non-indigenous knowledge. The data produced in this study reveal the path to accessing non-indigenous knowledge; however, there are still few institutional movements for the reaffirmation of specific indigenous knowledge³⁴. This is revealed in a teacher's statement:

For the teachers, it has a small impact because most teachers treat the presence of indigenous people in the courses with invisibility [...] But it was their presence at the university that favored the construction of extension and research projects related to indigenous health, all these projects might not have existed before, several things are linked and provoked by their presence [...] The collective, more than the individual, presence in the courses, because they end up becoming very invisible, it's one per course, per year [...] We don't have any indigenous teachers. When we have an indigenous teacher, I think it will start to favor the other side a bit more. (Participating teacher).

Higher education courses do not have the

exclusive dedication of teachers or researchers for this purpose, a curriculum that dialogues with this premise, and more importantly, do not have indigenous teachers³⁵. Thus, in HEIs, it is still proposed to dialogue more with affirmative action policies, favoring access and educational equity, and not so much the indigenous student movement itself to address specific indigenous themes in HEIs.

This data could favor these intersectoral aspects present in educational policies and the health promotion proposal, and also favor many other issues experienced by these students within HEIs and in society, such as the invisibility of their millennial knowledge, prejudice, and the recognition of indigenous diversity³⁴.

In HEIs, funding for this purpose is rare or punctual, as well as the mobilization and awareness of the academic community for this purpose. Traditional indigenous medicine, millennial, is present in the students' reports either due to the inequities of Western health or by the community's own choices³¹, and it could also benefit everyone.

In my village [...] which is quite far from the municipality, [...] as we know in the Amazon, there are no roads, so we travel by river, and besides that, there are the difficulties like waterfalls and such [...] So even though the DSEI or Special Indigenous Health Districts do their part, it continues to be one of the worst areas for care [...] to the right we have, which is health. [...] But regarding the medications that arrive at the base hub, they are very basic medications, and they are medications that we can manage ourselves, we residents can solve with medicinal plants, but not everything works, so we combine the two knowledge. (Indigenous participant).

Interculturality, in this sense, is configured, in a way, as a form of resistance, exemplifying how the various indigenous peoples have appropriated and appropriate representations that are not their own, configuring new perspectives³⁶.

The contextualization of this sector

throughout the discussions favored the understanding of the impact that indigenous higher education could have on health promotion, even indirectly, and how they deal with the issues of indigenous health services and their ancestral health knowledge:

[...] usually, they have a lot of refusal within the village to be attended by the white doctor because they still believe a lot in the medicine of their community. (Indigenous participant).

The various realities of the physical structure of indigenous health were revealed in all statements. COVID-19 was also discussed regarding traditional medications and worldviews on what would be best for the health of the sick at that time:

We are trying to see the possibilities of getting some traditional teas here to take to the hospital, I didn't want to take him to the hospital, it would be ideal to treat him here at home, but not everyone thinks like that, most of the family wanted to take him to the hospital, so I just agreed. (Indigenous participant).

Significant higher education could better contribute to these longings specific to the communities that send their members for this training, filling gaps and health inequities in these territories. About the need for diverse professionals, besides the multidisciplinary team that usually presents in the communities, some indigenous student statements signal potentialities not yet practiced in the territories:

The health structure is relatively good [...] but now we needed professionals from a multidisciplinary team like physiotherapists, occupational therapists, etc., so as not to seek private means. (Indigenous participant).

Access to HEIs, therefore, favors the awareness of health rights. After contact with various areas of knowledge during training, there is recognition of the various fields that are still not accessible to most indigenous peoples in

the country. Not only in the territories but also for access to various levels of care, the training of indigenous people and the approach to the indigenous theme contribute to indigenous health¹⁷, as present in a teacher's statement:

We have graduates who are working in the villages, working in other spaces that are not their villages of origin and enhance indigenous health work, for example, an indigenous person who is in a hospital where he receives other indigenous people, he is in the hospital and sensitizes other people there about the importance of welcoming the indigenous in a different way. (Participating teacher).

One of the central axes of dialogue between the health promotion paradigm, sustainability, and indigenous access to HEIs is empowerment^{3,37}. This appears in many of the participations in this research and places training as a path to achieving improvements in the original territories, in addition to expanding the communities' 'power' of choice, which also dialogues with the 2030² premises of reducing inequalities, offering quality health, eradicating poverty, not to mention all the objectives related to the environment and sustainability, which are directly related to the original communities³⁸. An example of this can be seen in the participant's statement:

[...] Being indigenous at the university today is to have this awareness and sensitivity that if we don't fight for our rights and improvements, it will not be the non-indigenous who will [...] we have to take advantage of this to always bring the best to our community, not only for our family and our people but for other peoples who are in vulnerable situations and really need representation in these places of speech, these privileged places like the university is, occupying these spaces and always fighting so that other indigenous people also have the opportunity to be there, so the main goal of most indigenous people being at the university is to bring improvements to their people, I believe. (Indigenous participant).

Regarding the possibilities of contribution, Urquiza, Nascimento, and Espíndola, in 2011³⁴, addressed higher education not only as a matter of social inclusion but also as the recognition and promotion of differentiated values and worldviews. For the empowerment of the territories and outside them, indigenous peoples seek in higher education the possibility to strengthen their indigenous knowledge, re-elaborate mechanisms of production and negotiation of knowledge so that they can manage their territories, plan and develop projects for the benefit of their communities³⁷.

One of the teachers participating in the group also addressed this construction and the empowerment of these students within the higher education process, and the issue of resilience.

Universities, in accompanying indigenous students and their representatives, would be, in a way, contributing to strengthening these students' autonomy and resolving their individual and collective demands. This aspect was revealed in the manager's speech about representatives of these groups who 'organize' institutional movements, as well as about the empowerment movement of indigenous social actors:

He is an authority, engaged. He made sure to learn the language, speaks Spanish, Portuguese, speaks a lot of languages nowadays. He is in a master's program [...] And he carries out this empowerment process, sometimes he distances himself, sometimes he comes back to call the people. (Participating manager).

In this reflection, it is questioned whether the choice of who will attend the university comes from the community, and how HEIs can strengthen and interfere in these movements in their internal policies. There are collective and individual perspectives of access – specific vacancies or quota law respectively – but also the recognition that the movement of indigenous access to this HEI happens linked to the community, as present in the manager's statement:

Of course, there could be policies that favor this collectivity [...] But we require a community declaration for the indigenous person who enters the university, from the moment I demand a community document, an indigenous person living in the city isolated from their people cannot enter alone [...] it is a signature that implies a commitment [...] So the institutional policy has some things that favor the individual and also some things that favor the collective. [...] today all the indigenous people at the university are there through specific affirmative actions and reserved spots, not through the quota law that uses self-declaration. (Participant manager).

This genuine movement of resistance, even with its radical and offensive characteristics, or the creation of a new power, also reveals the power relations to which these peoples have long been subjected, but who have resisted for more than 500 years and are organizing to reclaim it³⁸.

Final considerations

The pursuit of policies that favor their projects of autonomy and sustainability also in university spaces is presented as a struggle. Thus, the devices addressed here proposed to emphasize the indigenous perspective on this entire process, aiming to generate new perspectives and future outlooks.

In this sense, it is also necessary to consider what represents the promotion of traditional indigenous knowledge within HEIs. These points demand internal adjustments in universities and consequently generate resistance. However, this work also represents a possibility to verify how the indigenous presence in HEIs goes beyond their own needs and those of their territories, modifying institutional and social structures and promoting sustainability on the planet.

Access to diverse worldviews, intercultural mechanisms, and diversity itself

in these spaces promote health and sustainability: by respecting differences and consequently reducing violence, promoting social equality, offering quality education and health, and expanding the view of Brazilian reality and minorities worldwide.

Their achievements can broaden discussions on more complex and global issues and need to be strengthened by policies that value and reclaim the culture of indigenous peoples. The current moment reveals this necessity: indigenous representation in higher education needs to be revisited not only due to the colonial model but also because it can be an advance, such as the creation of the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples in Brazil and the Ministry of Racial

Equality currently, for promoting health and sustainability beyond the territories.

Collaborators

Ribeiro AERA (0000-0002-8057-3049)* contributed to the conception, planning, analysis and interpretation of data, drafting, and approval of the final version of the manuscript. Beretta RCS (0000-0003-2817-0805)* contributed to the critical review of the content and approval of the final version of the manuscript. Mestriner Junior W (0000-0003-2202-388X)* contributed to the conception, critical review of the content, and approval of the final version of the manuscript. ■

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