



Panel T08-P06 Session 1

Governance of Intersectoral Policies with the Population - Capturing novelties: new citizens, new technologies, new truths

*Transversal public action and democratic construction: the
university as a locus of innovation and political participation*

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Abstract

This paper examines democratic participation in Brazilian higher education, focusing on the University of Brasilia experience. While traditional structures may struggle to adapt to changes in society and technology, student and community-driven practices are fostering new, less hierarchical participatory logics that offer valuable insights. This research is built from academic community perspectives, considering 40 interviews and more than 100 participants in group discussions, to propose an innovative democratization model for public universities through the improvement and linkage of socio-state interfaces. By interpreting transversal dynamics, the study provides the launchpad for the university's institutional development of an academic system of participation. The research contributes to improving representative forums by connecting formal participatory interfaces with communication mechanisms, and by fostering better-informed community members and management responsiveness. The study proposes a more effective and inclusive system for recognizing demands, amplifying discussions, and influencing deliberations among all university members.

Keywords: Political participation; University Participatory Management; Transversal Public Action; University of Brasília; Deliberative Systems; Democratic Innovation.



Introduction

Brazilian public universities are not only the primary centers for scientific knowledge production in the country but also operate under a constitutional principle of democratic management. This principle is traditionally upheld by participatory deliberative bodies such as councils and committees. However, and this is crucial, although guaranteed by the Law No. 9,394/1996, “Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação” (Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education) and fundamental for ensuring the participation of different segments, the universities' deliberative participatory instances, by themselves, do not necessarily address the social, political, and technological changes observed in the social environment, which impact not only the university public and curricula or research and extension activities, but also their support activities and the deliberations that stem from them. Democratization of education extends beyond simply providing access to quality higher education; it necessitates the democratic exercise of characterizing demands and collaboratively building new solutions within the university context itself. However, the high level of bureaucratization in Brazilian public universities - including communication flows - can hinder participatory processes and confine members' perceptions to routine, individualized activities that do not reflect their capacity for political engagement in shaping the university's goals. This can lead to employees becoming detached from decision-making processes and a lack of capacity and collective interest to solve problems and develop innovations that position the university within its social environment.



Despite the significant research on political participation in Brazil — examining various interfaces like councils, conferences, and participatory budgets — there's a notable lack of self-reflection concerning participation within the very academic environments that produce these studies. This study, therefore, aims to address this gap. University participation is frequently understood through a narrow lens, primarily focusing on consultation processes for rectors and representative collegiate bodies. While crucial, these formal collegiate environments, such as University Councils and course committees, often exhibit representative inequalities, with faculty typically overrepresented compared to students and administrative staff (Carvalho, 2013; Freire & Conjero, 2021). Furthermore, traditional instances of participation may not fully resonate with younger generations. Students, particularly youth, are increasingly developing new collective practices less constrained by hierarchies and rigid rules (Sposito & Tarábola, 2016). With their experiences in social movements, especially those entering through affirmative action quotas, these young individuals offer valuable insights for proposing alternative interactional logics (Souza et al., 2024) that promise multiple forms of effectiveness (Cruz & Daroit, 2023).

To foster a new level of democratization within Brazilian public universities, this study proposes a comprehensive approach that considers the diversity of democratic innovations (Freitas et al., 2022; Lavallo & Vera, 2010) and potential socio-state interfaces (Luchmann, 2020; Pires & Vaz, 2014; Daroit et al., 2023; Izunza Vera & Hevia, 2006) across both digital and in-person modalities. Drawing on the concept of transversality of public action (Daroit et al., 2023), this research seeks to connect participatory interfaces with management structures, recognizing that instruments, practices, meanings, and contexts are relevant across all interfaces — from the most ephemeral to the most institutionalized. In this sense, the concepts of democratic innovation, transversality, and socio-state interface serve as guiding principles for discussing a system of academic participation that extends beyond mere representative elections.



The University of Brasília (UnB), with its foundational commitment to democratic processes and historical recognition as an innovative institution, is hereby analyzed as the subject of study. Founded in 1961, the principles of the University of Brasília (UnB) guide its operation as a public and free higher education institution, focused on academic freedom, the integration of teaching, research, and extension programmes, and the universality of knowledge. UnB aims to ensure the quality of its scientific, humanistic, artistic, literary, and technical education, promoting exchange and dialogue with popular knowledge. The institution is deeply committed to democracy in all its dimensions (social, cultural, political, economic), to the democratization of education (management, access, and benefits), to the development of the country, and to values such as peace, human rights, and environmental preservation (UnB, 2025). In terms of its quality, the university is currently one of the leading institutions in the country, ranking among the top ten universities in Brazil according to the QS World University Rankings (2025) and the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) (2024). It also holds the 25th position among the best universities in Latin America, as per the QS Latin American University Rankings (2024).

By observing transversal themes and participative dynamics, this study provides the launchpad for the university's institutional development¹ of a robust and dialogical academic system of participation. The research intends to contribute to improving representative forums by connecting formal participatory interfaces with informal communication mechanisms, and by fostering better-informed community members and management structures. The aim is to establish a more effective and inclusive system for recognizing demands, fostering discussions, and influencing deliberations among all university members, thus overcoming the current fragmentation of democratic governance in Brazilian public universities.

¹ The research project "Academic Participation System (SPA) at UnB: From Mapping Instances to Democratic Innovations," coordinated by the authors, involves postgraduate researchers and technical staff from the University of Brasília.



This paper proceeds as follows: First, we detail our methodology, which includes a literature review, documentary analysis of the UnB participatory instances, an ongoing questionnaire, forty individual interviews, six discussion groups, all culminating in the proposition of a comprehensive academic participatory system (SPA). Next, we lay the theoretical groundwork by discussing political participation within universities, specifically drawing insights from deliberative systems and socio-state interfaces. We then set out to the concept of transversal and participatory public action, exploring transversality both through its dynamic process and as a thematic possibility, observing the concept of hybrid forums to take into account the participatory less formal flows within contemporary complex issues. We then dedicated ourselves to present our partial results, examining the simultaneous articulation and diffusion of instances, the current organizational chart, and how transversality manifests in practice as both a dynamic and a theme at the studied university. To do so, we explore the existing framework of dialogicity, the contentious interplay between interdisciplinarity and the lack of parity in councils, and possibilities for collaboration leading to democratic innovations, outlining the design of our proposal. Finally, the conclusion reflects on how transversal public action can enhance responsiveness, addressing the crisis of meaning related to a perceived lack of effectiveness in participatory management mechanisms, and also aiming to tackle limitations of parity, apathy, and detachment from participatory processes.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to investigate communication flows and participatory interfaces within the University of Brasília (UnB). This strategy combines a literature review drawing from national and international databases (with 29 articles, 15 master thesis and nine doctoral dissertations), detailed document analysis, ongoing survey opened to the 60 thousand members of the university community, 40 individual interviews with counsellors, and six insightful discussion groups (counting on 14 to 60 participants/each) with faculty, administrative staff and students. Together, these methods aim to map existing participatory mechanisms, the



university community perspectives and diagnose their effectiveness in fostering democratic university management.

To identify the current state of communication flows and participatory interfaces, while also contextualizing UnB's practices within a broader landscape, there is an ongoing institutional survey designed to gauge perceptions of communication and participation across the entire UnB community. Concurrently, researchers are monitoring meetings and have developed a collection of participatory management experiences in other public universities in Brazil, providing crucial comparative insights (Silva, Martins, 2025).

To characterize participatory interfaces, its limits and articulations, as well as assessing their capacity to drive meaningful change in university management, a document analysis examines meeting minutes and foundational documents from UnB's superior collegiate bodies and various other participatory interfaces (Braz, Custódio, 2025). The ongoing questionnaire being distributed to faculty, students, and administrative staff is also crucial. This is further enriched by the discussion groups involving these same university segments. This primary data collection will collaborate to develop a proposal of an academic participatory system, as it seeks to address critical questions about participation at UnB, exploring what individuals understand by "participation" how they engage in it daily, what problems or weaknesses they've observed in existing processes, how participation could be improved, and finally, what themes are considered priorities for participatory and deliberative debate within the university.

University Democratic Management: What Is and What Could Be

Democratic management is a constitutional principle in Brazilian public education, yet its implementation in universities faces significant hurdles. Dantas (2019) and Ribeiro (2017) highlight issues of representativeness, bureaucracy, and structural problems that diminish these institutions' inclusive and democratizing potential. While formal mechanisms like elected leaders exist, they might fail to capture the dynamic political landscape shaped by student collectives and digital culture



(Gohn, 2018). These new practices introduce horizontal demands that traditional formal structures struggle to absorb, necessitating structural transformations (Denicoli, 2016; Turb rio & Santos, 2017) to effectively include historically marginalized actors like administrative staff and students (Gon alves Filho, 2016).

Nevertheless, recent studies by Silva and Souza (2023) and Calbino and Nery (2024) highlight a critical assault on the autonomy of Brazilian federal universities during the Bolsonaro government's period of democratic rupture. Beyond mere defunding, these institutions suffered a significant loss of self-governance in appointing leadership, as external interventions overrode the university community's electoral choices. This directly undermined the principles of autonomy and participation, negatively impacting collegiate bodies and overall university management. The crisis underscores the vital importance of legitimate electoral processes for representatives and their advisors.

In addition to the electoral choices of rectors, in a democratic setting, collegiate forums like councils and chambers are essential, fostering crucial interactions among diverse academic and external stakeholders—faculty, staff, students, and community members—that would otherwise remain fragmented across various university units. Drawing upon the context of more democratic times, Calbino and Nery (2024) note that existing formal structures in public universities frequently favor faculty representation, a bias reinforced by cultural resistance to change. This marginalizes administrative staff (Santos, 2019; Martins & Ribeiro, 2018), creating structures that comply nominally but lack true participatory function (Klein, Pizzio & Rodrigues, 2018). Low academic community participation is also linked to communication weaknesses and disillusionment with the capacity of participatory processes to effect real change (Predes, 2015; Lima, 2019). Beyond, managerial models focused on productivity can further empty these spaces, and might turn participation into a technocratic exercise that merely legitimizes centralized decisions (Dantas, 2019).



To overcome these fragilities, Costa, Lima, and Lima Filho (2025) propose three key strategies: institutional reforms for parity; new participatory spaces, including digital platforms; and continuous political education. They argue that democratic management remains institutionally fragile without genuine participation from the entire academic community, especially administrative staff and students. This calls for a renewal of administrative structures and the very meaning of political participation, emphasizing effective information flows and fostering transversal dynamics to embrace democratic innovations arising from new technologies and social organizations.

Deliberative systems and socio-state interfaces

One way to address this reality of participatory issues is to enhance responsiveness capacities by encouraging improved interactions between the many formal and informal mechanisms that connect the public (students and participants from extension initiatives), the workforce (professors and technical staff), and university management (rectorate, deans' offices, directorates).



Deliberative theorists supporting a comprehensive view of deliberative democracy emphasize the interaction of various institutions rather than relying on single forums for decision legitimacy. A systemic view posits that while individual components may not all be deliberative, the system as a whole must be, thereby redirecting focus to understanding institutional interactions that enhance overall deliberative capacity. As to say, this approach relates to the perception that no single forum can legitimize all decisions, shifting attention to how diverse, interconnected institutions, both formal and informal, interact within the broader democratic system. Democracy must foster an inclusive political process in terms of equality, actively promoting diverse voices and ensuring no citizens are systematically excluded. This systemic view allows for a division of labor where different parts, even those seemingly non-deliberative, can contribute positively to overall deliberative capacity. It also acknowledges the crucial role of experts, whose knowledge must be integrated while mitigating biases, ensuring diverse expertise contributes to the system's epistemic, ethical, and democratic functions. Elements, such as pressure and protest can introduce new perspectives and compel inclusion. Similarly, the political media are central to the deliberative system, influencing civility, information flow, and inclusion. A systemic evaluation considers how these elements connect and influence various deliberative spaces, ensuring critical information and diverse viewpoints are transmitted (Mansbridge et al, 2012; Burall, 2015).



In Latin America, Hevia and Isunza Vera's (2006, 2010) approach to socio-state interfaces (SSI) offers a complex and relational analysis of the multiple forms of engagement between state and society, demonstrating how both participation and deliberation are crucial dimensions within a broader ecology of state-society interactions. Their work examines various mechanisms like councils, participatory budgeting, and digital platforms, focusing on different interaction modalities (e.g., contribution, transparency, communication, political control). The core of this approach lies in understanding the dynamics, functions, constraints, and power logics at play within these interfaces, investigating how they articulate and effectively influence decision-making and public policy. Still, since the reality of governance is complex and multifaceted, it cannot be understood or made effective through a single channel or participatory space.

More recently, Lüchmann (2020) emphasized that the design of socio-state interfaces (SSIs) is crucial for their articulation and the broadening of participation. Effective engagement in deliberative systems isn't achieved through isolated channels; instead, it requires designs that actively integrate multiple interfaces, expanding the range of actors and participatory spaces. This integrated view is essential because the complex and multifaceted nature of governance cannot be fully grasped or made effective through a single participatory channel. A comprehensive analysis of SSIs must therefore consider their design, origins, resources, goals, involved actors, their positions, constraints, and their intricate interconnections with other participatory mechanisms. To understand the fluidity and multifaceted connections and effectiveness of these participatory forums, Cruz and Daroit (2017; 2023) proposed an approach that will be detailed in the next section.

Unpacking transversal and participatory public action

Fernanda Cruz and Doriana Daroit (Cruz, Daroit, 2017; Cruz, 2020; Daroit, Cruz, Borges, 2023) concept of transversal and participatory public action²,

² To know more about transversal and participatory public action, see the website of the authors research group, the Laboratory on Public Action for Democratic Development (LAP2D: desenvolvimentodemocratico.org).



investigates the complex interplay between state and societal action amidst uncertainty. While most formal participatory bodies persisted during the Brazilian democratic backsliding, the core challenge studied by the authors laid in understanding the effective operation of these interfaces and its linkages beyond its formal terms.

Cruz (2020) emphasizes the approximation between transversality, intersectorality and governmentality, meaning that multiple actors — governmental (across sectors and levels) and non-governmental — interact and articulate beyond traditional institutional and sectoral boundaries to take into account citizen demands. This participatory action highlights involving these diverse actors in policy co-production, not just in formal spaces, but also through hybrid forums (Callon, Lascoumes, Barthe, 2009) with diverse composition and informal interactions, which are shaped by, and actively shape, public action instruments (Halpern, Lascoumes, Le Galès, 2021), aiming to reorient state action and foster complex decision-making.

Within this framework, a dialogical management philosophy prioritizes a negotiated approach that considers multiple references and where the citizen guides the debate, co-constructing solutions and transcending hierarchies. The organizational model of hybrid forums is characterized by horizontality, diversity, and transparency, fostering flexible collaborative networks that mobilize various forms of knowledge. Their technical substratum involves integrating diverse knowledge and spokespersons — legal, scientific, and practical — to structure dialogue and ensure exchanges translate into actionable policy insights, challenging conventional sectoral logic.

Building on this, Cruz (2020) integrates insights from Brugué, Canal, and Paya (2015) work on administrative intelligence, to move beyond transversality as mere themes to specifically understand transversal dynamics. These dynamics, alongside hybrid forums, allows comprehending dialogicity in an expanded sense and provide subsidies for the construction of democratizing management instruments. Dialogicity then becomes an aspect of both participation (through inclusive voices and knowledge) and transversality/intersectorality (by enabling these voices and knowledges to circulate and articulate across different sectors and levels of public



action). This combined approach clarifies how fluid interactions and hybrid spaces can foster more responsive and democratic public action in complex contexts.

More recently, Daroit, Cruz, and Borges (2023; Cruz & Daroit, 2023) have observed the consubstantiality between policy and democracy to propose an analytical framework for transversal public action (TPA). While still emphasizing hybrid forums, the authors suggest that to understand TPA and its multiple forms of effectiveness, it's necessary to examine four core axes: practices, instruments, meanings, and contexts. They also highlight how these axes dynamically interact with four dimensions: normativity, experientiality, power, and operationality.

Significantly, studying transversal and participatory public action is a way to understand democratic innovations. By integrating complexity, uncertainty and multidimensionality inherent in problem situations, transversality fosters participatory processes and enhances the potential for the development of innovative alternatives—solutions that are unattainable through disciplinary approaches or the isolated actions of specific actors. Democratic innovations serve as socio-technical devices that structure the relationship between public authorities and citizens (Freitas, Sampaio, Avelino, 2023), opening new channels for dialogue and participation in policymaking and agenda-setting (Ventura, 2016). These innovations are vital for addressing contemporary challenges, such as the rise of elected authoritarian governments and deepening inequalities, especially as traditional elections and political parties no longer offer sufficient solutions (Warren, 2021). Democratic innovations are mechanisms and processes designed to enhance democratic quality by moving beyond traditional forms of representation.

Initial Outcomes

Both Brazil's 1988 Federal Constitution and the National Education Guidelines and Bases Law (LDB) enshrine democratic management as a core principle for public education. Yet, its full realization in higher education faces significant hurdles, such as persistent challenges in representativeness, pervasive bureaucracy, and deep-seated structural issues (Dantas, 2019; Ribeiro, 2017). These factors often undermine



democratic governance and diminish the inclusive, creative, and democratizing potential inherent in public universities. Democratic-participatory management encompasses formal processes like leadership consultations, institutional planning, and the work of collegiate bodies, alongside policy formulation (Ribeiro, 2017) and engagement facilitated by universities' official digital platforms, all while upholding university autonomy.

However, transversal articulation among different participatory mechanisms is not yet common in Brazilian universities. Notable exceptions, like digital consultation mechanisms preceding deliberations (e.g., in the Institutional Development Plans of UFSC and UnB), demonstrate potential. Existing literature on university participatory management reveals the limitations of formal mechanisms when they operate in isolation or are too self-contained, despite their foundational role in deliberation. This perspective suggests that collegiate bodies could significantly expand their representativeness by actively recognizing and incorporating diverse demands and perspectives from the academic community. Such an approach would enhance their responsiveness and guide management through sustained, systemic articulations, leveraging specific normative and technological devices, including both digital and in-person dialogical interfaces — precisely what we term an academic participation system.

The University of Brasília (UnB)³, in particular, has maintained a deep commitment to democratic processes since its inception. Historically, its democratic ethos, forged in political, scientific, and pedagogical spheres, extends beyond institutional walls to engage broader society. UnB's participatory interfaces include its foundational administrative and financial autonomy, underpinned by a decision-making structure heavily reliant on deliberative collegiate bodies. Over the decades, UnB pioneered initiatives like flexible "free module" curricula, serial evaluation in the 1990s, the introduction of racial quotas in the early 2000s, and, more recently, access

³ To further deepen democratic practices, UnB is currently developing the "Academic Participation System: From Mapping Instances to Articulations for Democratic Innovation" project, a collaborative endeavor between the Laboratory for Research on Public Action for Democratic Development (LAP2D - desenvolvimentodemocratico.org), coordinated by the authors, and the Rectorate.



for students aged 60+ and the adoption of transpeople quotas, mirroring practices in other institutions.

The University of Brasília (UnB) was founded by Law nº 3.998 on December 15, 1961, with its foundational legal framework laid out in its Statute, established in 1994, and further detailed in its General Regulations, enacted in 2001 (UnB, 2025). These normative instruments define UnB's core mission of teaching, research, and extension, aiming to educate citizens dedicated to democratic solutions for the nation. Central to this framework is the principle of democratic management, which underpins the university's structure. In terms of participation, the Statute outlines an architecture for community engagement in decision-making, primarily through its Superior Councils — including the University Council, the Teaching, Research, and Extension Council, and the Administration Council — which serve as the main deliberative bodies. Furthermore, the Community Council functions as a consultative body responsible for shaping overall community policy. Both documents underscore UnB's commitment to inclusivity and transparency by emphasizing open participation for individuals and entities in all collegiate body meetings. Within a democratic framework, collegiate bodies such as councils and chambers serve as vital conduits for interaction. They bring together actors with diverse scientific rationalities and ties to the academic community — including faculty, staff, students, and external members — coordinating crucial relationships among various pro-rectorates, dean's offices, and academic units that would otherwise remain siloed.

The comprehensive analysis of minutes and formal documents shown in Table 1 observes the University Council (Consuni), the Administrative Council (CAD) and the Teaching, Research and Extension Council (CEPE) allowing us to understand its extents and limitations, considering Cruz (2020) approach on dialogicity analysis of transversal and participatory public action.

Table 1. Dialogicity Analysis: Consuni, CAD, CEPE

Managerial philosophy	Diversity of points of views	UnB's Councils (Consuni, Cepe, and CAD) are composed of faculty and student representatives, along with most Deans and Directors of Academic Units, although Cepe includes only a portion of the Deans. Consuni also features a representative from
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		the Community Council. Notably, CAD further integrates the Mayor and the Secretaries of Infrastructure and Immovable Property, positions frequently held by civil servants. According to the LDB (Brazilian Law of Directives and Bases of National Education), at least 70% of council compositions must be faculty. The participation of technical-administrative staff is foreseen in Consuni and CAD, but not in Cepe.
	Negotiation-Oriented	In all Councils, there is room for suggestions, but deliberations are always by vote, due to its bureaucratic nature. The percentage difference in composition (70% faculty) means that contributions from technical staff and students are sporadic or rare. In Cepe, specifically, a large number of approvals occur in blocks, with little room for suggestions.
	Citizen guidance	The agenda for UnB's Councils is always constructed based on regimental processes, with Deans' protagonism, and subject to the approval of the collegiate's President (Rector or Vice-Rector, in Consuni). The inclusion of extra-agenda items is difficult, although councilors can freely express their views during the "Informes" (Announcements/Reports) section. The participation of external members is conditioned on Council authorization and does not grant them voting rights. Despite these restrictions, groups sometimes utilize the visibility of the meetings for mobilizations on important issues, indirectly contributing to guiding the public debate.
Organizational model	Tendency Towards Horizontality	The operational dynamic in all Councils follows formal rites, with a central figure in the President and adherence to the agenda, although there is room for discussion.
	Transparency and Traceability	The participation of external members is rare in all Councils, as the meeting calendar is mainly sent to councilors and is not made available on a public portal. Many meetings are live-streamed and accessible online, and all resolutions and minutes are published in the website or internal bulletin and are publicly available. Nevertheless, traceability remains low because the general university community is unaware of the dissemination channels.
	Repetition of interactions	UnB's Councils (Consuni and Cepe, monthly; CAD, bi-monthly) hold regular meetings and can be convened extraordinarily, with cancellations being rare. Two-thirds of the members can also call new meetings, and there is a high degree of repetition of interactions. However, a critical point across all Councils is the short timeframe (only two days) between the convocation of a meeting and the submission of its agenda and the meeting itself.
	Groups independence	In all Councils, internal subgroups (technical staff, students, faculty, specific groups) can gain strength to pressure decision-making, depending on the topic on the agenda.



	Rules knowledge	The operating rules are established in UnB's Internal Regulations, being known and mastered by councilors in all Councils.
Technical substrate	Knowledge Diversity (Managers, Technicians, Bureaucrats, and public concerned with the problems)	Within the Technical Substrate, all Councils benefit from the participation of various actors who possess prior experience in lower-level councils or collegiate bodies. This experience provides them with practical knowledge and familiarity with the operational dynamics of the University's Councils. The different academic backgrounds of faculty members also allow an interdisciplinary approach within the councils.

Source: Adapted from Braz and Custódio (2025), with the supervision of the authors.

Moreover, based on data collected through dialogue with more than 150 members of the UnB academic community, the University of Brasília (UnB) holds a multifaceted understanding of participation, encompassing everything from a sense of belonging and shared responsibility to the effective exercise of democracy within university life. For many, participation means feeling an integral part of the institution and having the opportunity to influence its direction, not only through physical presence but also through engagement in debates, the collective construction of ideas, and the execution of projects. This view emphasizes the importance of a space where everyone can speak, act, and, crucially, be heard, fostering a bond of exchange and care for the university, where effective communication is seen as a crucial pillar for disseminating deliberations.

Participation manifests in various forms at UnB, both in formal settings and in more everyday interactions. Community members engage in councils, collegiate bodies, and commissions, acting as listeners, information disseminators, and, in some cases, decision-makers. Additionally, participation arises from daily partnerships, collaboration, continuous dialogue in classrooms, and engagement with university challenges. The selection of representatives for bodies like the DCE (Central Directory of Students), involvement in outreach activities, and presence in both digital and physical (territorial) environments are also recognized as fundamental avenues for exercising participation, reflecting a desire for active involvement in institutional dynamics.



However, the effectiveness of participation at UnB is hampered by some problems. Fragmentation and isolation among sectors, units, and collegiate bodies lead to disarticulation. This is compounded by unassertive communication, which prevents information from reaching everyone clearly and accessibly, especially for students and technical staff. Excessive bureaucracy and rigid rules limit the agility and openness of processes, while the absence of feedback on contributions discourages engagement. The underrepresentation of technical staff and students in collegiate bodies and the heavy workload across different segments also contribute to apathy. Fear of criticism and structural issues like lack of inter-campus transportation compromise the participatory potential. These obstacles give rise to two experiences within the academic community: on one hand, a strong desire to engage more actively in decision-making processes and academic life, yet being hindered by structural and procedural barriers; on the other, a growing disillusionment with participatory practices, stemming from the lack of tangible outcomes and the absence of meaningful changes needed to advance the university and ensure more fluid day-to-day operations.

To overcome these obstacles and strengthen democratic management, the community points to the need for substantially improving communication and information, making them more accessible and understandable through digital platforms, social media, and specific information materials. Specially, many suggested that the participatory forums should be more comprehensible and the entrance of members would be better if accompanied by a handbook of its guidelines. In general, the interviewees understand that continuous feedback and responses to participation, valuing contributions and qualified listening from managers and fostering a sense of belonging are crucial for engaging members. The community recognizes that the responsibility for participation is shared by everyone, requiring a collective effort to build a more democratic and responsive university environment. Ultimately, articulation and integration among the university's various instances and actors, promoting humanized processes, fostering dialogue spaces and conviviality, providing training for participation, strategically using innovative technologies (like collaborative



platforms), and implementing a strategic plan for participation are identified as essential paths.

The University of Brasília (UnB) stands to benefit significantly from implementing and strengthening an academic participation system, especially given its current challenges and the aspirations of its community. Such a system, by aligning community perceptions with concepts of deliberative systems and socio-state interfaces, can transform university dynamics in several ways, such as enhancing democratic governance and qualified decisions; increasing responsiveness and institutional relevance; overcoming fragmentation and strengthening bonds; optimizing communication and strategic use of technology; and promoting democratic innovations to orientate public action.

An academic participation system would significantly strengthen UnB's democratic governance. By articulating the Superior Councils and other collegiate bodies with broader, more fluid engagement mechanisms, the university can more effectively integrate diverse perspectives from faculty, staff, students, and the external community. This leads to more informed and legitimate decisions, as it incorporates a plurality of voices and knowledge (following the systemic view of deliberative democracy by Mansbridge et al., 2012), overcoming the notion that a single forum can legitimize all choices. The system would enable UnB to develop a much greater capacity to respond to the demands and expectations of its community. An integrated system would ensure accountability and the circulation of information (reflecting the UnB community's emphasis on communication and information). This would transform the university into a more agile institution, better aligned with real needs, particularly regarding issues like infrastructure, mental health, student aid, and curriculum flexibility.

Currently, participation at UnB is criticized for its fragmentation and isolation among units and sectors. An articulated system, based on the idea of socio-state interfaces (Hevia and Isunza Vera, 2006, 2010; Lüchmann, 2020), can connect formal mechanisms (collegiate bodies) with informal ones (daily dialogues, partnerships). This would create a cohesive internal network, facilitating transversal articulation and continuous dialogue among different instances and actors — something the UnB



community already desires and that the Statute doesn't detail for digital contexts. The "sense of belonging" would be reinforced by humanizing processes and relationships.

Moreover, the UnB community identifies flawed communication as one of the main problems hindering participation. Communication processes are central to sustaining participation and democracy. Relying solely on councils and collegiate bodies for communication flows is insufficient to reach the entire academic community, largely due to the legislative-driven underrepresentation of administrative staff and students, and inherent difficulties in engaging external members. Digital platforms can be instrumental. They not only facilitate the recognition of diverse views, demands, and expectations but also enable crucial feedback on participatory outcomes. An academic participation system would greatly benefit from strategic and transparent communication, utilizing digital platforms and social media to both to spread information about decisions, processes, and engagement opportunities, as well as to assemble the community perspectives. This would not only give greater visibility to the work of collegiate bodies but also allow for the recognition and validation of community demands, as well as providing necessary feedback on the results of participatory dynamics. Technology would become a tool for integration, not merely for disseminating information, as suggested by UnB interviewees.

The proposal (Figure 1) seeks to integrate the participatory and deliberative structures historically established at the University of Brasília (UnB) since its inception—such as councils, chambers, and collegiate bodies—with emerging participation channels, including digital media, public consultations, and hearings. It also envisions the incorporation of new participatory modalities that engage the university's diverse constituencies, such as collectives and the formation of advisory committees focused on key themes like student welfare, culture and sports, and the fight against disinformation.

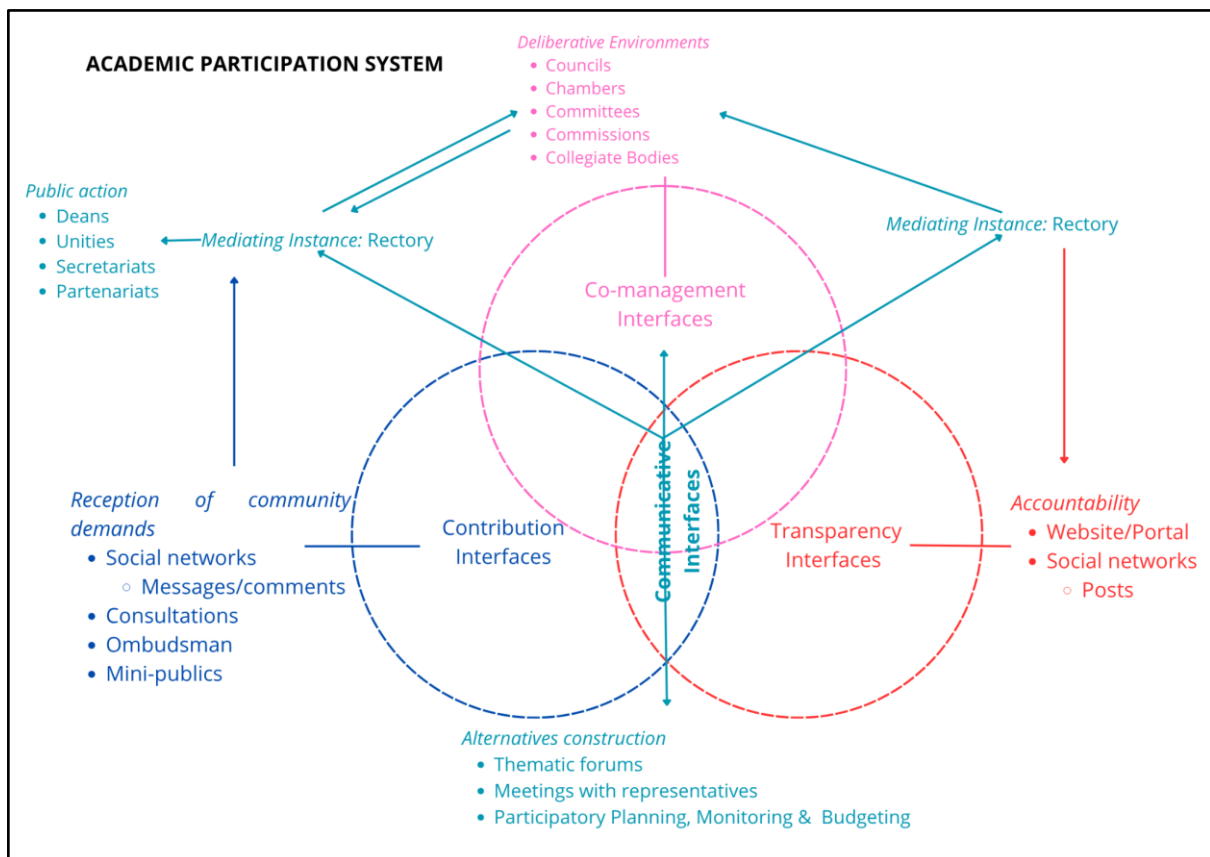
To this end, and as indicated by the academic community consulted throughout the research process, the system is anchored in the enhancement of communicative interfaces, ensuring that information circulates effectively across different groups and institutional sectors. At the same time, it aims to foster a more comprehensive



understanding of the university as a complex and interconnected whole—an essential demand, given UnB’s large scale, comprising nearly 60,000 individuals.

By enabling the reception of community demands (contributive interfaces) and the return of decisions and outcomes to the community (transparency interfaces), these communicative mechanisms support more informed and context-sensitive deliberative processes (co-management interfaces), aligned with the real needs and aspirations of the academic community. Within this architecture, the rectorate assumes a mediating role, facilitating both shared governance and the implementation of public action.

Figure 1. UnB’s Academic Participation System Proposal



Source: The authors.

An academic participation system can be a catalyst for democratic innovations at UnB. By fostering dialogicity and transversality (Cruz & Daroit, 2017; 2023), the



university would become a living laboratory of democracy, with the responsibility for participation shared by all. It would encourage policy co-production and the reorientation of collective action within the university itself. Integrating different types of knowledge (legal, scientific, practical) and valuing diverse spokespersons, as occurs in hybrid forums, would enable UnB to face its challenges more complexly and creatively, complementing its formal interfaces and overcoming the limitations of more bureaucratic traditional mechanisms.

Final Remarks

An integrated academic participation system would bring substantial benefits to UnB, enhancing its democratic governance by more effectively integrating diverse perspectives and knowledge. This would lead to more qualified and legitimate decisions, moving beyond the fragmentation often seen in current collegiate structures. Such a system would significantly boost the university's responsiveness to community demands, ensuring feedback and aligning with real needs like infrastructure and mental health support. It would also help overcome current isolation, fostering a cohesive internal network and humanizing processes through the articulation of both formal and informal mechanisms. Communication would be optimized, leveraging technology strategically to disseminate information, validate demands, and provide essential feedback, transforming communication into a tool for integration.

In this context, transversality may function as a catalyst for the development of innovative solutions to persistent challenges within the university — most notably excessive bureaucratization, the limited systemic understanding of the institution as an integrated whole, and the structural and operational management constraints that hinder the effective fulfillment of its core missions: teaching, research, and extension. By fostering broader engagement of the academic community and expanding the scope of deliberation to encompass fundamental issues — such as the university's role in professional and political formation and in the production of knowledge to address national challenges (a central tenet of UnB's founding vision) — the hybrid



forums that underpin the academic participation system can contribute to repositioning the university within its social environment. These forums support the construction of shared meanings, in which a strengthened sense of belonging drives the co-creation of democratic innovations and generates meaningful outcomes for the broader community in which the university is situated. Ultimately, this system would serve as a catalyst for democratic innovations within UnB, fostering dialogicity and transversality, encouraging policy co-production, and positioning the university as a living laboratory of democracy.

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