

NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AND SOCIAL MANAGEMENT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS



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Éder Rodrigo Gimenes¹.

ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: Since the re-democratization of Brazil in the mid-1980s, there have been significant advances in the development of various forms of participation and in how the population accesses and engages in political and social actions. In this sense, it is pertinent to highlight some aspects of the formation of the national scenario in these last five decades.

First, after a period of military government with restrictions on the political involvement of Brazilians, in 1985 the resumption of presidential elections was approved as a direct vote by the population and the text of the Federal Constitution of 1988 introduced innovations such as the possibility of submitting proposals of popular initiative for consideration as projects by the Legislative Branch and the holding of plebiscites and referendums, in addition to expanding the group of voters and encouraging the strengthening and/or establishment of mechanisms of institutional participation, about which Brazil is internationally recognized as an example due to public policy councils and conferences and the experiences of Participatory Budgets, for example.

Keywords: Non-Formal Education. Social Management. Civil Society Organizations.

¹ PhD in Political Sociology from the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC), professor of the Postgraduate Programs in Social Sciences and Public Policies at the State University of Maringá (UEM), professor and research fellow at the Cidade Verde University Center (UniCV). Researcher at the Center for Research in Political Participation (Nuppol/UEM) and the INCT "Representation and Democratic Legitimacy" (REDEM/CNPq).
E-mail: ergimenes@uem.br

INTRODUCTION

Since the return to democracy in Brazil in the mid-1980s, there have been significant advances in the development of various forms of participation and in how the population accesses and engages in political and social actions. In this sense, it is pertinent to highlight some aspects of the formation of the national scenario in these last five decades.

Firstly, after a period of military government with restrictions on the political involvement of Brazilians, in 1985 the resumption of presidential elections was approved as a direct vote by the population and the text of the Federal Constitution of 1988 introduced innovations such as the possibility of submitting proposals of popular initiative for consideration as projects by the Legislative Branch and the holding of plebiscites and referendums, in addition to expanding the group of voters and encouraging the strengthening and/or establishment of mechanisms of institutional participation, about which Brazil is internationally recognized as an example due to public policy councils and conferences and the experiences of Participatory Budgets, for example.

Secondly, in addition to the forms of participation that have some direct relationship with public power, it is pertinent to consider collective actions, with emphasis on social movements and civil society organizations (CSOs) or the Third Sector. Throughout the history of the national republic, social movements have been protagonists of social struggles and significant mobilizations, especially unions and workers in the first decades of the last century and the movements that pressured the government to establish women's suffrage in 1932. With the military regime and the repression of freedom of expression, movement, and demonstration, social movements were hunted down by the government, but they did not weaken; on the contrary, they articulated themselves beyond two individual agendas and organized demonstrations for the resumption of democracy, also assuming an important position during the Constituent Assembly that organized the text of the current Magna Carta. On the other hand, with the return of democracy, social movements began to establish dialogues with the State, especially after the 2002 electoral victory of the Workers' Party (PT) candidate for president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, due to the party's historical relationship with social, union and religious movements. On the other hand, actions were undertaken by private associations and foundations, whose activities take place in parallel and/or in partnership with governments, and these social organizations - social initiatives, formalized or informal community associations, and CSOs - are the object of research and discussion in this article.

In this context, the objective of this research is to present and discuss an experience report resulting from the implementation of an extension project, linked to an undergraduate course, aimed at a broad audience of participants who work in CSOs, social movements and other social initiatives, constituting a non-formal education strategy for training.

To this end, in addition to these initial considerations, the article is also composed of three other sections. The next section presents official data and results of previous analyses that allow the characterization of the Third Sector field in Brazil. Next, the undergraduate course from which the extension project originated is highlighted, and the aforementioned non-formal education initiative and its direct and indirect results are discussed, both for the social reality of the target audience and for the development of research and structuring of the undergraduate course itself. Finally, considerations are outlined regarding the impact of the project on teaching, research, and extension activities related to CSOs and social training.

SOCIAL PARTICIPATION IN THE THIRD SECTOR: CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN BRAZIL

Since the State's purpose is to serve the population, it is up to public management to work in a way that meets the needs of citizens through actions that aim to optimize the accountability and transparency of public acts (AZAMBUJA, 2005). Thus, public management is related to the political development of the State, whose changes do not necessarily have a direct relationship with its economic development, which implies that the reforms that the modern State has undergone tend to generate many conflicts since they confront the vision of the bureaucratic State in return for innovations that can contribute to the development and improvement of the public management process.

In this context, it is up to the State to implement actions that meet the interests and needs of the population, especially in a democratic regime. The means for such implementation corresponds to public policies, which constitute mechanisms for implementing the deliberations of the public power toward the population. Considering its scope in terms of areas of action and performance, as well as the distinctions that can be assumed according to the arrangements between the State and government, there is no single concept to address the issue. For example, for Souza (2006), public policies correspond to the field of knowledge that aims to effectively carry out government actions,

as well as their evaluations depending on the results of this analysis, as well as the proposal of changes about the execution of activities. Rodrigues (2010) understands that public policies are the set of processes through which different groups, with different demands and interests, debate to make collective decisions that direct paths to the development of certain areas within a sphere of society (municipal, state, or federal). Finally, Amabile (2012) presents a set of characteristics that permeate the concept of public policies, namely: they are decisions that involve issues of public order and that enjoy broad scope, to satisfy the interests of collectives; they concern public action strategies with the capacity to impact reality; and represent the implementation of government actions, developed through a complex process.

Given this perspective, the social rights that public policies aim to meet can be from the most diverse areas, such as education, health, public transportation, leisure, culture, housing, social security, or minority agendas, which means that the focus of public policies is not a specific field of action, but the guarantee of broad citizenship, so that not all actions will cover the entire population, as they may be directed to meet the demands or needs of social, cultural, ethnic or economic segments that are in a social-political condition that inspires care. This means both the diversification of areas and groups served and the universalization of the concern for achieving the well-being of society as a whole, even if the effective contribution of the State to this may eventually be small (GIMENES, 2018).

Regarding the prospects for effective changes in social reality through public policies, social mobilization stands out due to initiatives and institutions that operate in partnership with and/or in substitution for the State, especially due to the neoliberal context of precarious social investments since the mid-1990s in the country (CECÍLIO; BERNARDO; CURI, 2019).

Given that the globalization process has affected the economic market and also other areas of society, these forms of mobilization have suffered significant effects in recent decades, which has reflected on how social actions are articulated and conducted. Regarding this change, which also occurred in Brazil, Scherer-Warren (2012) highlights the identification of different possibilities for organizing individuals, which the author calls collective actions:

[...] the expression collective actions have generally been used, even in academia, as a definition of an empirical concept to refer to any forms of protest or protest action carried out by social groups, such as civil associations, groups for the defense of common civil interests, public interest organizations (SCHERER-WARREN, 2012, p. 19).

This concept refers to a broad spectrum of modalities, with different interests and levels of action, from the action of a non-governmental organization (NGO) or civil society organization (CSO) that carries out its work in a community or neighborhood of a given municipality to national or international organizations.

The second aspect highlighted by Scherer-Warren (2012) concerns the articulation of collective actions in contemporary times. According to the author, this articulation can occur at three levels, depending on the complexity of its organization: [1] social networks, when it involves ties established due to continuity between actions or interaction in their execution, without the need for formal organization and greater possibility of action led by individuals; [2] network collectives, which refer to articulations between NGOs or other organizations around specific thematic categories, such as the Brazilian Forum of NGOs and Social Movements for the Environment and Development, which brings together different collective actors that mobilize for environmental causes; and [3] network social movements, about the unions of social movements around general or specific causes, and at different times it is possible to have articulations in networks that are also distinct, due to the objectives, interlocutors and demands on the agenda. Regarding civil society organizations, the most recent official data made available by the Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA), referring to the year 2016, indicate the existence of 820,185 CSOs operating in Brazil, a number that refers to the organization's active organizations, excluding entities such as political parties, unions, notary offices, condominiums and other entities that do not fit the specified characterization. Of this total, 86% are private associations, 12% are religious organizations and 2% are private foundations (LOPEZ, 2018). Regarding their characterization, entities that meet the following specificities are classified as CSOs:

- a) they are private and are not legally or legally linked to the State;
- b) they are not for profit, that is, they do not distribute the surplus among owners or directors and, if there is a surplus generated, it is applied to the organization's core activities;
- c) they are legally constituted, that is, they have legal personality and registration with the CNPJ [National Registry of Legal Entities];
- d) they are self-managed and manage their activities autonomously; e) they are voluntarily established by individuals, and the activities they perform are freely

chosen by those responsible (LOPEZ, 2018, p. 15-16).

Quantitative data show that more than 58% of these CSOs were formally established after 1990, with around 40% in the 1990s and 2000s and another 18.6% between 2011 and 2016, with distribution and growth in all units of the federation and the different areas of activity, related to social policies, as highlighted in tables 1 and 2, respectively.

Table 1. Number of CSOs by Creation Period

Period	CSOs	%	North	Northeast	Southeast	South	Central-West
Until 1970	28,579	3.5	1,224	3,568	15,933	6,107	1,747
1971-1980	72,466	8.8	3,115	10,426	37,900	16,099	4,926
1981-1990	88,147	10.7	3,855	16,151	38,833	22,919	6,389
1991-2000	201,389	24.6	16,039	60,809	69,769	40,208	14,564
2001-2010	277,452	33.8	27,583	78,265	101,500	48,002	22,102
2011-2016	152,152	18.6	15,554	36,081	61,440	24,563	14,514
Total	820,185	100	67,370	205,300	325,375	157,898	64,242

Source: Adapted from Lopez (2018).

Table 2. Number of CSOs by Area of Activity

Area	Total	%	North	Northeast	Southeast	South	Central-West
Health	6,841	0.8	318	1,189	3,424	1,412	498
Culture and Recreation	79,917	9.7	4,999	14,308	31,901	23,394	5,315
Education and Research	39,669	4.8	3,536	11,716	15,497	5,206	3,714
Social Assistance	27,383	3.4	1,132	5,684	13,523	4,915	2,129
Religion	208,325	25.4	13,557	35,025	112,713	27,677	19,353
Employer and Professional Associations	22,261	2.7	2,030	4,743	8,749	4,474	2,265
Development and Advocacy of Rights and Interests	339,104	41.3	31,950	108,337	104,526	71,424	22,867
Other Associative Activities and/or Civil Society Organizations	96,636	11.9	9,848	24,298	35,043	19,396	8,101
Total	820,136	100	67,370	205,300	325,376	157,898	64,242

Source: Adapted from Lopez (2018).

Table 3. Total and Percentage of CSOs in Formal Employment by Areas of Activity

Area	CSOs	%	Employed Personnel	%
Health	2,706	2.9	738,217	25.4
Culture and Recreation	7,965	8.6	147,206	5.1
Education and Research	6,399	6.9	551,900	19
Social Assistance	5,563	6	182,587	6.3
Religion	27,611	29.9	360,737	12.4
Employer and Professional Associations	5,279	5.7	65,342	2.2
Development and Advocacy of Rights and Interests	22,762	24.7	475,548	16.4
Other Associative Activities and/or Civil Society Organizations	13,959	15.2	383,351	13.2
Total	92,244	100	2,904,888	100

Source: Adapted from Lopez (2018).

Table 4. Total and Percentage of Employed Personnel in Formal Jobs by Region and Federal Units

Region	CSOs	%	Employed Personnel	%
North	3,885	4.2	90,825	3.1
Northeast	13,014	14.1	381,848	13.1
Southeast	48,492	52.6	1,698,756	58.5
South	19,042	20.6	513,450	17.7
Central-West	7,811	8.5	220,009	7.6
Total	92,244	100	2,904,888	100

Source: Adapted from Lopez (2018).

A detailed analysis of this amount highlights a persistent characteristic in this segment over the decades: this contingent of formal workers is concentrated in around 10% of these organizations, while the remaining 90% are micro-organizations, of which 7% have one or two employment relationships and 83% have no record of formal relationships (LOPEZ, 2018). Based on this information, Gimenes, Souza, and Santiago (2018) inferred that the so-called Third Sector operates, mostly, based on voluntary work and/or partnerships with city halls or agreements with private companies, a reality that has remained the same over the decades (KISIL, 2000; PIMENTA; BRASIL, 2006), without recent changes, which could generate concern. Considering this information, it is possible to see that the field of activity of CSOs is currently characterized by the expansion of the number of legally established entities, by the low percentage of formally linked workers with consequent dependence on volunteering, and by the increase in legal requirements and specificities for the functioning of organizations.

This set of findings demonstrates that the scope of action of social managers is increasingly specific, as well as highlights the growing and pressing need for professionalization in the sector, as discussed by Gimenes and other authors in material organized to address professional practices aimed at developing the management of CSOs (GIMENES, 2020), a need pointed out by the segment itself about bureaucratic demands and other activities of the institutional routine.

NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AS A PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE: PROFESSIONAL TRAINING AND RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

This experience report is the result of teaching activities linked to the undergraduate course in Management of Third Sector Organizations, offered by a private Brazilian university in the distance learning modality and recognized by the Ministry of Education as the only higher education course in the area in operation in the country. Since 2017, I have been teaching the course, having experience in activities such as preparing teaching

materials, teaching courses, coordinating the course, supervising scientific initiation research, and participating in research, teaching, and extension projects.

With regard to the last activity, extension projects are developed by faculty members with a view to impacting social reality, and in the case of the Management of Third Sector Organizations course, such projects had the objective of contributing to the dissemination of information and technical knowledge to broaden the perspective of training social managers, considering the deficiency highlighted in the previous section of this article.

Therefore, this experience report deals with the “Gesta Social” project, in which I participated as a teacher in the first edition (2018) and as a coordinator in the second edition (2019). This project was developed through a partnership between the Third Sector Organizations Management course, the Municipal Department of Social Assistance of the City Hall of Maringá, and an institute linked to a state TV network, to train individuals active in social initiatives and movements, which lack strengthening and information regarding the institutionalization of their practices and improvements to their functioning. In 2018, 126 participants from 60 entities were trained and in 2019 the project reached 105 participants from 68 entities, including initiatives, movements, associations, or CSOs already regularly operating, which develop actions in the urban, rural, and metropolitan areas of Maringá and Londrina - reaching at least seven municipalities and activities in the fields of social assistance, health, religion, education and defense of rights. This extension project expected to promote non-formal education to the target audience, along the lines of Gohn's (2006, p. 28) definition of the subject, which is:

Non-formal education designates a process with several dimensions such as: political learning of the rights of individuals as citizens; training individuals for work, through learning skills and/or developing potential; learning and exercising practices that enable individuals to organize themselves with community objectives, aimed at solving everyday collective problems; learning content that enables individuals to read the world from the point of view of understanding what is happening around them [...].

To this end, the first meeting of each edition of the project was a conversation circle, open to participation and dialogue for expressions of difficulties, tensions, limits, expectations, and needs on the part of the target audience. The dialogic experiences allowed the project's organizing team to establish training on topics relevant to the social reality of the participants, in a way that lectures, workshops, and activities were offered on volunteering, the legal formalization of social movements and associations to become CSOs, the possibility of raising funds and understanding the spaces and mechanisms

relevant to participatory institutions, the importance of training for the management of social initiatives, strategic planning, raising funds, developing projects and municipal councils in general.

Throughout the project, a strategy of applying questionnaires was adopted in order to understand the internal and external environments of the organizations, for which the responses to the questionnaires were systematized using a technique called the SWOT matrix.

The SWOT matrix derives from the initials of the four aspects considered in its analysis: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This strategy for collecting and analyzing data allows the identification of positive and negative aspects related to the functioning of the organization (internal environment) and of elements that configure opportunities or threats perceived in the context where the organization operates (external environment). Although Santos et al (2004) and Sertek, Guindani, and Martins (2012) highlight its application in the business environment, authors such as Chirnev (2020), Cazumbá (2014), and Nakagawa (2020) state that SWOT is recommended for CSOs because it enables the understanding of points of attention and/or development and stimulation within the organization and its environment, since it is based on the collection of conjunctural and primary data with a view to prospecting paths for the CSO to act.

When it comes to constructing the instrument for data collection, it is appropriate to consider the specificities of the target audience, given that the participants of “Gesta Social” had different levels of educational background, some even had difficulty reading and interpreting, so it was decided to develop simple questions. This strategy is in line with the proposal of Certo et al (2010), who lists a set of questions for each element of the SWOT matrix.

In this sense, considering previous research experience at the master's level (GIMENES, 2011) and discussions with the public as a professor of the aforementioned undergraduate course, it was considered pertinent to develop direct questions that would allow descriptive answers. Thus, considering the components of the SWOT matrix, the questions that deal with strengths seek to identify the public served, the activities developed, the resources available, and the greatest advantage of the action of the entity, movement, or project. In terms of weaknesses, data on the formalization of the CSO, the training of personnel, the physical structure, the administration, and the knowledge of the policy that governs the field of public policy in which the entity's action is inserted are

relevant.

In the environment external to the organization, it is imperative to understand what opportunities the entities envision about directing actions to councils or public agencies, as well as potential contacts with private companies. Finally, regarding threats, one should ask about the perception regarding policies or negotiations that may affect the organization's performance and threats that may negatively impact the functioning of the entity, project, or social movement.

For educational purposes, the following table presents the basic questions offered to project participants. Regarding the application of the questionnaire, experience has shown that conditions for responses should be provided, such as a suitable place for accommodation, materials, and availability of time and attention to clarify any doubts and wait for individuals to reflect and report what was requested according to their limitations or difficulties.

Table 1. SWOT Matrix base questionnaire for the “Gesta Social” extension Project

	POSITIVE FACTORS Help the Strategic Environment	NEGATIVE FACTORS Disrupt the Strategic Environment
INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT (Characteristics of Institutions)	STRENGTHS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is the target audience for the organization's services? • What activities are carried out in the organization? • What material, financial and personnel resources are available? • What is the organization's biggest advantage or difference? 	WEAKNESSES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the organization have a legal entity registration (CNPJ)? • Are there actions to train employees and/or volunteers? • What needs to be improved in the organization's physical structure? • How is the organization managed? • What do you know about public policy and legislation related to the organization?
EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT (Market Characteristics)	OPPORTUNITIES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What actions are directed at politics and councils to improve the organization's performance? • Is it possible to seek contributions from public bodies? • Is there a possibility of partnerships with private companies? • What previous contacts can be resumed? 	THREATS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the level of influence or participation of the organization in defining public policy? • How does the organization deal with bureaucracy? • Are there perceived threats that could hinder the continuity of care?

Source: Prepared by the author.

By allocating the responses to each field, it is possible to perform analyses that allow for the establishment of a more assertive portrait of the social management investigated, considering three stages pertinent to the analysis of the data, namely: [1] considering the responses to each question in a specific manner for the entire contingent of questionnaires; [2] establishing the summaries of the questions of each element (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) to analyze it in its entirety; and [3] considering the interlocutions between the fields present in the matrix to understand their operational

context and prospect social management activities and strategies.

Therefore, the first stage of the analysis consists of the descriptive verification of the contents of the responses to identify recurrences and specificities, while the second stage concerns the joint analysis of the responses to each question of the same element of the matrix. The third stage, is the most complex and complete part of the analysis, since, in an adaptation of the analytical proposal by Sertek, Guindani, and Martins (2012) aimed at the Third Sector, the expectation is to establish interlocutions between strengths and opportunities, weaknesses and opportunities, strengths and threats and weaknesses and threats to generate information for decision-making.

The interlocution between strengths and opportunities provides a picture of the organization's service and its prominence in the community where it operates, while the combination of data on weaknesses and opportunities points out aspects that need to be improved in the management of the CSO to enhance its interaction with society. On the other hand, when the CSO's strengths and external threats are analyzed together, there are points of attention that should be monitored, since they do not represent momentary problems but require care so as not to harm the organization's functioning. Finally, the interlocution of weaknesses and threats provides information on everything that must be overcome or eliminated by the CSO to avoid its discontinuity. Regarding the results, from this point onwards in the section, findings arising from the analyses of the second and third stages are presented, based on the understanding that the synthesis of the second stage includes the results initially compiled in the first stage of analysis. I then present the summaries of the responses to the questions of each element (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) to understand it in its entirety, carried out after reading all the answers to the questions individually (first step).

About the strengths, the multifaceted profile of organizations, initiatives, projects, and social movements whose members participated in "Gesta Social" stood out: there are those with continuous or occasional assistance, for groups ranging from 20 to around 1000 people per month, with varied audiences, such as homeless individuals, drug addicts, families in conditions of social vulnerability, individuals who have left prison, the elderly and patients diagnosed with different diseases and their families, for example. In this sense, the focus was on inclusion, acceptance, and/or social and family reintegration as the main positive results of the work, which is based on activities such as intellectual and professional training, social, psychological, and material support, provision of training and

therapeutic courses, as well as spiritual guidance and family counseling. However, the majority of participants also reported that the activities depend on volunteers since few entities have hired employees - which is consistent with the national scenario.

As for weaknesses, most participants reported working in entities that are in the process of formalization, some having difficulties due to the bureaucratic requirements for registration with the National Registry of Legal Entities (CNPJ), while others that are already formally constituted highlighted concerns about accreditation with municipal councils. Other points of concern are the low level of systematization of training due to the dependence on volunteers, which is partially inconsistent, and the lack of adequate structure for the activities in terms of physical space, equipment and materials for services, means of transportation for the public that needs such support, and the very condition of human resources. Still regarding the last aspect, the lack of human, financial, and material resources was unanimously highlighted as a weakness of the entities, with the specificities of the legislation acting as an obstacle both because they are legal and public order systems and because the greatest concern of participants and non-institutionalized entities is generally with the quality of the service provided, not with the bureaucratic aspects. In the external environment of the entities, among the participants of the "Gesta Social," it was identified that the majority began to consider the possibility of participation and/or forwarding demands and agendas to the councils as a repertoire of action, which represents an opportunity to improve their actions, even though approximately a quarter of the entities maintained their focus exclusively on carrying out their core activities. Among the contributions expected of the public authorities, the entities highlighted, for the most part, the need to offer professional training courses, financial resources, and infrastructure, as well as the need to reduce or make bureaucracy more flexible to formalize their activities and raise funds and the possibility of providing advice to entities that occupy seats on councils. Furthermore, approximately 80% of the questionnaires contained answers that denote the importance of resuming, maintaining, or establishing partnerships with public agencies and private companies, which they justified by stating that such partnerships could subsidize the expansion of the number of people served and the quality of the service. Finally, regarding external threats to the functioning of the entities, the specificities of the legislation and bureaucratic obstacles were repeatedly cited as the greatest concern by participants, who highlighted the expectation that the Regulatory Framework will hinder actions due to the lack of details on the deadline for its entry into

force or for adjustments, in addition to impasses regarding the classification of activities by public policy councils and the requirements for their constitution and operation that are imposed by the government. A second threat should also be highlighted, which refers to the difficulty in raising funds (also largely related to legislation), valuing the work developed as something professional (and not just as a charity), and raising awareness among the population (both for volunteer engagement and donations) and the government (for reducing bureaucracy and material support).

Given the summaries of the main positive and negative aspects of the internal and external environments exposed by members of social entities, it is possible to consider the interlocations between strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to identify both circumstantial aspects and prospective activities and strategies for social management. Therefore, I will now briefly present the results of the third step of the SWOT analysis, that is, the interlocations between strengths and opportunities, strengths and threats, weaknesses and opportunities, and weaknesses and threats.

When observing the first interlocation, the positive points are the multiplicity of entities about the operating characteristics and the prospect of establishing a dialogue with the government to participate in the definition of municipal public policies. On the other hand, observing strengths and threats, despite the social commitment of the entities, there are bureaucratic and material obstacles that need to be addressed and may hinder the performance of the activities currently performed.

Regarding weaknesses and their relationship with opportunities, the results show the need for greater engagement by the State in the structuring and formalization of the entities, since opening a dialogue with the municipal Executive and the councils is only relevant to entities that are already institutionalized.

Finally, the weaknesses-threats binomial shows that the restriction of resources of all kinds - physical, financial, human resources and even information - is the main challenge for entities, capable, as reported by some participants of "Gesta Social", of constraining the process of formalization or the execution of activities, to the point of becoming, in extreme cases, an impediment to the continuity of the activities of the social entity.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Considering the context of strengthening social protagonism in the struggles for rights and public policies in Brazil over the decades, CSOs are currently configured as

important institutions in debates with the State and as collective strategies for individuals in vulnerable situations to have access to public equipment and services of a social nature. However, despite the growth of CSOs in the country, this is still an incipient field of management and professionalization. That said, this article aimed to present and discuss an experience report resulting from the implementation of the extension project “Gesta Social”, a non-formal education activity aimed at members of social initiatives, social movements, and CSOs. In general, this objective was met by the explanation about the organization of the project, its target audience, the topics covered, and the detailed results of the SWOT analysis, but it is also necessary to highlight other developments of this activity.

In this sense, first of all, It is worth highlighting that “Gesta Social” was configured as a strategy to promote the social development of local communities, so that its impact has a potential effect on the functioning of dozens of organizations, which served thousands of citizens in seven municipalities with a total population of over 1.3 million inhabitants in 2019. Thus, in the social sphere, the project is linked to at least four Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (UN), namely: eradication of poverty (1); quality education (4); reduction of inequalities (10); and peace, justice and effective institutions (16).

Regarding the Third Sector Organizations Management course, the results of the project allowed the delimitation of training perspectives and also became a source of information for proposing activities to academics, as well as stimulating discussions about the content taught and the need to develop more teaching, extension and research projects.

Specifically regarding the latter perspective, between 2018 and 2019, in parallel with the “Gesta Social” meetings, I collected data on the functioning of municipal public policy councils and the participation of CSO members as representatives of the segment. The systematization and analysis resulting from the data collected through triangulation allowed us to infer that such participatory institutions are still not very democratic in the way they constrain the effective action of civil society representatives (Gimenes, 2019). Finally, the demands of the project participants and the recurring perception of the lack of professionalization of managers and individuals working in CSOs, in general, guided a change in the curricular matrix of the aforementioned undergraduate course, to include in its contents the professional practices pertinent to the Third Sector.

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