

Academic Rankings: implications for university governance of Brazilian Catholic universities

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ABSTRACT – Academic Rankings: implications for university governance of Brazilian Catholic universities^I. This article aims to analyze the implications of academic rankings, as external assessment tools, in the governance structure of Brazilian Catholic universities. For the development of this study, exploratory research was carried out through documentary and bibliographic analyses, taking as reference scientific production found in indexed bases, federal legislation, apostolic constitutions, canon law, statutes, regulations and Institutional Development Plans (IDPs) of these institutions. In light of the numerous existing rankings, their use is evident in the strategic planning process of most Catholic universities, through their respective performances in establishing goals and objectives.

Keywords: Catholic Universities. Academic Rankings. University Governance. Higher Education. Institutional Assessment.

RESUMO – Os Rankings Acadêmicos: implicações na governança universitária das universidades católicas brasileiras. O presente artigo tem como objetivo analisar as implicações dos rankings acadêmicos, como instrumentos de avaliação externa, na estrutura de governança das universidades católicas brasileiras. Para o desenvolvimento do estudo foi realizada pesquisa exploratória por meio de análises documentais e bibliográficas, tomando como referência produção científica obtida em bases indexadas, legislação federal, constituições apostólicas, direito canônico, estatutos, regimentos e Planos de Desenvolvimento Institucional (PDI's) dessas instituições. Diante dos inúmeros rankings existentes, evidencia-se em grande parte das universidades católicas, o uso desse ferramental no processo de planejamento estratégico, por meio de seus respectivos desempenhos para o estabelecimento de metas e objetivos.

Palavras-chave: Universidades Católicas. Rankings Acadêmicos. Governança Universitária. Educação Superior. Avaliação Institucional.

Introduction

Brazilian Catholic universities are aligned with each other under the spectrum of Christian identity present in their missions, principles and ethical-moral values. The governance of these institutions brings together elements that respect their characteristics and distinguish them from the others, as in addition to following the norms of the Federal Education System, they are governed by guidelines determined by the Holy See. However, it is clear that such particularities do not overlap with market-imposed logic, subjecting them to the flexibility of their management processes to adapt to the current scenario of higher education.

These universities seek to preserve their confessional identities in the face of challenges and external pressures of the educational market (Calderón, 2000; Traina Chacon; Calderón, 2015), in which they compete with for-profit Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). With threatening characteristics, such pressures influence their actions and overload them with contradictions, given the noticeable drop in demand for students at this level of education and the emergence of large educational groups, which further intensify competition in this segment of Brazilian HEIs.

The expansion of academic rankings, whether global, regional or local, since the creation of the Shanghai ranking – Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) –, is now on the spotlight and, as stated by Albatch (2006), they are here to stay. For Hazelkorn (2011), these are parameters in the battle for excellence: they are linked to greater accountability and transparency in the quest to achieve an outstanding level among institutions. These rankings have assumed the position of external evaluators and challenge university governance. Fanelli and Carranza (2018) point out that the impact of rankings on HEIs is increasingly evident: the internal governance structure of universities uses them in strategic plans and in benchmarking.

Studies on the performance of Catholic universities in academic rankings indicate a certain heterogeneity and, although supported by their quality-wise traditional prestige, not all of them stand out. There is a group with excellent performance made up of research universities; on the other hand, there is a group with below average performance (Wandercil; Calderón; Ganga-Contreras, 2019; Righetti; Gamba, 2019).

Among the Brazilian private universities, there are only four institutions (2% of the total) with similar characteristics when it comes to an administrative, research activity and institutional maturity point of view. UNISINOS (University of Vale do Rio dos Sinos) and the Pontifical Catholic Universities of Rio de Janeiro, Rio Grande do Sul and Paraná make up a group of non-profit confessional private universities with over 31 years of activity, in the South-Southeast axis of Brazil and with moderate research activity. These are Universities, therefore, that do not 'compete' with the group of internationalized Brazilian public

institutions, but converse with the set of moderate public universities such as, for example, UERJ (University of the State of Rio de Janeiro) and the Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF) (Righeti; Gamba, 2019, p. 149).

In the current scenario of higher education, marked by competition and academic rankings, Catholic universities began to adopt management methods based on business paradigms that are gradually adapted and shaped to university governance (Santos, 2010; Sampaio, 2014).

In light of the foregoing, this article aims to analyze and discuss the implications and uses of academic rankings as external assessment tools, a phenomenon that has gained more and more legitimacy in the scope of university governance in these universities as they are incorporated into the management tools.

Although academic rankings have achieved evident primacy and technical legitimacy as assessment tools, and although they are covered with actuality and originality, their approach in university governance documents is rarely addressed in Brazilian academic literature, as they analyze an emerging and little explored field of study, including in the Ibero-American space (Calderón; França, 2018).

This article is divided into four parts: the first presents the methodology adopted and contextualizes Catholic universities in the Brazilian higher education scenario; the second analyzes the mission, vision and royal governance documents of Catholic universities; the third addresses the similarities and distinctions between these HEIs; and finally, the fourth addresses Catholic universities in the context of quality indicators adopted by academic rankings.

Methodological Aspects of the Study and Catholic Universities in Context

For the development of this article, exploratory research was carried out through document and bibliographic analyses, referencing the scientific production obtained in databases such as the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), the Journal Portal and the Theses Bank of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES); Brazilian legislation; the apostolic constitutions and canon law; the Agreement between Brazil and the Holy See; statutes and regulations of Catholic universities, the resolutions of their university councils and councils for teaching, research, and continued education, the normative instruments and internal ordinances, the acts of the Grand Chancellors and Deans, as well as the Institutional Development Plans (IDPs) of these institutions.

It should be noted that this research was also based on a survey of the organizational structures of these universities and the relationship with their *stakeholders*², in the light of institutional documents. Achieving the proposed objective required a survey of institutional documents (statutes and regulations) and IDPs of these universities, considering

aspects of their respective missions and vision of the future, analysis of topics that address institutional objectives and goals, as well as identifying aspects that theoretically guide decision-making within the scope of governance, and whether they directly or indirectly point to concerns in relation to academic rankings.

Also note that for the purposes of this analysis Catholic universities were divided by size, adopting the criterion of the university ranking promoted by Folha (Ranking Universitário Folha..., 2019), defined by the number of students enrolled. Among the large universities, there are five, four of which are Pontifical³: those of Rio Grande do Sul (PUCRS), Minas Gerais (PUC MINAS), Paraná (PUCPR) and Goiás (PUC GOIÁS), together with the University of Vale do Rio dos Sinos (UNISINOS), headquartered in the city of São Leopoldo – RS. Within medium-sized universities, nine contemplate this structure, three of which are Pontifical: Rio de Janeiro (PUC-RIO), São Paulo (PUCSP) and Campinas (PUC-Campinas), São Paulo; the São Francisco University (USF) of Bragança Paulista, also in the State of São Paulo; the Catholic Universities of Pernambuco (UNICAP), Salvador (UCSAL), Brasília (UCB), the Catholic University of Dom Bosco (UCDB), Campo Grande – MS, and the La Salle University (UNILASALLE) of the city of Canoas – RS. Grouped among the small ones are the Catholic Universities of Pelotas (UCPEL), Petrópolis (UCP), Santos (UNISANTOS) and the Franciscan University (UFN) located in Santa Maria – RS.

Catholic Universities: their missions and visions and their royal governance documents

Catholic universities are governed by Brazilian legislation and, with regard to confessionality, they are also governed by apostolic constitutions; by canon law; by the agreement between Brazil and the Holy See (Brazil, 2010); by statutes and bylaws; by the resolutions of the university councils and of the councils for teaching, research and continued education; by regulatory instruments and internal ordinances; by the acts of the Grand Chancellors and Deans, and by their respective IDPs.

As suggested by Pope John Paul II (1990) in the Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*⁴, Catholic universities must manifest their confessionality through their missions expressed in their official documents (statutes, general regulations, IDPs, self-assessment reports) and/or institutional portals. However, their mission – a mechanism of aspirations and expectations described as institutional guidelines – needs to go beyond institutional documents, as its implementation must be verified in the actions that precede such registration.

The mission sets the cause that the institution supports and must clearly reflect the way it positions itself before society, its reason for being, its social role, objectives and strategies through effective and transparent management (Takeski; Rezende, 2000; Bart, 2001; Valadares, 2002).

This article analyzes to what extent the mission statement is in fact effective, as a tool to support university governance, since this statement is reflected in the directions of an institution. Chart 1 highlights the mission of the 18 Brazilian Catholic universities as identified in their official documents.

**Chart 1 – Mission of the 18 Brazilian Catholic Universities
According to Official Institutional Documents**

UNIVERSITIES	MISSION
PUC GOIÁS	Guided by the principles of academic excellence and social commitment, based on its Catholic, community and philanthropic identity, its mission is to undertake integral human development, associated with the production and socialization of knowledge and the dissemination of universal culture.
PUC-Campinas	From ethical-Christian values, considering the sociocultural characteristics of reality, its mission is to produce, enrich and disseminate knowledge, contributing to a fair and solidary society, through its Teaching, Research and Continued Education activities, aiming at excellent professional training and the integral development of the human person.
PUC MINAS	Promote human and social development, contributing to the humanistic and scientific training of competent professionals, based on values of ethics and solidarity and commitment to the common good, through the production and dissemination of science, arts and culture, the interdisciplinarity and integration between the University and society.
PUCPR	Guided by ethical, Christian and Marist principles, its mission is to develop and disseminate knowledge and culture, in addition to promoting the integral and permanent development of citizens and professionals committed to the life and progress of society.
PUC-RIO	Produce and propagate knowledge from teaching, research and continued education activities, based on pluralism and democratic debates, aiming, above all, at reflection, growth and enrichment of society.
PUCRS	Based on human rights, the principles of Christianity and the Marist educational tradition, its mission is to produce and disseminate knowledge and promote human and professional training, guided by quality and relevance, with a view to developing a just and fraternal society.
PUCSP	It is fundamentally guided by the principles of Catholic doctrine. In this spirit, it ensures freedom of investigation, teaching and expression of thought, always aiming at the accomplishment of its social role, considering the nature and public interest of its activities.
UCB	Its mission is to act in solidarity and effectively for the integral development of the human person and society, through the generation and sharing of knowledge, committed to quality, ethical and Christian values, in the search for the truth.
UCDB	Promote, through teaching, research, continued education and pastoral activities, the integral development based on Christian, ethical and Salesian principles, of people committed to society and sustainability.
UCP	Promote the integral development of the human person and the good of society in the face of current challenges, through excellence in teaching, research and continued education, inspired by the Christian message and supported by the principles of socio-environmental responsibility.

UNIVERSITIES	MISSION
UCPEL	Investigate the truth, produce and transmit knowledge to turn human beings into ethical and competent professionals, guided by Christian values, at the service of the person and society.
UCSAL	For the love of searching for the truth, develop ethical citizens and professionals committed to serving the human being and collaborating with social development through excellence in teaching, research and continued education.
UNICAP	Its mission is to preserve, elaborate and transmit knowledge, in order to develop human beings capable of carrying out a constructive attitude and contributing to the transformation of their community, the country and the world, inspired by the values of Christian humanism and the Jesuit tradition.
UNI SANTOS	Raise citizens based on the principles of solidarity, justice and respect for human rights, strengthened by Christian ethics and with professional competence to act in a heterogeneous sociocultural reality, subject to frequent changes.
UNISINOS	Promote the integrated training of the human person and their training for professional practice, through the production of knowledge, continuous learning and solidarity action for the development of society.
USC	Integral human development based on Catholic principles, materialized in the excellence of teaching, research and continued education, expressed in social commitment and in the dissemination of science and knowledge for the good of society.
USF	Producing and disseminating knowledge, freeing the human being through dialogue between science and faith and promoting fraternity and solidarity, through the practice of good and consequent construction of peace.

Source: Prepared by the authors. Official Documents and/or Institutional Portals (survey carried out in 2020).

The similarities between Catholic universities are evident and their missions are effectively linked to the apostolic constitutions, as they contemplate catalysts of the Christian faith and the universalization of knowledge. It is also observed that they expose their philosophy and values based on ethical-Christian principles, always referring to their stakeholders, making their commitment to society clear; especially when they refer to their commitment to the integral development of the human person, the reason why these philanthropic-community and confessional institutions exist. It is worth mentioning that the terms with the highest incidence in the missions of these HEIs highlight integral human development; ethical and Christian principles and values; Catholic identity; building a fair and solidary society, production and socialization of knowledge; excellence in teaching, research and continued education; commitment to society and quality and social duties (responsibility and sustainability); search for truth; diffusion of universal culture; freedom of investigation, teaching and expression of thought.

Their missions play an important role in directing university governance by bringing together elements that justify their existence. Having a main purpose is the starting point for the elaboration of their strategic planning and institutional development.

Another relevant aspect is the foresight of Catholic universities expressed through their vision. Maximiano (2011) highlights the importance of having a “mission”, the reason why the company exists, followed by the “vision”, an aspect established by the medium and long-term objectives it wishes to accomplish, strengthened by decision-making and, in the case of these HEIs, in line with their values, which are guided by the conservation of Catholic identity.

Considering the missions as starting points, the arrivals are references in different ways in space and time, that is, they depend on the horizon of their strategic plans or their IDPs. Chart 2 presents the vision of the future of Catholic universities, identified in their respective documents and/or institutional portals.

It is worth noting that, in their vision of the future, Brazilian Catholic universities take into account their institutional moment. When writing the IDPs, a reference that determines what they aim for within the planned time limit (objectives and goals for the coming years), it establishes, for example, if the university has the goal of being recognized as the greatest or best in the set time. In this sense, universities define measurable indicators in their IDPs or strategic plans to monitor their achieving the proposed objectives.

Chart 2 – Vision of the 18 Brazilian Catholic Universities According to Official Institutional Documents

HEI	VISION
PUC Goiás	To be recognized nationally and internationally for its excellence in academic practices, management, and social commitment, in all its areas and dimensions in a sustainable way.
PUC-Campinas	In 2025, to be recognized for excellence in the production and dissemination of knowledge, quality of teaching and innovation, fulfilling its mission and thus contributing to the transformation of society, towards justice and fraternity.
PUC Minas	To be a Catholic educational institution increasingly recognized for its ability to generate knowledge and innovations, as well as to promote social inclusion and consolidate national and international alliances, acting in the various areas of knowledge with efficiency, agility and with an adequate dimension in its academic structure -administrative, ensuring its contemporaneity, quality and sustainability.
PUCPR	By 2022, consolidate itself as a world-class institution with excellence in teaching, knowledge production, service provision and social relevance.
PUC-Rio	Not identified
PUCRS	In accordance with its Mission, PUCRS will be an international reference in Higher Education through Innovation and Social, Environmental, Scientific, Cultural and Economic Development.
PUCSP	Not identified
UCB	To be a reference in academic excellence and in the generation of sustainable development.
UCDB	“To be, by 2022, among the 100 best universities nationwide through processes of excellence in human education.”

HEI	VISION
UCP	To be recognized as a reference for a Community University, at the national level, offering excellence at different levels of education, in the face-to-face and distance modalities, expanding its geographical and academic performance, with sustainability, consolidating alliances, including international ones.
UCPEL	To be a recognized quality University, a reference center in education, health, business and technology, based on innovation, sustainable and participatory management, contributing to social and cultural promotion and local and regional development.
UCSAL	To be a national and international reference as a community university, recognized for academic excellence and committed to regional development.
UFN	Strengthen itself as a Franciscan University through the qualification and expansion of fields of knowledge, in pedagogical and scientific integration for human and social transformation.
UNICAP	To be a Reference as a Community University in Brazil, strong in teaching and research, an example of excellence in extension, aligned with the demands of regional and national development; committed to social transformation; organized in modern and sustainable standards by a consistent and innovative academic community, driven by the ability to dream, design and realize.
UNILASALLE	To be, in 2025, a University recognized for academic excellence, sustainability and internationalization.
UNISANTOS	Not identified
UNISINOS	To be a global research university.
USF	To be nationally recognized for academic excellence, for the promotion of sustainable innovation, regional development, justice and peace.

Source: Prepared by the authors. Official Documents and/or Institutional Portals (survey carried out in 2020).

The views of Catholic universities were analyzed in light of the quality indicators present in national and international academic rankings, more specifically those present in more than two rankings: 1) teaching; 2) research; 3) internationalization; 4) innovation; and 5) employability.

It should be noted that it was not possible to identify the “vision of the future” of PUC-Rio, PUCSP and UNISANTOS in official documents or institutional portals. Thus, analyzing the quality indicators of the academic rankings was restricted to 15 of the 18 Brazilian Catholic universities.

UNISINOS was the only Brazilian Catholic University not to mention the “teaching” quality indicator of academic rankings in their “vision”. However, this indicator is present in the “vision” of all the others, showing that this is the institutional focus of most of them, as identified in the study conducted by Righetti and Gamba (2019).

Regarding the “research” indicator, it was found that, although all HEIs have graduate programs, research is explicitly present in the “vision” of two (UNICAP and UNISINOS), reinforcing the focus of these institutions. UNISINOS (2014) established this indicator as a goal and

did so vehemently, giving it strong emphasis, translating its vision of the future into a single assertion “[...] to be a global research university”.

With regard to the “internationalization” indicator, eight Catholic universities (PUC Goiás, PUC Minas, PUCPR, PUCRS, UCP, UNILASALLE, UCSAL and UNISINOS) established international relevance as a vision of the future, two of them (PUCPR and UNISINOS) aim for “World-Class University” (WCU)⁵ status; four (PUC Goiás, PUC MINAS, PUCRS and UNILASALLE) aim for international recognition; and two (UCP and UCSAL) aim at international cooperation in the coming years. Based on these indications, Catholic universities have focused on internationalization. However, expanding institutional boundaries does not detract from the community role and local regional relevance of the others, as their profiles appeal to relevant demands of social development, socio-cultural promotion, commitment to environmental issues and social justice. These elements are present in the vision of these universities, which cherish both quality and reputation.

Six Catholic universities (PUC-Campinas, PUC MINAS, PUCRS, UCPEL, UNICAP and USF) have made an express commitment to the “innovation” indicator in their “visions of the future”. This indicator refers to industrial partnerships for fundraising or knowledge transfer.

It was not possible to identify aspects that make direct reference to the “employability” indicator; however, one can see this implicit commitment in the “vision” of the universities, in terms of loco-regional development and social demands.

When it comes to governance matters, although the term does not appear explicitly, virtually all Catholic universities agree that they must be conducted and managed within parameters of sustainable, social, environmental, scientific, cultural and economic development, with excellence in efficient and agile management practices, consolidation of alliances and committed to loco-regional development.

This survey shows that few Brazilian Catholic universities indicate in their official documents and/or institutional portals a “vision of the future” articulated with quality indicators measured by academic rankings, a fact clearly observed in only three of them (PUCPR, UCDB and UNISINOS). The fact that other Catholic universities do not explicitly mention such indicators does not infer a lack of concern with improving performance and/or positioning in academic rankings, as they compose a set of institutions with a respected reputation that have always stated in their missions and visions the commitment to the quality of human formation. They are reference institutions in the regions where they operate and, in some cases, of national and international recognition. In addition, they make use of these classifications on their portals as a way of strengthening their institutional image.

Chart 3 – Official documents (Statute, Regulations and IDP) made available by Catholic universities in their respective institutional portals and/or forwarded in response to the author’s request

UNIVERSITIES	STATUTE	REGULATIONS	IDP - TERM
PUC Goiás	YES	YES	2017 - 2027
PUC-Campinas	YES	YES	2018 - 2020
PUC Minas	YES	YES	Not available
PUCPR	YES	YES	Not available
PUC-Rio	YES	Not available	2018 - 2022
PUCRS	YES	YES	2011 - 2015
PUCSP	YES	Not available	2015 - 2019
UCB	YES	YES	2018 - 2022
UCDB	YES	YES	2018 - 2022
UCP	Not available	YES	2016 - 2020
UCPEL	YES	YES	2018 - 2022
UCSAL	YES	YES	2016 - 2020
UFN	YES	YES	2018 - 2021
UNICAP	YES	YES	2017 - 2022
UNILASALLE	YES	YES	2016 - 2020
UNISANTOS	YES	YES	2007 - 2011
UNISINOS	YES	YES	2014 - 2017
USF	YES	YES	Not available

Source: Prepared by the authors. Official Documents and/or Institutional Portals (survey carried out in 2020).

When referring to these royal documents, the term “governance” is used only in the IDPs of PUC-Campinas, UCPEL, UCSAL and UNICAP, and in the folder publicizing the Strategic Planning (SP) of PUCRS; the term is not mentioned in other universities. However, university governance, regardless of the terminology used by these institutions when referencing strategic actions, seeks to broaden the understanding of what management is by the managers themselves, emphasizing both the decision and its maker, i.e., governance is the way in which these universities are organized and operated internally, and how they ally with their stakeholders to achieve their goals (Parnoff, 2007; Brunner, 2011; Kehm, 2012; Barros, 2014; Sasaki, 2016; Félix; Furtado, 2016, Balbachevsky, 2017; Schmal; Cabrales, 2018; Klein; Pizzio; Rodrigues, 2018).

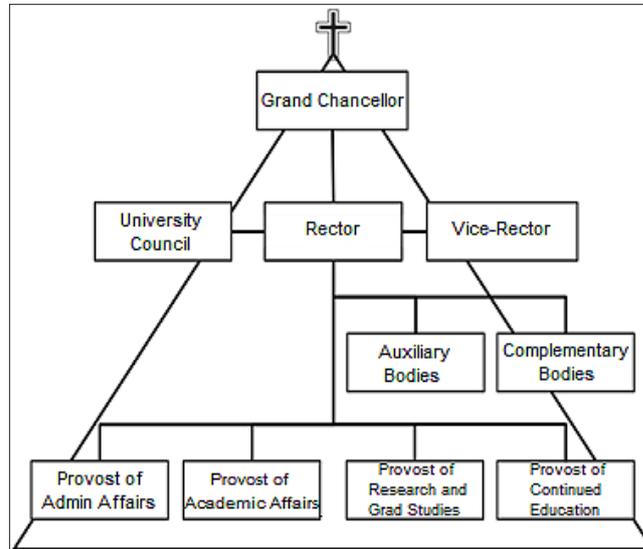
In the Brazilian scientific literature (Wandercil; Calderón; Ganga-Contreras, 2021), the authors analyzed expand the notion of university governance. Klein, Pizzio and Rodrigues (2018) address how universities are actually organized and governed in practice, how they work and how they are transformed, according to their structure of representation of power for decision-making – of highly condensed authority and with autonomy in its basic units. This statement is broadly shared by Parnoff (2007) and Sasaki (2016), when they also state that the term is related to structures of representation of power for decision-making.

With the notion of university governance expanded by the aforementioned authors, Félix and Furtado (2016) complement its importance as a central role in decision-making, since it may contribute to problem mitigation and building of a permanent evaluation culture that provides feedback to all management processes. As a document that supports external evaluation and institutional self-assessment, the IDP should be periodically updated (as identified in the data collection, this is not the case of some Catholic universities) to fulfill its role in university governance and to shape an evaluation that provides effective feedback for management processes. After all, the IDP is also used as a reference for programs and projects developed by the institutions themselves.

The structure of power, mission and vision of Catholic universities plays a relevant role in this investigation, since, according to the theoretical framework adopted herein (Balbachevsky, 2017; Klein; Pizzio; Rodrigues, 2018), theoretical approaches to university governance are defined according to the identified models of higher education, such as: Humboldtian, instrumental, democratic and entrepreneurial. The Humboldtian model is characterized by a strong convergence of values that sustain strong hierarchies of authority within the institution; in the instrumental model, administrative logic tends to predominate, the institution's internal dynamics are strongly conditioned and its characteristic is to respond to decisions made by the State; in the democratic model, authority is legitimized because it is a representation of the different interests coexisting within the institution; and the entrepreneurial model is marked by a competitive environment, in which HEIs are encouraged to explore the opportunities available in the internal and external environments.

Since university governance is related to its processes, objectives and decision-making structures, it can be said that Catholic universities, object of this study, have a pyramidal organizational structure, due to their centralized and vertical organization of power, as exemplified in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Model of organizational structure adopted by most Brazilian Catholic universities



Source: Prepared by the authors based on official documents and/or institutional portals (survey carried out in 2020).

These Universities come very close to the Humboldtian model, although the democratic model does appear, since, at the top of the pyramid, there is the University Council or the Superior Council, deliberative bodies that, due to the way in which they are composed, open spaces for a more democratic and less centralized management in the hands of the Grand Chancellor⁶ and/or the Rector, as can be seen in the decision-making bodies of Brazilian Catholic universities. With rare exceptions, there is a vertically hierarchical structure with power distribution from the Catholic Church in the figures of its Grand Chancellors, who grant power to their Rectors. The latter transfer, determine and/or delegate powers to their Vice-Rectories and/or Provosts, and to their respective Complementary and Auxiliary Bodies.

According to Chiavenato (1998), this model of functional pyramidal structure favors the specialization of each organ and intradepartmental cooperation. However, it produces undesirable consequences, such as subjectivation, that is, departmental objectives become more important than institutional ones because, when pressured to show results of each specific field, decision-making and top management support instances end up generating a myopic view of the institutional whole.

It is necessary to consider the organizational structure prevailing in Catholic universities, since, by not renouncing their traditions and their philanthropic character – either because they shouldn't, couldn't or wouldn't –, they have to focus on the present, gradually giving way to

innovation, towards a new posture, in which archaic management concepts must be replaced by new ways of thinking about decision-making processes.

According to John Paul II (1990, p. 3), nowadays, “[...] characterized by such a rapid development of science and technology, the tasks of the Catholic university assume an ever greater importance and urgency”. The current Supreme Pontiff reinforces that “[...] today, we are not just living in an era of change, but a true and proper change of era [...], increasing symptoms of a breaking point, due to the high speed of changes” (Francisco, 2017, p. 4-5).

In this sense, the rapid, unforeseen and unexpected changes of scenario began to influence universities. In the analysis of this situation, from the perspective of Chiavenato (2010), the organizations most exposed to environmental changes abandoned their power structures with fixed and stable bodies based on mechanistic models, with hierarchical structures and high bureaucratic control, to be based on multifunctional teams with a more organic, agile and flexible structure focused on management in times of change.

Logically, these aspects related to the culture of change need a longer maturation time in a university than in business organizations. And, particularly, Catholic universities have more components, which are closely linked to the symbolism of the Catholic Church, such as the rite when a new representative takes office, symbolically consecrated to the position of rector. In Bourdieu’s (2008) analytical perspective, such investiture shifts the representation that other agents have of this person, and, by changing people’s behavior towards them, the investiture transforms the image that the invested person makes of themselves, as well as the new behaviors adopted to adjust to that attribute.

Bourdieu’s (2008) statement is characterized by the liberality of a Catholic university granting degrees and the symbolic respect associated with this grant. It is due to the context of the symbology present in the power structure of Catholic universities that their governance incorporates such distinct aspects, reinforced by the Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (John Paul II, 1990, p. 2), which give them an almost divine character, i.e., consecrated in truth, serving at “the same time the dignity of man and the cause of the Church [distinguished] by its free investigation of the whole truth about nature, man and God”. This Constitution was established as a Magna Carta, addressed to those responsible for these universities, their respective academic communities and all those interested in them.

Given the symbolic aspects that involve Catholic universities and the changes influenced by the private market of higher education, these HEIs will only remain perennial if they are efficiently and effectively managed⁷. However, attributing the reasons for its problems only to the market and external environment is to blur the reflection of its governance. This fact is evident when referring to the history of crises experienced by Catholic universities that, in given situations, took place

in times of low competition (Calderón, 2000), when there was not yet a massive presence of private HEIs in the higher education market.

According to Alves (2006, p. 130), if these institutions persist in their current organizational structures and prevailing management models, even if Catholic education has a favorable educational market and abundant cash resources, the challenges will not be “[...] for the most part overcome, neither their problems solved nor their survival guaranteed”.

Catholic Universities: governance similarities and distinctions

The Brazilian Higher Education Assessment System (SINAES) brings in its evaluation concept the goal of identifying the profile and meaning of the performance of HEIs, through their activities, courses, programs, projects and sectors, considering ten different institutional dimensions (Brazil, 2004). Among them, the ones considered in this study are mission and IDP. In view of the evaluation dimensions established by SINAES, the Brazilian Ministry of Education (MEC) began to require HEIs to prepare an IDP and established instructions for its elaboration, which include general guidelines and a basic structure containing the key thematic axes (Brazil, 2017): institutional profile; institutional pedagogical project; schedule for implementation and development of the HEI and courses (in-person and distance learning); faculty profile; administrative organization of the HEI; student service policies; infrastructure; assessment and monitoring of institutional development; and financial and budgetary aspects (Gomes; Melo, 2018).

As can be seen on the guidelines for preparing the IDP (Brazil, 2017), the structuring of this document literally converts into a “navigation chart”. So much so that some Catholic universities use this terminology as a synonym. This is the case of UCDB, whose IDP title is precisely *Navigation Chart*. Another example is that of PUC-Campinas: in the presentation of the IDP, its magnificent rector, Prof. Dr. Germano Rigacci Júnior, states that “[...] good navigators know that the direction of the winds and the movement of the waves are worth little without the navigation charts indicating the destination and the work of the crew, which result in speed, agility and safety” (PUC-Campinas, 2018, p. 5).

UNICAP (2017), in turn, when preparing its IDP concomitantly with its first strategic plan, states that the interfaces of these various “navigation maps” strengthen the IDP, as they reinforce a culture of evaluation, planning and management of the university as a community institution.

Also, the document is presented by the other Catholic universities with the same importance. For example: PUCRS (2011, p. 9.) states that “[...] the IDP constitutes an important institutional document that helps the decision-making process and the construction of PUCRS’ future trajectory”. UNISINOS (2014, p. 5), in its perspective of development

and expansion, understands that the set of academic policies and institutional management “[...] express the guidelines to orient actions and decisions”. For PUC Goiás (2017, p. 13), its IDP “[...] will give consistency and solidity to the future of the educational project [...] and the thousands of projects resulting from it”. For PUCSP (2015, p. 6) it is an “[...] instrument of practical utility to be observed step by step by managers [...] when facing future challenges”. UCSAL’s IDP (2016, p. 14) “[...] has the role of guiding institutional decisions”. Likewise, UCPEL (2018, p. 7), also considers it “[...] as a guide for firm and responsible management”. The UFN (2018) points to the need of professionalizing management.

Most Catholic universities do not use the term “governance” in their IDPs, since the term is understood as synonymous with management. The importance of using IDP in decision-making and future orientation processes is undeniable. As a reference document for HEIs, whose academic institutional characteristics and administrative organization are addressed, the IDP became the guiding thread for this article.

Félix and Furtado (2016) add to the discussion the importance of university governance as a central role in decision-making, since it may contribute to problem mitigation and building of a permanent evaluation culture that provides feedback to all management processes. This role is theoretically attributed to the IDP, which subsidizes the processes of external evaluation and institutional self-assessment and should be periodically updated, as it is also used as a reference for programs and projects developed by the institutions themselves.

It should be noted that the term “governance” was used in only five IDPs of the following universities: PUC-Campinas, PUCRS, UCPEL, UCSAL, UNICAP, and in the PUCRS Strategic Planning (SP) dissemination folder. In relation to other Catholic universities, the governance approach is not used directly, since the terminology is not present in most institutional documents and has not yet been appropriated by the Brazilian academic-scientific literature (Wandercil; Calderón; Ganga-Contreras, 2021).

Catholic universities and the quality indicators of academic rankings

For the most part, academic rankings have clear evaluation criteria to measure HEIs through their quality indicators, some objective, others subjective; some focused on products, others on inputs; that is, with the combined and variable presence of indicators constructed simultaneously from products and/or inputs and collected through simultaneously objective and/or subjective information (Calderón; França; Gonçalves, 2017). By doing so, they wish to make the ranking process more transparent. Considering the statement to be a true premise, being present in a certain ranking is synonymous with prestige for many Catholic universities.

The IDPs of Catholic universities have different validity periods, some starting a new period, others currently in the middle, and others ending and/or still in the planning phase of the next period. As follows, it appears that they do not share the same logic in space and time, as the HEIs that started their IDPs in 2007, for example, had a different scenario from those that have recently started. However, it is possible to identify converging strategic objectives and actions in some of them.

UCPEL, PUCRS, PUC GOIÁS, UCSAL, UNICAP, for example, have structured IDPs, according to the Roadmap for Institutional Self-Assessment Report established by INEP/DAES/CONAES Technical Note No. 65 (Brazil, 2014) and MEC assessment instruments (in their several editions, which, in this regard, kept their structure organized by evaluation and self-evaluation axes and dimensions). To achieve the objectives established for the period in their IDPs, these universities organized them in alignment with the SINAES evaluation structure. By following the regulatory agency's booklet, management of the proposed actions is easier to be monitored and subsequently evaluated.

In relation to what is described in the IDPs of Catholic universities, we also sought to identify some objectives, goals and/or actions indicated by them as improving their performance and/or meeting the quality standards established by the academic rankings.

Of the Catholic universities that made their IDPs available, it was possible to identify actions in the institutional objectives of six of them: PUC-Rio, PUCRS, PUCSP, UCDB, UNICAP, and UNISINOS. Valuing the evaluation system established by several academic rankings, PUC-Rio, in addition to proposing to update its database of researchers and collaborating companies for research on the reputation of international rankings, also showed in its IDP that:

[...] it values participation in different modalities, understanding that the external look at its reality and the conclusions arising from it contribute to the diagnosis and improvement of its mission [...], PUC-Rio participates annually in the evaluations of the Abril Student Guide and the Ranking by Folha de São Paulo and, in the international context, the rankings prepared annually by the assessment institutes THE Times Higher Education and QS Quacquarelli Symonds, based in London, and the UI Greenmetric Ranking of World Universities, organized by the University of Indonesia (PUC-Rio, 2018, p. 112).

PUCRS aims to maintain its growing recognition by government bodies and, implicitly, by national and international rankings, as described in its Vision of the Future (PUCRS, 2016), and aims to become a reference in quality of education and relevance of research, innovation and sustainable management, contributing to scientific, cultural, social and economic development. With reference to their objectives and goals, they indirectly suggest attention to academic rankings, such as: reinforcing institutional visibility in the consolidation of the university's positioning and increase the scientific production of quality and

relevance in the great branches of knowledge. Such samples exemplify their concern to establish goals and objectives that improve institutional performance.

PUCSP (2015) reinforced the importance of the following aspects: scientific dissemination as a mechanism to strengthen the institutional image, through the dissemination of academic production in renowned journals; the implementation of the institutional repository and obtaining better grades for the courses in external evaluation, in addition to the consolidation of an internationalization policy.

The UCDB (2018), in its *Navigation Chart*, established the creation of instruments for monitoring institutional planning results, as well as the insertion and strengthening of the UCDB's integration in the international scenario, through scientific, technological and innovation cooperation agreements.

UNICAP (2017) established other goals, all addressing clearly quantitative criteria, for advances in research and internationalization indicators, such as: expand external partnerships by 40%; deepen the relationship with the network of international institutions of scientific cooperation; implement the Catholic Business School in partnership with national and international HEIs.

UNISINOS (2014) uses the term governance and citizenship, in addition to establishing goals aligned with improving their performance in academic rankings, such as: consolidate the university's academic and scientific performance evaluation practices; prioritize investments in teaching and research activities; achieve standards of excellence and revealed and perceived value in schools, programs and courses; develop competences for the global performance of the university; and continue improving its undergraduate courses, with a view to the perception of its excellence, supported by internal and external evaluations by students, professors, employees and the community.

Finally, UFN (2018) proposes to achieve the Preliminary Course Concept (*Conceito Preliminar de Curso*, CPC) 4 or 5 in undergraduate courses and Capes concept equal to or greater than 4 in *stricto sensu* graduate courses.

The other universities did not pay explicit attention to academic rankings; however, they addressed actions, objectives and goals in their respective IDPs, which suggest performance improvement in quality indicators established by academic rankings.

Conclusions

In the context of university governance in Catholic universities, their statutes, regulations and IDPs are essential management tools. Statutes and regulations underpin universities as private legal institutions of a community philanthropic character and public utility, with regard to the norms that regulate their functioning and their statutory provisions. Its IDPs define, in general terms, the institutional objectives

for a certain period, which must be legitimized by the participation of the community, through medium and long-term goals and strategies.

It is verified that the IDPs, with their goals and objectives, create actions, even if indirectly, in attention to the quality indicators present in the academic rankings, especially when the following actions are addressed: expansion of research and publications; improvement of innovation projects; articulation and partnerships with companies; implementation of teacher training programs; improvement of institutional planning and evaluation methodologies; updating the database of researchers and collaborating companies for reputation surveys; promotion of internationalized scientific publication; among with proposals for the consolidation of internationalization policies; strengthening of the institutional image; and improvement of management and governance policies.

Of the Catholic universities that made their IDPs available and made explicit references to the quality indicators of the academic rankings promoted by the national government and national and international private sectors, four are small (UCP, UCPEL, UFN and UNISANTOS). UNISANTOS only specifies that its focus is to maintain the position of reference in quality in the Baixada Santista. UCPEL strives to set its goals in order to improve its performance and meet MEC's quality standards. UFN (2018) aims to improve its indexes in the CPC and in the Capes concept. The UCP did not make its IDP available, nor does it mention in its Self-Assessment Report actions to improve performance in the quality indicators (UCP, 2019).

Among the large Catholic universities, PUCRS and UNISINOS have clear goals aimed at improving performance in their IDPs. Despite pinpointing actions to improve quality indicators, PUC Goiás does not directly mention any of the academic rankings analyzed. Unfortunately, PUC MINAS and PUCPR, despite their excellent performance in academic rankings, did not make their respective IDPs available. However, in their respective institutional Self-Assessment Reports, they show their performance in academic rankings (PUC Minas, 2017; PUCPR, 2017).

In view of the above, it was identified that six Catholic universities established goals and objectives to improve performance in the indicators of academic rankings, and UNICAP aims to improve its results in the external evaluations promoted by MEC; PUC-Rio and UNISINOS proposed targets in line with international rankings; while PUCRS, PUCSP and UCDB presented more generic performance improvement goals in terms of national and international academic rankings. Regardless of the objectives and evaluating bodies, these universities used indicators as institutional development planning tools, with goals and objectives explained in their IDPs.

Due to the fact that the institutional documents analyzed have different validity periods and were elaborated in contexts prior to the increase in the debate on academic rankings and their uses, some com-

parisons were impossible to be made, especially in international contexts, which have gained prominence and recognition by universities only in recent years.

Considering that Catholic universities have their institutional focus on teaching, it is worth mentioning that, among them, there are four universities with a moderate focus on research (PUCRS, PUC-Rio, PUCPR and UNISINOS) “This small group [...] varied interest in higher education indicators” (Righetti; Gamba, 2019, p. 149). The others, despite not focusing on it, show an attentive eye to the research indicator, especially when they reinforce concerns with knowledge governance in their IDPs. Barros (2014) and Balbachevsky (2017) contributed to substantiate the understanding of knowledge governance, defining the interaction between science or knowledge governance and ethics in management. This interaction, according to the authors, increases the scope of knowledge production management, reflecting on university autonomy in a professionalized way, aiming to organize it through objectives and goals towards improvement in research and scientific dissemination.

It should be noted that the governance of science and knowledge is an ongoing process in Catholic universities. In most of them, such governance is not aimed at meeting the “research” indicator specifically, as evaluated by academic rankings, but it is possible to identify an evident concern with matters of research and scientific dissemination in the goals and objectives found in the IDPs, notably characterizing aspects of science or knowledge governance.

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Notes

- 1 Article presented and discussed in the Working Group No. 11, Higher Education Policy, during the 40th National Meeting of the National Association of Graduate Studies and Research in Education (ANPED), whose theme was “Education as a practice of Freedom: letters from the Amazon to the world!”, held in September to October 2021, at the Federal University of Pará (UFPA), Belém-PA, Brazil. It composes the project “University governance in times of RANKINTACs (rankings, indexes and league tables) in Brazilian higher education institutions” (Process No. 311333/2017-6), coordinated by DSc. Adolfo-Ignacio Calderón, research productivity fellow at the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq).
- 2 The use of this term within the article comprises a person or entity with a legitimate interest in higher education. They are students, parents, employers, the State, society, the higher education institutions themselves (in relation to the system), etc. These HEIs serve the interests of various publics, their administration needs to converge these interests (Amaral; Magalhães, 2000).
- 3 A title that some Catholic and ecclesiastical universities receive, such an honor is only bestowed by the Holy See to grant academic degrees in sacred theology, canon law, sacred scriptures and philosophy. In practice, many of these

universities also award other academic degrees. They are governed by the Apostolic Constitutions and Canon Law. A university honored with this title will seek to stand out, both for its qualities as a university and for the quality of its Catholic identity and witness.

- 4 Apostolic Constitution whose name in Latin means “From the heart of the Church”.
- 5 Concisely, a WCU has a complex structure, offers an extensive variety of courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, invests and promotes research, enjoys substantial resources and budgets, and has the possibility to recruit faculty and students from other nationalities (Altbach, 2004).
- 6 The most important position in the organizational structure of a Catholic university, in most cases held by the supreme ecclesiastical authority of a local order or of a city or metropolitan region.
- 7 In Administration, efficiency and effectiveness are similar words and often considered synonymous. However, there are subtle differences in the definition and usage of both terms. Efficiency would be the act of “doing things right”, while effectiveness consists of “doing the right things” (Drucker, 1989).

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