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## THE TRAJECTORY OF THE GENERAL LAW OF UNIVERSITIES (LGU) WITHIN PARANÁ'S STATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

O caminho da Lei Geral das Universidades (LGU), nas instituições de ensino superior  
estaduais paranaenses

El camino de la Ley General de Universidades (LGU), en las instituciones estatales de  
educación superior de Paraná

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**Abstract:** This article examines an education policy for the governance of the State of Paraná's higher education system, the General Law of Universities (LGU), State Law No. 20,933, enacted on December 17, 2021. The analysis addresses the statute's content and draws on official statements issued by the universities, as recorded in the minutes of meetings of their senior governing councils. The methodology relies primarily on primary sources, supplemented by a brief literature review on higher education and related publications. The initial hypotheses delineate a process of discipline subordinated to a logic external to university dynamics, which calls into question the notion of institutional autonomy. The observed set of factors aligns the university's outlook with market logic. Analysis of the documents makes it possible to observe the material expression of the hypothesis and to record how universities in Paraná assessed the process.

**Keywords:** educational policy; higher education; Paraná.

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**Resumo:** Este artigo se debruça sobre uma política educacional de gestão do sistema de ensino superior do estado do Paraná, a Lei Geral das Universidades (LGU), Lei Estadual n. 20.933, de 17 de dezembro de 2021. O texto analisa o conteúdo da legislação a partir das manifestações oficiais das universidades, registradas nas reuniões de seus conselhos superiores, em atas. Metodologicamente, utilizam-se principalmente fontes primárias, complementadas por breve revisão bibliográfica sobre o ensino superior e publicações correlatas. As hipóteses iniciais demarcavam um processo de disciplinamento subordinado a uma lógica externa à dinâmica universitária, o que põe em questão o conceito de autonomia dessas instituições. O conjunto de fatores observados aproxima as perspectivas da universidade da lógica de mercado. As análises dos documentos permitem observar a materialidade da hipótese e registrar como o processo foi analisado pelas instituições universitárias do Paraná.

**Palavras-chave:** política educacional; ensino superior; Paraná.

**Resumen:** Este artículo se centra en una política de gestión educativa del sistema de enseñanza superior del estado de Paraná, a saber, la Ley General de Universidades - LGU, Ley Estadual n. 20.933, de 17 de diciembre de 2021. El objetivo es analizar el contenido de la legislación a través de las manifestaciones oficiales de las universidades que se registraron en las reuniones de sus consejos de educación superior, a través de actas. Metodológicamente, se utilizaron fuentes primarias, complementadas por una breve revisión bibliográfica de publicaciones sobre educación superior y afines. Las hipótesis iniciales demarcaban un proceso de disciplinamiento que obedecía a una lógica externa a la dinámica universitaria, cuestionando así el concepto de autonomía de esas instituciones. El conjunto de factores implicados aproximaba las perspectivas de la universidad a la lógica del mercado. A través del análisis de los documentos, se puede ver la materialidad de la hipótesis, así como un registro de cómo el proceso fue analizado por las instituciones universitarias del Paraná.

**Palabras Clave:** política educativa; educación superior; Paraná.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The present proposal examines the organization of the legal framework that governs universities in higher education. In Brazil, the largest public higher education network consists of federal universities. State universities account for a significant share of the university system, with greater reach into populations and towns in the interior of the Brazilian states. As systems, the regulations of these institutions, in principle, observe the principle of university autonomy set forth in the Federal Constitution and in infra-constitutional legislation. In Paraná, the state with the largest number of state universities in Brazil, legislation was enacted in 2021 that “sets financing parameters for the State Public Universities of Paraná, establishes criteria for the efficiency of university management, and provides other measures,” namely the General Law of Universities (LGU), State Law no. 20,933 (Paraná, 2021a).

Accordingly, this article seeks to make explicit the process, at least in its more formal dimension, of how this legislation progressed within Paraná’s state public universities, the debates and official statements issued by the institutions, and the manner in which the law secured approval. The debate began in 2019, and approval occurred nearly three years later.

To meet this objective, the study used documentary sources, as well as drafts, preliminary bills, and the statute itself. The research identified official statements from the universities through their senior councils, along with the debates recorded in the minutes of those bodies. Some documents drew on reports from committees designated to assess the drafts submitted by the government. The limited set of publications already disseminated in scholarly journals also served as research sources. For conceptual issues and analytical categories, the study relied on a literature review.

Grounded in these procedures and in experience arising from direct participation as a faculty member and administrator within Paraná’s public higher education system, the text adopts features that merit dissemination to support understanding of the phenomenon, namely: the constitution of this state university structure, with its characteristics and specificities; the political, governmental, and social context in which the statute under study was implemented, crucial to the development of this article; and, based on statements from the actors involved through their senior collegiate bodies that represent Paraná’s universities, the identification of the analytical categories that inform the current debate.

Beyond institutional arenas, within civil society, political and organizational mobilization, especially by labor unions, stood out, with demonstrations and significant actions linked to the trajectory described here of the debate on the LGU within the institutions.

The findings indicate that debate on university autonomy is central within the set of statutes and analyses surrounding the LGU. Conversely, a management model directly tied to the metamorphoses of capital, its neoliberal face, enters state organization and reaches the universities, which poses a challenge to these institutions’

autonomy. Accordingly, this article proposes analysis of the LGU's trajectory within Paraná's public universities.

## 2 THE DEBATE ON STATE UNIVERSITIES

Brazil's university system is complex. Rather than trace a genealogy, this discussion adopts as its temporal frame the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law no. 9,394 (Brazil, 1996), which refers to the administrative categories public, private, and community. Each category contains internal variants, such as confessional and philanthropic universities; and, within the public system, the division into municipal, state, and federal institutions. Decree no. 5,733 (Brazil, 2006) further subdivides institutions, according to their organizational form and corresponding prerogatives, into three types: colleges, university centers, and universities. For the purposes of delimiting the present debate, the focus remains on state public universities, subsequently restricted to the State of Paraná.

At the outset, an account of the relevance of state universities within Brazil's higher education system is necessary. In studies on the subject, Carvalho and Amaral (2020) analyzed this type of institution and synthesized the set of state universities in Brazil, their location, and their numbers:

Table 1 – List and distribution of Brazilian state universities by region and state of the federation, year of creation, and number of campuses/university units

State	Institution	Year of creation
<b>North</b>		
RR	Universidade Estadual de Roraima (UERR)	2005
TO	Fundação Universidade do Tocantins (Unitins)	1996
AP	Universidade do Estado do Amapá (Ueap)	2006
AM	Universidade do Estado do Amazonas (UEA)	2001
PA	Universidade do Estado do Pará (Uepa)	1993
<b>Northeast</b>		
PB	Universidade Estadual da Paraíba (UEPB)	1987
BA	Universidade Estadual de Feira de Santana (UEFS)	1976
	Universidade Estadual do Sudeste da Bahia (Uesb)	1987
	Universidade Estadual de Santa Cruz (Uesc)	1991
	Universidade do Estado da Bahia (Uneb)	1983
PI	Universidade Estadual do Piauí (Uespi)	1988
MA	Universidade Estadual do Maranhão (Uema)	1981
PE	Universidade de Pernambuco (UPE)	1990
CE	Universidade Estadual do Ceará (Uece)	1975
	Universidade Estadual do Cariri (Urca)	1986



	Universidade Estadual Vale do Acaraú (UVA)	1984
AL	Universidade Estadual de Alagoas (Uneal)	1995
	Universidade de Ciências da Saúde de Alagoas (Uncisal)	2005
RN	Universidade do Estado do Rio Grande do Norte (Uern)	1987
<b>Southeast</b>		
RJ	Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (Uerj)	1975
	Universidade Estadual do Norte Fluminense Darcy Ribeiro (Uenf)	1991
MG	Universidade do Estado de Minas Gerais (UEMG)	1994
	Universidade Estadual de Montes Claros (Unimontes)	1994
SP	Universidade de São Paulo (USP)	1934
	Universidade Estadual Paulista Júlio de Mesquita Filho (Unesp)	1976
	Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp)	1966
<b>South</b>		
PR	Universidade Estadual de Londrina (UEL)	1969
	Universidade Estadual de Maringá (UEM)	1969
	Universidade Estadual do Norte do Paraná (Uenp)	2006
	Universidade Estadual de Ponta Grossa (UEPG)	1969
	Universidade Est. do Centro Oeste do Paraná (Unicentro)	1997
	Universidade Estadual do Oeste do Paraná (Unioeste)	1994
	Universidade Estadual do Paraná (Unespar)	2001
SC	Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina (Udesc)	1965
RS	Universidade Estadual do Rio Grande do Sul (Uergs)	2001
<b>Center-West</b>		
MS	Universidade Estadual de Mato Grosso do Sul (Uems)	1993
MT	Universidade Estadual de Mato Grosso (Unemat)	1993
GO	Universidade Estadual de Goiás (UEG)	1999

Source: Carvalho and Amaral (2020, p. 150-151)

Presentation of this table, although extensive, is necessary to show the scale and significance of the state university system nationwide. Some of Brazil's leading universities, including the most frequently cited in international rankings and one of the country's oldest, the Universidade de São Paulo (USP), belong to the state system. Taken together, these universities also represent a sizable contingent when compared with other categories, such as federal and private universities.

Further analysis is possible. The reference article from which the excerpt was drawn (Carvalho; Amaral, 2020) examines institutional indicators in light of quality-evaluation models and observes closer proximity to federal universities and greater distance from private ones. That focus, however, does not constitute the aim of the present demonstration concerning the set of state higher education institutions. Its

principal function lies in situating the Paraná system, which provides the setting for the analyses conducted. In this respect, the national overview indicates that Paraná is the federative unit with the largest number of public state universities, an especially significant factor, given that in population terms it ranks only fifth among Brazilian states.

As at the national level and among federal universities (note that states such as Rio Grande do Sul and Minas Gerais host a larger number of those institutions), the creation of state universities in Paraná resulted primarily from political and economic factors rather than social and scientific ones. This text does not aim to reconstruct the process by which those universities came into existence; instead, it highlights the operational orientation present in the consolidation of the system.

Regarding the earliest universities, Stroparo and Miguel (2017), in an article with the suggestive title “Expansion of University Education into Paraná’s Interior: Expansion Policy or Genuine Submission to the Dictates of International Capital?”, offer a synthesis of their genesis that accords with this article’s thematic approach by showing the origin of Paraná’s universities as tied to the movements of capital. The authors list multiple motivations for their creation. Internally, they highlight, among others, the “political–clientelist content of the measure establishing the universities” (Stroparo; Miguel, 2017, p. 395); and, as external motivations, the “national adherence to international capitalism” (Stroparo; Miguel, 2017, p. 399) and the “state-level alignment with the authoritarian developmentalist ideology of the military governments” (Stroparo; Miguel, 2017, p. 401).

Beyond the institutions created in 1969, the universities established later maintained the same logic of dependence and the same correlations of political forces. Organizational differences distinguish the more recent universities. Unlike the earliest ones, linked to their host cities, Maringá, Londrina, and Ponta Grossa, the others are regional and multicampus, such as Unioeste and Unicentro, created in the 1990s; and, after the 2000s, UENP, also regional, and Unespar, which covers distinct regions of the state. These universities emerged from preexisting standalone colleges located in hub municipalities across Paraná, with significant geographic coverage. This complex system, with heterogeneous institutional realities, stands as the subject of the statute at the center of this article’s analyses.

### 3 FROM IDEA TO LEGISLATION: THE LGU’S INSTITUTIONAL PATHWAYS

Discourses circulate, tied to the history of how education functions and to who bears responsibility for it, that constitute a memory invariably revived in certain contexts, without formal records of the debate. They reappear tacitly in electoral debates as implied statements. In the case of state universities, the desire for federalization of the system remains a recurrent theme, justified by the claim that public higher education falls under the Union’s responsibility.

Such discourses culminate in questioning of the system. In response, actors pursue forms of greater “efficiency” for the public university ensemble, here, Paraná’s.

In Paraná specifically, a market-oriented, corporate logic has motivated debates and statutes that affect public management. It is therefore not excessive to state that legislation such as the LGU, given its context, and others approved under Governor Ratinho Junior, rested on market-based management. Although, in the message sent to the State Legislative Assembly, the governor initially asserts that the project “was inspired by practices tested in the federal higher education system” (Paraná, 2021b, p. 51), one may infer that the private sector inspired the parameterization proposed in the LGU. Beyond the recurrent informal assessments that contrast the state university system with the private sector in terms of cost, the remainder of the message makes explicit the logic of the draft that would become law by stating that the proposal sought the “objective of creating a normative instrument capable of meeting the precepts of efficiency gains and cost-effectiveness [...]” (Paraná, 2021b, p. 51).

This perspective does not arise as an isolated or subjective stance of one government or individual. Before intensifying criticism of Ratinho Junior’s policies, it is important to situate the phenomenon within the shifts of systemic capitalism which, in its most recent phase, incorporates education and other fundamental social services into the realm of commodities. As a result, market pressures intensify even in public educational institutions, especially universities. Regarding this broader perspective, Santos (2004, p. 18–19) states:

The second level consists in the gradual elimination of the distinction between public and private universities, with the transformation of the university, as a whole, into a firm, an entity that not only produces for the market but also produces itself as a market, as a market for university management, degree programs, certification, teacher training, and the assessment of faculty and students.

The author advances this analysis from a global vantage point within the movements of capital in distinct contexts, chiefly in Europe. A similar dynamic manifests in Brazil, with the reconfiguration of the Brazilian university. The trend appears across most analyses dedicated to the theme and ranges from the privatization of higher education, including the expansion of fee-based distance education and private institutions, to so-called “privatization from within,” which establishes, inside the public university, a logic that incorporates market and capital practices. Chauí (2018, p. 187) makes this explicit:

Reduced to an organization, the university abandons formation and research in favor of competitive fragmentation. Why does it do so? Because privatization has taken place, and most research obeys market demands imposed by funders. This situation means that the public university produces knowledge destined for private appropriation. That appropriation is inseparable from the profound change the sciences have undergone in their relation to practice.

Directly related to the topic addressed here lies a concrete reality that warrants consideration: the sociopolitical context of national and state governance. The administrations of Jair Bolsonaro, at the federal level, and Carlos Roberto Massa Júnior

(Ratinho Junior), at the state level, maintained a relationship of near-unshakeable proximity, even breaking with collective initiatives undertaken by Brazil's state governors as a group.

In this regard, the considerations published in the article "The Privatist, Market-Oriented Orientation of Brazilian Higher Education and Its Expressions in the Federal Government's "Future-se" Proposal and in Paraná's General Law of Universities (LGU)" (Colmán; Portes, 2019, p. 141) prove apposite. The title synthesizes reflections that corroborate the argument presented here: the LGU process, grounded in a global logic that commodifies education and consonant with a national project, materializes as legislation that imposes, within state bureaucracy, concepts the universities, both subjects and objects of the actions set forth in the statute under analysis, have questioned and continue to question. The discussion now turns to the LGU itself and to the mode of its circulation.

#### 4 THE PROCESS WITHIN THE UNIVERSITIES

As noted above, the LGU project emerged during the 2018 electoral debate, prior to Ratinho Junior's election, with the stated intent to impose "effective" management in order to optimize resources allocated to the state universities. Upon assuming the governorship in 2019, and mirroring the federal administration, the slogan was to "slim down the public machine," with an initial reduction from 28 state secretariats to 15. This decision directly affected the higher education system, since the Secretariat of Science, Technology, and Higher Education of Paraná (SETI), responsible for university governance, lost secretariat status and became a superintendency directly subordinate to the Civil Cabinet.

Aldo Nelson Bona was appointed superintendent. He is a professor at a state university, served two terms as rector, and sat on the State Council of Education. At the time of his appointment, the area received, among its missions, the "reorganization" of the state higher education system by statute. At the first meeting with unions, in a discussion about faculty hiring, the superintendent stated "that new competitive examinations/appointments of professors would occur only after 'the approval of parameters and criteria for the assignment of teaching activities that standardize practices among the Universities'" (Marino; Mandalozzo, 2023, p. 4).

According to the record in the article cited, studies on the LGU read through the lens of the faculty unions at Paraná's state universities, this meeting occurred at the very start of Ratinho Junior's term, on March 14, 2019. In other words, the state government prioritized this regulation for the state higher education system from the outset of its mandate. This guideline formed part of its "management shock".

Given this priority objective, the text now records how the LGU moved through the institutions, based on official documents, minutes, resolutions, reports, and other records produced by the universities themselves. In general, three drafts circulated with minimal changes during the process: "The first draft was presented to the rectors of the State Higher Education Institutions of Paraná (IEES/PR) (at an APIESP meeting) on



June 3, 2019; the second draft on August 12, 2019; and the third draft, which would compose the text of the bill approved in December 2021” (Marino; Mandalozzo, 2023, p. 5). All presentations provoked intense debate and questioning, including at the institutional level, by the universities, their leadership teams, and those directly involved in the discussion.

Methodologically, this article emphasizes the presentation of the second draft, formally made available to the institutions by an official letter from the General Superintendency of Science, Technology, and Higher Education on August 12, 2019, without a registry number.

The text, in fact, was an erratum that stated: “the deadline for the end of the debate, initially set for August 15, was extended to August 30, when institutional contributions must be sent to SETI” (2019, p. 01). In response to this presentation, the universities’ senior councils issued formal statements on the statute. These statements constitute most of the corpus analyzed in this study.

Regarding the first draft, the minutes analyzed contain few records, except for generic notes on the “history.” News items on the universities’ websites include the statement that “This is a document proposed by the General Superintendency of Science, Technology, and Higher Education of Paraná (SETI), with no participation by Paraná’s state universities in its drafting” (UEM, 2019a). Despite weaknesses and the absence of indicated authorship, the text fostered debate that led to changes in the proposal within SETI before the debate reached the universities. During preparation of the second draft, more actors became involved and appear in the covering letter that presented the document: the superintendent cites a structure dedicated to drafting the text as “a working group formed by SETI technical staff and the Pro-Rectors for Human Resources and for Planning at the state universities”.

The universities followed a similar *modus operandi*: deliberations took place in the senior councils and, in most cases, the institutions created working groups to analyze the LGU in depth. The results of those groups (reports, records) are also available; however, for delimitation purposes, the analysis here remains with the minutes of the senior councils, which compile statements on the statute proposed by the Government of the State of Paraná up to that point. A further reason to focus on the minutes lies in the fact that most universities rejected the reports and resolved to issue a formal, comprehensive rejection of the proposal for a statute specific to university management. For orientation, the following table presents the outcome of the analyses carried out within each university:

Table 2 – Official positions of the Universities on the LGU draft

University	Deliberation	Document
UEM	Do not approve the Final Report of the Committee established by Ordinance No. 582/2019-GRE (UEM, 2019c) and adopt other measures.	Resolution no. 011/2019-COU (UEM, 2019b).
UEL	The request is that the processing of the current proposal be canceled and that a broad, effective, and democratic debate be established by the academic communities of the IEES concerning the difficulties faced in fulfilling the mission entrusted to them and expected by Paraná's society.	Minutes of Ordinary Meeting no. 724 of the University Council of the State University of Londrina, held on September 6, 2019 (UEL, 2019, local. 26–30), Book 20.
UEPG	Unanimous vote in favor of the rapporteur, with rejection of the LGU	Minutes of the University Council no. 6/2019 of September 2, 2019 (UEPG, 2019, local. 247–248)).
Unioeste	Comprehensive rejection of the draft.	Minutes of the University Council no. 07/2019-COU of August 27, 2019 (UNESPAR, 2019, local. 254–255).
Unicentro	Forward the document prepared by the Special Committee.	Minutes no. 145 of the University Council of September 24, 2019 (UNICENTRO, 2019, local. 1216).
UENP	Approval <sup>2</sup>	Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of the University Council (CONSUNI) of the State University of Northern Paraná (UENP) held on December 9, 2021 (UENP, 2021).
UNESPAR	Rejection of the proposal and request for its filing.	Minutes of the 3rd Session (2nd Ordinary) of the University Council No. 07/2019-COU of August 27, 2019 (UNIOESTE, 2019, local. 254–255).

Source: authors' elaboration based on minutes of the universities' senior councils

<sup>2</sup> The institution neither located the requested records nor responded to the formal request submitted under protocol no. 22.911.215-5. This note relies on the detailed minutes from 2021, which reference the 2019 deliberation.

The set of university deliberations indicates that most institutions rejected the draft bill in its entirety on account of disagreement with its core. The substance of the debates within the senior councils shows that, even at institutions that submitted contributions to the document and, to some degree, expressed support for it, critical positions toward the bill prevailed. The previously noted *modus operandi*, which concentrated analysis in working groups, effectively fulfilled its role of dissemination and promotion of debate across the universities, each in its own way; it generated discussion, reflection, and formal positions on the proposed statute. All of the documents reviewed refer to a synthesis prepared by these groups, chiefly in reports that, although not the direct object of analysis in this article, attest both to qualified debate on the subject and to consistent arguments marked by a pronounced critical stance.

As the record shows, the statements differ. Four institutions (a majority) adopted firm positions, making rejection of the proposal explicit. The largest university in Paraná issued a statement that signaled opposition to the proposal, although it did not adopt an outright rejection of the document submitted by the State of Paraná. Finally, two universities expressed themselves through dialogue with the draft bill. The context of these two institutions warrants note: at the time, UENP's rector also served as president of the Association of Public Higher Education Institutions of Paraná (APIESP), an organization composed mainly of the universities' rectors that maintained direct dialogue with the state government. The university council considered a motion to reject the proposal; however, the original document was unavailable, and this analysis relies on another set of minutes on the matter that refers back to the earlier decision. The other institution was Unicentro, the university where the superintendent for science, technology, and higher education had served as rector and to which he remains affiliated. Even at these universities, intense debate took place and the proposal's contradictions were identified.

It bears emphasis that collective organizations, chiefly the unions at Paraná's institutions, acted as central actors in the coordination of resistance to the project under way. Coalitions against the LGU also emerged, as did forums and parliamentary fronts that worked to oppose the law on the universities. In sum, notwithstanding the variables, the review committees at the universities identified elements that express rejection of the format adopted in the proposed statute.

## 5 WHAT THE LGU SAYS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS BASED ON OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

Officially, the bill promised numerous immediate benefits, summarized in two points: improvements in university operating funds and isonomy. As recorded in Unicentro's minutes, "with the LGU it would be possible to define criteria and ensure equal treatment among the State Higher Education Institutions (IEES)" (Unicentro, 2019, local. 946).

According to the body of reflections produced, even the so-called "positives" warrant scrutiny. The LGU, as its synopsis states, "Provides on the financing parameters of the State Public Universities of Paraná, establishes criteria for the efficiency of university management, and provides other measures" (Paraná, 2021a). Yet the statute constitutes a General Law of Universities, as stated in Article 1, and therefore affects the entire university structure, the production of science, technology, and information, and the domains of teaching, research, and outreach. It is thus necessary to foreground the law's totalizing character and its impact across the university as a whole.

As noted, this study relies on the minutes of the university councils at Paraná's universities. Before advancing observations on the content, two pertinent points require emphasis. First, the analysis does not aim to express the universities' institutional views; rather, it offers critical considerations grounded in the documents reviewed. Second, the excerpts from the minutes derive from multiple sources: remarks by council members; readings of documents produced collectively, such as by the student movement and unions; and materials from internal university bodies, such as departments and centers. A schematic reading of the documents concentrates the debate in three axes: autonomy; personnel management and labor; and teaching, research, and outreach. The presentation of these axes serves a strictly didactic purpose and does not establish any hierarchy among themes.

### 5.1 Autonomy

Undoubtedly, debate on university autonomy stands at the core of the other issues raised by the LGU. According to the documents, "the Law directly violates university autonomy" (UENP, 2021, local. 31). This finding appears, at first glance, across documents from all universities and constitutes the most frequently repeated assertion. In the education literature, the principle of autonomy in schools and universities is foundational, not only in debates specific to higher education, but also in fields such as Law and Education Policy.

As a site of research and knowledge production, the university also serves as a space for the social circulation of knowledge, since it disseminates and shares the knowledge produced in and by it. From this perspective, university autonomy does not constitute an end in itself; it functions as a necessary condition for the university's purposes (Fávero, 2000, p. 54).



On autonomy as a condition for university functioning, the councils repeatedly recorded that the LGU operates as an instrument that removes autonomy. This position appears in different forms. From a legal standpoint, several advisory offices noted signs of a breach of university autonomy, as in the minutes of UEL: “The main points of divergence with regard to the constitutionality and legality of the proposed General Law of Universities are those that depart from the principle of University Autonomy” (UEL, 2019, f. 9, local. 38–39). Within the debates held by the universities, legal offices either issued opinions or joined the committees tasked with analyzing the statute. Even though the cited excerpt mentions divergences concerning the instrument’s legality, the legal analysis bodies, as recorded in the minutes, recognize that the State has competence to legislate on the matter. The emphasis here reflects the fact that autonomy does not reduce to a legislative framework; it belongs to the very nature of the university as an institution. In exemplifying the meaning that becomes “swallowed” by the market, directly related to earlier remarks on the “privatization” of the university, Chauí (2001, p. 204–205) states:

In a word, organizational autonomy reduces to corporate management of the institution so that it fulfills targets, objectives, and indicators defined by the State and has independence to enter into other contracts with private companies. Its institutional, sociopolitical meaning has been devoured by the administrative and instrumental meaning of the laws that govern the market. In sum, autonomy has come to signify an operational capacity to manage public and private resources, no longer the mode of insertion of the university institution into a national system of education and research nor its form of relation with society and the State.

The LGU directly incorporates the content of the observations indicated by Chauí (2001), including those on autonomy. Although the text of the statute mentions the constitutional principle, from its synopsis to its internal provisions it proposes a reduction of autonomy to management. This reduction appears in provisions of the law, as in Article 11: “In addition to investment resources set forth in the state budget, State Universities may receive transfers arising from public and private agreements and programs for investment and collaboration” (Paraná, 2021a). The statute also refers to the provision of services, with amendments to earlier laws that not only authorize but encourage the “sale” of services to “third parties”, read: the market, thereby turning university output into a kind of product. The minutes already anticipated such mechanisms in pre-law analyses. Although this document genre is typically concise, it contains substantive reflections: “a technical analysis of the Law allows the assertion that it represents a neoliberal logic and philosophy, with the introduction of a corporate standard” (UENP, 2021, p. 3), a position aligned with the market-oriented nature emphasized here. Similar reflections appear across all documents reviewed.

## 5.2 Personnel Management and Labor

Many of the concerns recorded by council members in the minutes on other topics also intersect with the autonomy debate, or with the lack thereof. At the outset, the LGU (Paraná, 2021a) establishes in Article 59 the Council of Rectors of the State Public Universities (CRUEP), which operates as an additional management mechanism designed, first, to monitor application of the statute and to “promote coordination with other bodies in the state system,” an issue already anticipated in the debates that assessed the LGU draft: “With the implementation of CRUEP, the University Councils fall silent, since at present they comprise all categories that constitute the universities and serve as the bridge to SETI” (Unicentro, 2019, local. 747–749). In effect, beyond relegating the function of university councils, CRUEP begins to set guidelines for higher education policy at each university, which further restricts their individual autonomy.

Personnel management also undergoes a direct impact under the LGU. In addition to generalized precarization, interference in the Full-Time and Exclusive Dedication regimen (TIDE) stands out as a central issue. Prior to the statute, adherence to this regimen was universal and open to any interested faculty member. The LGU (Paraná, 2021a, p. 10), however, defines in Article 17 that:

The Full-Time and Exclusive Dedication (TIDE) Work Regimen may not apply to more than 70% (seventy percent) of the total number of faculty positions assigned to each State Public University under this Law.

It is worth noting that even the number of positions allocated to the universities came under question. With respect to TIDE, this definition directly affects the set of regulations in force. If the percentage had already reached its limit at the time of a new hire, the faculty member would not gain access to full-time duties, a fact that effectively defines a university model with a significant contingent of part-time workers. This scenario signals precarization of labor and subordinates research and outreach when teaching-hour distribution takes priority.

This precarization formed a subject of debate in the university councils, based on the understanding that university organization would become governed by numerical and mechanical relations of a market-like nature: “this draft later proposes turning professors into points; for example, an RT 40 is worth 1.55 [...]” (Unioeste, 2019, local. 112–113). The underlying logic is mathematical: the creation of a total number of positions follows numerical criteria, enrolled students, number of programs, and other indicators, with minimal qualitative differentiation. Distribution of personnel then follows this dynamic, with consequences for financing of current expenditures, the so-called operating budget.

All documents reviewed register the councils’ concern with labor precarization, in recognition of the market logic embedded in the statute’s construction, a model of exploitation proper to private firms, antithetical to the process of scientific production in which the university is engaged. Precisely for these reasons, statements appear in

every university to the effect that the LGU “ratifies the precarization of working conditions” (Unespar, 2019, local. 203).

Two concrete manifestations of this principle within the universities merit emphasis. The first links directly to the market through personnel outsourcing. In the State of Paraná, a 2020 statute eliminated operational positions, chiefly general services in cleaning, maintenance, and related areas. This context raises an important point: the LGU draft was presented in 2019 with the same outsourcing proposal. Indications therefore suggest that the LGU would have enacted that elimination had approval occurred within the timeframe projected by the government. In the enacted LGU, the logic gains reinforcement: regardless of university autonomy, the statute refers explicitly to outsourced services and creates the figure of the “outsourced equivalent,” a provision for financial compensation in the face of vacancies in operational positions. The statute even assigns a monetary value to this figure, meaning that, if a university manages to operate with fewer outsourced workers, it may redirect the equivalent amount within the operating budget to other expenses. This mechanism represents a neoliberal rationalization of personnel cost-cutting.

The second manifestation involves the legitimation of the precarious status of temporary faculty. In an article on the subject, Marino and Mandalozzo (2023, p. 6) share a statement originating from debates in UEPG’s university council: “The LGU increases the percentage of collaborating professors (CRES), turning what was an eventual measure into a policy of precarization of faculty labor.” In the enacted LGU, Article 14 sets the percentage of temporary professors at 20%, with provisions that allow expansion of that share. Combined with the article that addresses exclusive dedication for faculty, the result within Paraná’s university system is a proportion of part-time workers (here considered precarized) that reaches half of a university’s faculty.

### 5.3 Teaching, Research, and Outreach

The relationship among teaching, research, and outreach under the LGU may appear ambiguous. In broad terms, the statute does not present these dimensions in concrete or direct form, such as specific actions, organizational proposals, or cross-cutting programs, even with the formal incorporation of outreach into curricula. On the other hand, practices ostensibly confined to management effectively affect these areas of the university. The minutes record recurring questions relevant to outreach, especially: “Outreach is entirely ignored and wholly disregarded in the draft presented” (Unicentro, 2019, local. 581–582). With respect to research, two movements emerge: private appropriation of scientific developments and, conversely, neglect of research itself, with the locus of scientific development, *stricto sensu* graduate programs (master’s and doctoral programs), treated as secondary. Two elements received greater emphasis in the debates: the possible closure of degree programs and student support policies.

Regarding possible program closures, a prior reflection concerns a general freeze of the university system. Under the LGU's logic (Paraná, 2021a), once the number of faculty and administrative staff positions becomes fixed, expansion of programs can occur only as an offshoot of existing work or by replacing a program currently in place, that is, "closing one to open another." This approach remains implicit in the calculation methodology underlying university management, as noted in Unicentro's minutes (2019, local. 597–599): "It is worth noting that this methodology likewise does not anticipate institutional growth, since institutions will have to divide among themselves the amount already in place." The same document advances a forceful conclusion that confirms the argument for system stagnation: "There is no mention, therefore, of growth; the LGU reinforces elements established by a system that forbids any initiative toward expansion" (Unicentro, 2019, local. 600–601).

The possibility of program closure received extensive debate in all university councils. Beyond closure per se, the minutes question the methodologies and formats adopted, "[...] based on purely quantitative assessment, which compromises the University's social function; it links the number of equivalent students to the number of programs and to the sizing of the total number of positions" (UEPG, 2019, local. 224–227). The debates anticipated elements later enacted in the statute (Paraná, 2021a, pp. 20–21). Article 58, although it does not use the words "closure" or "termination" of programs, proves explicit:

State Public Universities with undergraduate programs that, for three consecutive years, record a total number of enrolled students lower than 50% (fifty percent) of the total number of places shall be required to submit to SETI a plan to recover enrollments for the three subsequent years, under penalty of losing authorization to operate the programs in question.

Paragraph 1. If, at the end of the third year, the recovery plan does not raise enrollment above the minimum threshold established in the caput of this Article, SETI shall initiate a process to reassess the authorization for the program's operation.

Reflections recorded in the university council minutes engage directly with matters that became law. At UEL, the minutes include a manifesto from the student movement, which organized for the analysis and recorded its position through its representatives on the University Council. The excerpt presents a pointed critique of the cited provision and introduces the final theme within teaching, research, and outreach: student support policies:

It is important to note that one cannot speak of recovering places in programs with high attrition without considering that one of the main reasons students leave the classroom lies in the fact that PUBLIC universities in Brazil do not guarantee material conditions that allow these students to remain in their studies (UEL, 2019, p. 368).



The passage offers a general observation about student assistance across Brazilian universities. Universities as institutions have undertaken significant efforts to include, within their spaces, students from diverse backgrounds and working-class communities; nonetheless, material conditions, opportunities, and supports for these students fall short of needs. This challenge may stand among the most significant faced by the contemporary university. Within the limits of the present discussion, it bears emphasis that student assistance emerged in all documents reviewed and, given the statute's silence, drew substantial criticism, as stated in UEPG's minutes: the draft "does not include any assistance policy for student retention, such as the university cafeteria, student housing, and retention scholarships" (UEPG, 2019, local. 232–234). It remains necessary to reaffirm that these elements, as well as pedagogical and psychological assistance, ongoing advising, and other actions essential to student development and, consequently, to retention, do not appear in, nor do they receive mention from, the LGU.

This analysis recognizes the limits inherent in reliance on university council minutes, even though all universities created working groups, studies, and analyses on the topic, much of which is widely disseminated and available. As stated at the beginning of the article, the aim was to give visibility to the structure the universities chose to express their positions. Beyond formal structures, broad mobilization by other organizations, such as unions and political parties, also played a significant role in the debate. The text therefore concludes with contributions from these actors.

## **6 COLLECTIVE ACTORS AND THEIR ANALYTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE LGU**

As stated above, the content recorded in the minutes of the universities' senior councils also conveys the voice of collective movements within the university, such as the student movement, departments, centers, and other bodies, depending on each institution's specific configuration. This section addresses actors connected to the universities but not directly integrated into their structures, especially the labor unions and the Paraná Front to Repeal the LGU.

Before presenting these actors' contributions, it is necessary to note that in 2019 the unions active in the analysis agreed that university councils constituted suitable venues for debate on the LGU, given their broad and democratic representation and their provision of a plural space for ideas. Regarding the timing of participation, the discussion begins with the unions, specifically the faculty unions, since the record is extensive in article form, already cited in this text, namely Marino and Mandalozzo (2023). Although directed to faculty unions, especially local chapters of the National Union of Faculty at Higher Education Institutions (ANDES), that article examines union debate and action more broadly.

At the outset, one can state that the unions acted as principal actors who sustained and, at most universities, successfully secured the thesis of comprehensive

rejection of the LGU, which, according to their documents, reflected collective will: “The outcome of the public debates held within the academic community was full rejection of the LGU” (Sindiprol [...], 2021). Union action also marked decisive moments in the internal university debate. For example, “the CSD reaffirmed its stance of rejection and warned about certain administrations that insist on the discourse that the LGU draft may be improved” (Marino; Mandalozzo, 2023, p. 10). As to debate methods, multiple strategies appeared, as the authors indicate:

Among the various mechanisms and strategies of denunciation and resistance adopted by the faculty unions of the IEES/PR in the face of the LGU proposal (which include: meetings of the Faculty Union Command with SETI representatives; work stoppages by faculty; debates in assemblies; participation in meetings of the senior councils and in public hearings; interviews in local news outlets; production and distribution of informational materials; political coordination with state deputies, the student movement, and other unions linked to the universities; among other mobilizations), the focus here, for the purpose of this characterization, rests on two state-level seminars organized by those faculty members in 2019 (Marino; Mandalozzo, 2023, p. 8).

These seminars covered the period after the 2019 debate and the statute’s enactment in 2021 and continue to occur, already incorporating actions arising from implementation of the LGU. The analyses’ underlying principles remain in place, and the consequences coincide with what unions denounced at the time. Union activity targets labor precarization, defends substantive autonomy, monitors university financing, and opened a new front after the statute’s approval. “What has appeared in the faculty union movement after approval of the LGU is reliance on a process of judicialization on grounds of unconstitutionality” (Marino; Mandalozzo, 2023, p. 14), a development aligned with the priority actions undertaken by the Paraná Front to Repeal the LGU.

The Paraná Front to Repeal the LGU is, in short, a movement that also brings together individuals and organizations outside Paraná’s university system. Launched officially on the UEL campus on October 2, 2023, the Paraná Front for the repeal of the LGU (Frente [...], 2023) was already organizing and promoting debate on the statute, chiefly in the political arena, and obtained support from state and federal deputies. Its website provides a manifesto from which information was drawn to understand the movement’s formation and demands. According to that text, the central objective is:

[...] the formation of a broad coalition of unions, student organizations, and senior councils of the IEES of Paraná, along with individuals or entities outside the university communities who defend a public and autonomous university, in order to repeal this Law (Frente [...], 2023, local. 11).

Regarding method and structure, the text indicates “[...] formation of local chapters at each university, coordinating union and student entities, members of the senior councils, and all who agree with its objective” (Frente [...], 2023, local. 49). During the pre-organizational phase, in coordination with legislators, the Front (Frente [...],

2023) spearheaded a Direct Action of Unconstitutionality, case no. 0067337-19.2022.8.16.0000, filed with the Court of Justice of Paraná (Frente [...], 2023). The case lists multiple authors, including state deputies and one federal deputy; unions, the government, and universities appear as third parties.

The case remains pending and constitutes one of the fronts in the struggle against the LGU. It bears note that, within the case, the Public Prosecutor's Office of Paraná issued an opinion favorable to certain elements of the action; at present, the court awaits the universities' responses to the claim of unconstitutionality. Overall, the role of collective actors in opposing the LGU shows that the issue extends beyond the university community. For the purposes of this study, it demonstrates that, although the debate bears a local imprint, it exceeds the university's boundaries and remains in motion even after the statute's approval.

## 7 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS: ALWAYS IN MOTION

This text pursued two aims: to document, in institutional form through university councils, the path followed by the LGU draft within the universities; and to present the statute's principal elements together with a critical appraisal, since the assumptions about its meaning and scope are not readily available to readers unfamiliar with Paraná's higher education system. That system includes the largest number of public universities in Brazil and plays a central role in the expansion of this mode of provision into the state's interior, given that the capital is served by federal institutions. Accordingly, processes "tested" in Paraná's system may affect other, similar systems.

One important caveat, already noted, is that the Paraná case, although "laboratory-like," does not stand apart from a national process undertaken since the coup against President Dilma Rousseff, in its multiple facets: a labor reform that precarizes working conditions in the country; a spending freeze that seeks to shrink the State and its institutions; the adoption of an ultraliberal, anti-university logic under the Bolsonaro administration; and, most importantly, the fact that these Brazilian elements reflect metamorphoses in the capitalist system of production and circulation of commodities. Financial capital enters institutions, turns education into a service, and moves away from the conception of a right. Higher education institutions operate as profit-oriented organizations, increasingly appropriated by education entrepreneurs. In the case of public universities, the system analyzed here, there is not (yet) an official privatization process, a sale and transfer to private owners, at least not directly. That step may not even be necessary, since "academic capitalism" has been absorbed across diverse university systems; in the case examined here, the LGU advances multiple facilitators for the predominance of market logic in Paraná's universities, notably the provision, read sale, of services and an entrepreneurial logic, presented as innovation and prioritized.

University council analyses in 2019 already highlighted this set of conditions. The debates addressed labor precarization inside the university and system stagnation through various mechanisms, such as the absence of growth planning and the possible

closing of programs, and worse, closure based on a meritocratic logic with a pseudo-scientific veneer, grounded in formulas and numbers that reduce policy to quantitative metrics resembling the reality of private higher education institutions. Although the universities' distinct contexts led to different courses of action, these issues did not fall outside institutional debate.

Collective actors within the universities, supported by external allies, did not abandon core principles in defense of their institutions after the LGU's enactment (Paraná, 2021a), even though the conditions the government used for approval were, at a minimum, restrictive. The bill passed under an urgency procedure, amid a global pandemic and at the end of the academic year, a moment marked by constraints and by the exhaustion of education professionals. Resistance has continued: collectives remained mobilized; a legal strategy moved forward; new fronts emerged, and some have already advanced toward concrete results. For example, the state government now concedes the need to adjust the LGU (Paraná, 2021a); one discussed adjustment is precisely the closure of low-demand programs. Whether these expectations will materialize remains uncertain. This development, in particular, may relate to a reality that strengthened in the post-pandemic context: youth disenchantment with higher education and the attendant decline in demand for university programs. Attractive offers from the market, both in price and in convenience, such as the expansion of distance education (DE), together with the worsening precarization of work across domains, also signal frustration with years of university study; young people increasingly prefer immediate entry into the labor market. All of this shows how the university stands under threat, and the LGU leverages that situation and positions itself as a restrictive element that serves the market, albeit indirectly.

These elements indicate the need to conceive a higher education policy that does not replicate the LGU's restrictive design. The task is urgent: to envision a welcoming, plural, and inclusive university in which retention and support policies receive due value, for students and for staff alike. Exhaustion driven by precarization severely affects education professionals, with consequences for teaching, research, and outreach, and ultimately deteriorates the university as a whole. Resistance to this model, which pushes an institution such as the university toward failure, is therefore not only necessary but urgent.

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## Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest with the article "The Trajectory of the General Law of Universities (LGU) within Paraná's state Higher Education Institutions".

## Data Availability

The content underlying the research text is available in the article.

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