

University Strategic Planning: a documentary analysis of the highest-ranked heis in Brazil

Planejamento Estratégico Universitário: uma análise documental das IES mais bem rankeadas no Brasil

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Abstract

This article presents a documentary analysis of the strategic planning of Brazilian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that rank among the top positions in three distinct rankings: Folha University Ranking 2023 (RUF); Entrepreneurial Universities Ranking 2021 (RUE); and Webometrics Ranking of World Universities 2023/2024 (RWU). The objective is to identify how these universities structure their planning, management, and institutional evaluation documents, highlighting practices, accessibility, and the integration between planning and evaluation. The methodology consisted of analyzing documents available on the institutional websites of the eight selected HEIs. The results indicate heterogeneity in the organization and level of detail of the Institutional Development Plans (PDI), as well as in the articulation with other management instruments. Some universities adopt consolidated structures of data and indicators, while others show gaps in transparency and detail. It is concluded that alignment between strategic planning, institutional evaluation, and organizational culture is essential for effective, results-oriented university management.

Keywords: University Management; Institutional Indicators; Academic Rankings.

Resumo

Este artigo apresenta uma análise documental do planejamento estratégico de Instituições de Ensino Superior (IES) brasileiras que ocupam as primeiras posições em três *rankings* distintos: Ranking Universitário Folha 2023 (RUF); Ranking Universidades Empreendedoras 2021 (RUE); e Webometrics Ranking of World Universities 2023/2024 (RWU). O objetivo foi identificar como essas universidades estruturam seus documentos de planejamento, gestão e avaliação institucional, destacando práticas, acessibilidade e integração entre planejamento e avaliação. A metodologia adotada consistiu na análise de documentos disponíveis nos portais institucionais das oito IES selecionadas. Os resultados indicam heterogeneidade na organização e no detalhamento dos Planos de Desenvolvimento Institucional (PDI), bem como na articulação com outros instrumentos de gestão. Algumas universidades adotam estruturas consolidadas de dados e indicadores, enquanto outras apresentam lacunas na transparência e detalhamento. Conclui-se que o alinhamento entre planejamento estratégico, avaliação institucional e cultura organizacional é essencial para uma gestão universitária eficaz e orientada para resultados.

Palavras-chave: Gestão Universitária; Indicadores Institucionais; Rankings Acadêmicos.

Technological Areas: Management and Administration, Education, and Institutional Communication.



1 Introduction

University management is a multifaceted activity that integrates academic, administrative, and social dimensions. In addition to overseeing teaching, research, and extension activities, university management encompasses compliance with legal regulations, the administration of human and physical resources, public accountability, and the generation of meaningful social impacts. Although administrative theories derived from both the public and private sectors provide important conceptual foundations, there remains a gap regarding specific conceptual models capable of addressing the organizational complexity of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). As a result of increasing pressure for performance and accountability, many HEIs have adopted management models originating from the private sector, even when such models do not fully align with the particular characteristics of public higher education institutions (Meyer Júnior & Lopes, 2015).

As argued by Paiva and Campos (2018), university management operates simultaneously under different organizational models, including professional bureaucracy, collegial governance, political models, and even forms of organized anarchy. This overlap of organizational logics makes management processes considerably more challenging. According to Gesser et al. (2022), the multiplicity of stakeholders within HEIs, including students, faculty members, administrators, society, and regulatory agencies, directly influences institutional strategic directions. In this regard, Duquia et al. (2022) and Valmorbidia et al. (2015) emphasize that, given this complexity, the adoption of governance models and decision support tools becomes indispensable.

In the field of planning, the primary reference instrument for Brazilian HEIs is the Institutional Development Plan (Plano de Desenvolvimento Institucional, PDI), whose preparation is legally required under Decree No. 9,235/2017 (Brazil, 2017). This document must be developed with the participation of the academic community, approved by the appropriate collegiate bodies, and submitted to the Ministry of Education (MEC) for evaluation and accreditation purposes. For federal universities, the ForPDI project provides a reference framework that guides the preparation of these plans through minimum guidelines while allowing adaptations according to institutional realities. However, requirements may vary substantially among state universities due to institutional autonomy and local regulations. The proposed framework also includes management tools designed to support both the development and implementation of PDIs, reinforcing their role as strategic instruments for planning, transparency, and institutional accountability (Sant'Ana et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, the preparation of the PDI cannot be understood as a merely technical exercise. As argued by Dourado (2011) and Sobrinho (2008), institutional planning should be aligned with the university's social mission and guided by principles of democratic governance, equity, and public responsibility. For these authors, both planning and evaluation must transcend an instrumental and technocratic perspective, assuming an ethical and political character capable of strengthening social quality, educational justice, and the public commitment of higher education.

Within this context, institutional evaluation plays a central role as a link between planning, management, and outcomes. Established through legal frameworks such as Law No. 10,861/2004 and Decree No. 9,235/2017 (Brazil, 2004; Brazil, 2017), the evaluation system encompasses processes ranging from self-assessment conducted by Internal Evaluation Committees (Comissões Próprias de Avaliação, CPA) to institutional participation and performance in the National Student Performance Examination (Exame Nacional de Desempenho dos Estudantes, Enade) and other program quality indicators. The results generated through these assessments feed back into planning cycles and constitute mandatory components of institutional reaccreditation processes. However, authors such as Almeida and Galvão (2021) and Bettencourt and Earp (2017) question the effectiveness and integration of evaluation instruments with PDIs, highlighting weaknesses both in the preparation of these documents and in their use as genuine management mechanisms.

Despite these criticisms, the results of institutional and program evaluations are translated into rankings and classifications that influence student choice and institutional positioning (Bittencourt, Creutzberg, & Bertolin, 2023). However, because such evaluations primarily focus on programs and academic units without providing a consolidated view of institutional performance, space has emerged for the growing prominence of university rankings. These rankings rely on publicly available data and proprietary criteria that are often contested, yet they exert a substantial influence on university visibility and reputation (Martins & Barreyro, 2023).

Since each ranking adopts distinct metrics and perspectives, the concept of the "best university" varies considerably. Consequently, organizational performance must be analyzed in light of the specific objectives and goals established by each HEI (Aguilera et al., 2024). Given that rankings are based on publicly available data derived from official evaluations but reorganized according to their own methodological frameworks, and considering that management models may vary even within the same institution, strategic planning, typically expressed through the PDI, emerges as the primary interpretive lens for assessing the coherence between institutional intentions,

actions, and outcomes, owing to its status as an official and publicly accessible document.

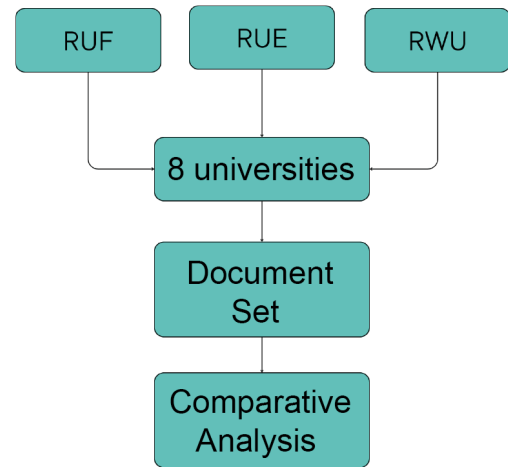
Against this backdrop, this article aims to describe how strategic planning is structured in the Brazilian universities that occupy the highest positions in three distinct rankings: the Folha University Ranking (RUF), the Education University Ranking (RUE), and the Ranking Web of Universities (RWU). The study seeks to identify patterns, gaps, and best practices that may support the formulation of more effective strategies in public universities. The article is organized into five sections: this introduction, the methodology, the results and discussion, the conclusion, and future perspectives.

2 Methodology

This study is characterized as a qualitative, documentary research investigation focused on the comparative analysis of institutional artifacts related to the strategic planning of Brazilian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Data were collected through official documents made publicly available on the institutional websites of the universities included in the study.

The selection of HEIs was based on their performance in three distinct rankings: the 2023 Folha University Ranking (RUF), the 2021 Entrepreneurial Universities Ranking (RUE), and the 2023/2024 Webometrics Ranking of World Universities (RWU). The five highest-ranked Brazilian universities in each ranking were identified, and the overlap among the lists resulted in a final sample comprising eight institutions.

Figure 1 – Methodological flow for the selection and analysis of universities



Source: Prepared by the authors

For comparative ranking purposes, a cumulative scoring strategy was adopted. Each university’s position in the rankings was converted into points, and the sum of these scores determined the institution’s final relative position within the sample. The lower the cumulative score, the higher the institution’s ranking. This procedure enabled the development of a comparative framework that served as the basis for the subsequent analyses.

Document collection was conducted between November and December 2024 through the official websites of the universities under analysis. The following

Box 1 – Universities analyzed and their relative positions in the rankings

UNIVERSITY	ACRONYM	STATE	RUF	RUE	RWU	SUM OF RANKING POSITIONS
University of São Paulo (USP)	USP	SP	1°	2°	1°	4
State University of Campinas (UNICAMP)	Unicamp	SP	2°	1°	2°	5
Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG)	UFMG	MG	5°	4°	3°	12
São Paulo State University “Júlio de Mesquita Filho” (UNESP)	Unesp	SP	6°	5°	4°	15
Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC)	UFSC	SC	7°	11°	5°	23
Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS)	UFRGS	RS	3°	13°	14°	30
Federal University of Viçosa (UFV)	UFV	MG	14°	3°	19°	36
Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ)	UFRJ	RJ	4°	19°	13°	36

Source: Prepared by the authors

institutional documents were selected: Institutional Development Plans (PDIs), management plans, institutional evaluation reports, strategic monitoring documents, and, when available, other instruments related to planning, strategic management, and institutional evaluation.

The document analysis was guided by criteria derived from the ForPDI framework and the specialized literature on university planning and governance. The objective was to understand how planning is formalized within the institutions, how it is articulated with the bodies responsible for strategic management, and how it incorporates, or fails to incorporate, the results generated through institutional evaluation processes.

The collected information was systematized using three descriptive comparative matrices organized in electronic spreadsheets. The first matrix compiled general institutional characteristics, including institutional size, number of campuses and academic units, presence across different municipalities, existence of planning documents beyond the PDI, planning cycle periodicity, and identification of the organizational units responsible for planning development.

The second matrix focused on comparing the structural elements recommended by the ForPDI framework with those effectively presented in the universities' planning instruments, assessing whether such elements were fully present, absent, or only partially addressed.

Finally, the third matrix sought to interpret, based on institutional documents and information available on the official university websites, the relationship between strategic planning, institutional evaluation, and the activities of the Internal Evaluation Committee (Comissão Própria de Avaliação, CPA), with particular emphasis on the process of institutional knowledge generation.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Overview of the Organization of Planning in the Universities Analyzed

The initial analysis focused on evaluating the structure of the Institutional Development Plan (PDI) based on the guidelines established by the ForPDI framework, its connection with monitoring documents such as management reports, and its articulation with institutional evaluation processes. However, throughout the course of the study, the need emerged to broaden the scope of the analysis in order to better understand the role and impact of strategic planning within the overall body of institutional documentation, as well as the manner in which it is integrated into the organizational structure and coordinated by the units responsible for planning in each university.

Based on this expanded objective, Box 2 was developed to provide a systematic overview of key institutional characteristics, including the number of academic units and municipalities served, the administrative sphere, the periodicity of planning documents, the existence of planning instruments complementary to the PDI, and the identification of the organizational units responsible for coordinating planning activities.

The information compiled in Box 2 provides a broader view of the documentary framework and planning governance structure within each institution. Furthermore, it reveals the complexity of the institutional arrangements established to coordinate the management of multiple units, often distributed across different campuses and municipalities, with central strategic planning. Such institutional alignment is essential to ensure the effectiveness of Institutional Development Plans (PDIs) and the consistency of local practices with the universities' overarching strategic guidelines.

As noted by Paiva and Campos (2018), different organizational configurations coexist within Brazilian public universities, directly influencing coordination mechanisms and the planning instruments adopted. This diversity of structures also reflects the multiplicity of interests and pressures affecting university management, as highlighted by Gesser *et al.* (2022).

According to Valmorbidia *et al.* (2015), the adoption of structured decision support methodologies can strengthen the alignment between the formulation and implementation of institutional plans, particularly in multicampus environments.

3.2 Profile of the Universities

As presented in Box 2, when discussing the planning structures of the selected universities, it is important to highlight, although evident from their names, that three of them, the University of São Paulo (USP), the State University of Campinas (UNICAMP), and São Paulo State University "Júlio de Mesquita Filho" (UNESP), are state universities, whereas the remaining institutions are federal universities. In terms of geographic distribution, two are located in Southern Brazil (Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul), while the other six are situated in Southeastern Brazil (three in São Paulo, two in Minas Gerais, and one in Rio de Janeiro). This geographic distribution and administrative affiliation help explain several institutional characteristics, since, as argued by Dourado (2011), public universities operate within a field marked by tensions between institutional autonomy and state regulation, which directly influences the design and scope of planning instruments. Moreover, these tensions vary according to governmental spheres and regional policy contexts.

Box 2 – Overview of the documentation identified

	USP	UNICAMP	UFMG	UNESP	UFSC	UFRGS	UFV	UFRJ
Units Cities	8/10/42	3/3/24	3/4/21	24/34/34	5/5/15	2/5/29	3/3/12	3/4/52
Administrative Sphere	State	State	Federal	State	Federal	Federal	Federal	Federal
State	SP	SP	MG	SP	SC	RS	MG	RJ
Primary Planning Document	PDI	Planes	PDI	PDI	PDI	PDI	PDI	PDI
Planning Cycle of the Primary Document	5 years	5 years	6 years	5 years	5 years	10 years	6 years	5 years
Existence of Additional Planning Documents	Yes	Yes	Not Available	Yes	Not Available	Yes	Yes	Yes
Planning Cycle of Additional Planning Documents	5 years	5 years	Not Available	5 years	Not Available	5 years	Documents with Different Timeframes	5 years
Unit Responsible for Planning Coordination	CPA	General Coordination Office	Management	Strategic Planning Advisory Office	Permanent Monitoring Committee	Planning Committee and the CPA Monitors the Process	Office of Planning and Budget	General Superintendence of Planning and Planning Committee

Source: Prepared by the authors

All universities included in the study possess organizational structures composed of multiple academic units distributed across different municipalities, characterizing them as multicampus institutions. These units encompass a wide range of colleges, institutes, and academic centers. Two institutions stand out in this regard. The Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) has four of its five units concentrated in Porto Alegre, with only one located in an adjacent municipality, making it notable for its geographic concentration. In contrast, UNESP maintains a presence in 24 different municipalities, typically with a single college or institute in each location, distinguishing itself through its extensive territorial reach. These characteristics reinforce the complexity of coordinating management activities and aligning local units with central institutional planning, while also highlighting the need for instruments capable of supporting the participatory and equitable development of institutional policies (Gesser *et al.*, 2022).

3.3 Access to Documents

During the process of locating documents related to the objectives of this study, different approaches to information

organization within institutional websites were observed, as well as varying ways in which planning was connected to evaluation and management processes. Through a systematic exploration of university websites, including menus and dedicated institutional sections, it became evident that each institution assigns different levels of visibility and accessibility to these materials.

The Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) and the University of São Paulo (USP) presented the most complex navigation structures, requiring the use of external search engines to locate strategic planning documents. In the case of USP, only a preliminary version of the 2012–2017 Institutional Development Plan (PDI) was available, with no more recent version identified. In contrast, the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), and the Federal University of Viçosa (UFV) organized their information in a more accessible manner, providing direct links from their homepage. The remaining institutions required more extensive navigation to locate the relevant documents.

Access to institutional evaluation results and Internal Evaluation Committee (CPA) reports was generally less straightforward, often requiring manual searches or the use

of external search tools. USP, for example, maintains three separate webpages related to the CPA, only one of which appears to be regularly updated. Although basic institutional information, such as the number of programs and enrolled students, is readily available on university websites, management reports and statistical yearbooks often require familiarity with the institutional website structure to be located. UNESP stands out in this regard by centralizing its PDI, management reports, and other institutional planning instruments on a single webpage.

This variation in the visibility of institutional documents demonstrates that the principle of transparency, emphasized within the ForPDI guidelines, is still implemented unevenly across universities. As noted by Sant'Ana *et al.* (2017), the PDI and associated management instruments should function not only as planning tools but also as public mechanisms of institutional accountability.

Furthermore, the absence of updated or easily accessible information on planning and evaluation limits the possibility of meaningful participation by the academic community in management processes, which, according to Dourado (2011), weakens the democratic function of the public university. This challenge becomes even more critical in multicampus institutions, where coordination among multiple decision-making centers is required. Valmorbidia *et al.* (2015) argue that the lack of organized information systems and systematic dissemination mechanisms compromises not only strategic management but also institutional legitimacy.

In this regard, Abello-Romero *et al.* (2021) add that information asymmetry between universities and their stakeholders, including students, faculty members, and regulatory agencies, represents a structural obstacle to the development of an institutional culture grounded in evidence, transparency, and accountability. Finally, McManus *et al.* (2021) contend that the public visibility of institutional profiles depends on the openness and standardization of strategic information, overcoming the limitations of fragmented metrics commonly employed in rankings and external evaluation systems.

3.4 The Institutional Development Plan (PDI) as Part of a Broader Planning Framework

With the exception of UFSC, all universities presented additional public planning documents beyond the Institutional Development Plan (PDI). UFMG and UFRJ maintain a planning document positioned above the PDI in the strategic hierarchy, aimed at guiding long-term institutional policies and goals through a broader perspective that is not constrained by a specific time horizon. In addition to this document, UFRJ, as well as USP, UNICAMP, UNESP, and UFRGS, has development plans

for its individual academic units. USP extends these plans to all of its academic entities, including colleges, research centers, and museums, while also requiring individual faculty planning aligned with the PDI cycle. UNICAMP and UNESP, in turn, structure the implementation of their strategies through specific institutional programs and projects designed to achieve the objectives established in the PDI.

UFRGS and UFV additionally employ management plans prepared by their respective rectoral administrations, as well as Information Technology Development Plans (PDTIs), which are aligned with the objectives of institutional planning. UFRGS, in particular, organizes its planning structure into strategic, tactical, and operational levels, with operational planning documents reviewed annually.

This diversity and complementarity of planning documents demonstrate that, although the PDI occupies a central role, it forms part of a broader documentary ecosystem that integrates distinct dimensions of university management.

3.5 Planning Cycles

Given the diversity of strategic planning documents found across the universities, it is important to examine the duration and planning cycles of the Institutional Development Plans (PDIs), which serve as the primary expression of institutional strategy. As shown in Box 2, five of the eight institutions analyzed adopt five-year planning cycles. The exceptions are UFMG and UFV, which employ six-year cycles, and UFRGS, whose PDI spans a ten-year period (2016–2026), reflecting different strategic approaches and varying degrees of institutional autonomy.

UFRGS stands out for integrating its PDI with a range of complementary instruments, including the management plan, graduate education planning documents, the Information and Communication Technology Master Plan, the Sustainable Logistics Plan, and the Integrity Plan, thereby promoting a more integrated approach to strategy implementation. UNICAMP, in contrast, adopts a decentralized model in which academic units develop their own planning documents during the year following the publication of the PDI, with validity extending until one year after the PDI's expiration. In the remaining universities, complementary planning documents generally follow the same cycle as the PDI.

These findings reinforce the importance of understanding planning cycles not merely as temporal intervals but as structural mechanisms that shape the relationship between institutional strategies, management

practices, and evaluation processes, as discussed by Valmorbidia *et al.* (2015) and Sant’Ana *et al.* (2017).

3.6 A Structure of the Institutional Development Plan (PDI) in Relation to the ForPDI Framework

The ForPDI project, developed as an initiative of the Brazilian federal government, proposes a reference framework for Institutional Development Plans (PDIs) aimed at Federal Higher Education Institutions (IFES). Its structure comprises 42 items distributed across topics and subtopics, designed to ensure a comprehensive approach to university planning by integrating dimensions such as mission, governance, performance indicators, evaluation, and institutional goals (Sant’Ana *et al.*, 2017).

In this study, a systematic review of institutional documents was conducted to verify the presence of these elements. The analysis classified the topics into four categories: (1) fully presented, (2) presented with limited clarity, (3) partially presented, and (4) not presented.

Box 3 presents the results for each university.

As previously noted, the ForPDI framework serves as a voluntary reference model designed primarily for federal universities. This characteristic grants institutions considerable flexibility in the formulation of their Institutional Development Plans (PDIs), even when the framework is adopted as a guiding reference. Among the federal universities analyzed, UFV and UFRJ exhibited the highest levels of alignment with the ForPDI model, particularly regarding the explicit presentation of objectives, performance indicators, and institutional goals. In contrast, UFRGS showed the lowest degree of adherence to the recommended topics. Nevertheless, none of the federal institutions examined fully incorporated all elements proposed by the framework (Duarte *et al.*, 2020; UFMG, 2018; UFV, 2024; UFRJ, 2023).

The differences become even more pronounced among the state universities. Since these institutions are not subject to the ForPDI guidelines, their PDIs exhibit substantially different structures, focusing primarily on sections related

to institutional profiles, organizational structures, and areas of activity. None of the state universities analyzed clearly addressed more than seven of the topics proposed by the ForPDI framework. A similar finding was reported by Monticelli *et al.* (2021), who described the development of Planes at UNICAMP as an institution-specific alternative for integrating evaluation and planning outside the federal framework. This approach reflects the efforts of some state universities to consolidate internal strategic planning systems that, although not aligned with ForPDI, effectively address their particular organizational needs (Atvars & Serafim, 2020; USP, 2017; UNESP, 2022).

Most of the documents analyzed focus on institutional profiles and educational projects, emphasizing policies related to teaching, research, extension, management, and social responsibility. In contrast, topics such as institutional evaluation, monitoring, and PDI review processes receive limited attention. Only UFRGS, UFV, and UFRJ systematically address monitoring, control, and revision mechanisms. Among all institutions, UFV is the only university that presents tables containing performance indicators demonstrating progress toward the goals established in the previous planning cycle.

Finally, topics related to infrastructure, faculty, and administrative staff are addressed only superficially in most PDIs. Nevertheless, with the exception of UFMG and UFSC, the universities provide additional planning documents through their institutional websites, particularly those focused on academic units. This finding suggests a parallel effort to support organizational planning and strengthen strategic management at the local level.

These findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that most PDIs remain concentrated on structural aspects and on policies related to teaching, research, and extension, while giving comparatively less attention to systematic institutional evaluation mechanisms and indicator-based strategic management practices (Monticelli *et al.*, 2021).

3.7 Detailing of Actions and Objectives

In general, with the exception of USP and UFMG, the universities analyzed follow the ForPDI framework

Box 3 – Compliance with ForPDI framework elements

	USP	UNICAMP	UFMG	UNESP	UFSC	UFRGS	UFV	UFRJ
Fully Presented	4	2	22	7	29	11	34	36
Presented with Limited Clarity	11	3	4	6	2	10	4	4
Partially Presented	4	1	1	1	1	1	0	0
Not Presented	23	36	15	28	10	20	4	2
Total Number of Items Assessed	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42

Source: Prepared by the authors

by adopting simplified structures based on objectives and performance indicators. Only UFV and UFRJ present institutional targets comprehensively within the PDI itself, as recommended by the framework guidelines. UFRGS, in contrast, indicates that its targets are detailed in complementary documents, such as the Management Plan.

At USP, institutional objectives are embedded within broader policy statements, while targets are presented without clearly defining either a baseline or a specific time horizon, limiting their measurability. UFMG, in turn, adopts a structure that distinguishes between general and specific objectives, accompanied by a list of actions organized within an annual implementation schedule, demonstrating an effort toward internal systematization.

UNICAMP and UNESP describe actions and budget allocations associated with institutional programs and projects aligned with the strategic objectives established in the PDI. Some of these actions are detailed in specific documents, such as unit-level plans and management reports, revealing a decentralized yet coordinated approach to strategic implementation. The organization of documents on the USP website similarly suggests that the detailed specification of actions is addressed through complementary instruments, including unit development plans and faculty activity plans. Monticelli *et al.* (2021) characterize this model as a mechanism for integrating planning and implementation through internal project portfolio systems and decentralized management structures, thereby enhancing managerial effectiveness.

Finally, UFRGS adopts a clear and hierarchical planning structure. The PDI operates at the strategic level, while the Management Plan and unit-level plans correspond to the tactical level. Annual plans developed by individual units constitute the operational level. This division facilitates monitoring and accountability for institutional actions, consistent with the arguments of Valmorbidia *et al.* (2015), who emphasize the importance of distinct levels of planning detail to support decision-making and institutional monitoring processes.

3.8 Previous PDIs and Institutional Results

Among the universities analyzed, only the Federal University of Viçosa (UFV) presents a systematic assessment of the results achieved during the previous planning cycle within its PDI, including performance indicators and an evaluation of target attainment. In the remaining institutions, management reports partially fulfill this role by describing implemented actions, but they generally fail to establish clear links between objectives, targets, and outcomes.

UNICAMP and UNESP provide monitoring dashboards containing projects and indicators associated with the

PDI, allowing for some degree of visibility into strategic implementation. However, none of the universities examined demonstrated a formalized process for reviewing the PDI with an explicit focus on institutional learning or the continuous improvement of planning practices.

This gap highlights a weakness in the feedback mechanisms of the planning cycle, compromising the systematic use of data to support strategic reorientation, as noted by Sant'Ana *et al.* (2017), Abello-Romero *et al.* (2021), and Ribeiro *et al.* (2023). The absence of clear mechanisms for evaluating and improving PDIs reveals a disconnect between planning and institutional performance management, limiting the consolidation of an evidence-based organizational culture. As observed by Monticelli *et al.* (2021), the institutionalization of evaluative practices depends not only on the existence of indicators but also on their incorporation into decision-making processes. Likewise, Valmorbidia *et al.* (2015) emphasize that the absence of structured monitoring methods hinders the continuous improvement cycle of institutional planning.

3.9 Data Management and Performance Indicators

The availability and accessibility of institutional data vary considerably across the universities analyzed. Although most institutions provide statistical yearbooks and management reports, access to such information is not always straightforward or intuitive. USP and UNICAMP, for example, feature visual dashboards on their homepages but do not provide readily visible links to more detailed information.

UFMG, UFRGS, and UFV stand out for offering direct access to statistical information from their homepages. In the case of UFRGS, this accessibility is enhanced through multiple interactive and segmented dashboards, such as “UFRGS in Numbers,” the “Quality Dashboard,” and the “Open Data Portal,” which provide filters and specialized categories. In contrast, UFV and UFMG make data available through more static formats. UFV relies primarily on image-based dashboards, whereas UFMG provides textual information through a webpage that redirects users to the Institutional Data Governance Office (EGDI).

Four universities maintain dedicated units responsible for data governance and performance indicators: USP (EGIDA), UNICAMP (EDAT), UNESP (EGD), and UFMG (EGDI, established in 2023). In the remaining institutions, data management responsibilities are distributed among planning or information technology offices, without a clearly defined and dedicated organizational structure.

UNICAMP and UNESP deserve particular attention for maintaining their own systems for monitoring programs and projects linked to the PDI. Nevertheless, only six of the eight institutions analyzed provide public dashboards

containing institutional performance indicators, with UFSC and UFRJ being the exceptions.

These asymmetries demonstrate that, despite recent advances, the strategic use of data has not yet been consolidated in an equitable manner across institutions. Abello-Romero *et al.* (2021) argue that information asymmetry between universities and their academic communities undermines transparency and public accountability. Ribeiro *et al.* (2023) and Monticelli *et al.* (2021) further emphasize that the absence of integrated data systems limits the development of evidence-based management practices, thereby constraining both institutional evaluation and strategic governance.

3.10 Integration with External Agendas

Some of the universities analyzed demonstrate efforts to align their strategic planning with international agendas and external performance measurement systems. UNICAMP was the only institution to incorporate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) transversally throughout its planning document (Planes 2021–2025), explicitly linking its strategic guidelines to the commitments established under the 2030 Agenda (UNICAMP, 2020 [PC 3.1]). At UFRJ and UNESP, the SDGs are referenced in initiatives supporting research and extension activities and are also used as a framework for institutional performance indicators. UFV, in turn, associates the topic primarily with its performance in university rankings, although the SDGs are not directly integrated into its PDI.

Regarding rankings, all universities monitor their performance in national and international classification systems, including RUF, THE, and QS. Institutions such as USP, UNICAMP, UNESP, and UFV maintain dedicated webpages or specific sections within their institutional websites to track and publicize these results.

This movement toward incorporating external metrics into institutional planning can be interpreted as an attempt to reduce information asymmetries and strengthen public legitimacy in increasingly competitive environments, as argued by Abello-Romero *et al.* (2021). Monticelli *et al.* (2021) further suggest that such alignment becomes more meaningful when it transcends the performative logic of rankings and is translated into institutional policies aimed at sustainable development and social inclusion.

3.11 Institutional Evaluation and the Internal Evaluation Committee (CPA) within the PDI

As required by Law No. 10,861/2004, universities must maintain an Internal Evaluation Committee (Comissão Própria de Avaliação, CPA). However, the composition

and institutional positioning of these committees vary considerably across institutions, influencing the extent to which they are integrated with strategic planning processes.

Among the universities analyzed, USP stands out for its CPA structure, which is organized as a Plenary Committee composed of representatives from the Institutional Evaluation Chamber (CAI), the Faculty Activities Chamber (CAD), the Academic Activities Chamber (CAA), and the university's vice provosts, under the leadership of the Vice Rector. This arrangement broadens the evaluative role of the CPA by directly integrating it into the planning processes of academic units.

Similarly, UNICAMP demonstrates a high degree of integration among planning, evaluation, and data management functions, all of which are concentrated within the University's General Coordination Office. This structure facilitates stronger connections between institutional evaluation and decision-making processes.

UFV also adopts an integrated model, with the CPA formally linked to the Office of Planning and Budget, thereby establishing a direct channel between evaluation outcomes and the formulation of institutional strategies.

At UFRGS, although the CPA is supported by Unit Evaluation Centers (NAUs) and an Institutional Evaluation Secretariat, its activities appear to be more focused on the production of evaluation reports than on strategic planning itself.

In contrast, universities such as UFMG, UFSC, and UFRJ maintain CPAs whose responsibilities are largely restricted to the operational aspects of institutional evaluation, with limited direct involvement in strategic planning processes. UNESP occupies an intermediate position, displaying evidence of connections between the CPA, departmental planning activities, and faculty career development policies.

In summary, Box 4 synthesizes the degree of integration among the CPA, institutional evaluation processes, and strategic planning across the universities analyzed.

These findings suggest that the ability of the CPA to influence institutional planning depends largely on its organizational positioning, its connections with strategic units, and the evaluation culture established within the university. As argued by Sant'Ana *et al.* (2017) and Ribeiro *et al.* (2023), institutional evaluation generates strategic impact only when it is effectively incorporated into planning decision-making and review cycles, moving beyond a merely bureaucratic or regulatory function.

4 Final Considerations

The analysis of institutional documents from the eight highest-ranked universities in major national and

Box 4 – Synthesis of the integration between the cpa, institutional evaluation, and strategic planning

UNIVERSITY	CPA COMPOSITION	INTEGRATION WITH STRATEGIC PLANNING
USP	Plenary Committee composed of representatives from the CAI, CAD, CAA, and the Vice Provosts	High – Planning Guided by Institutional Evaluation
Unicamp	University General Coordination Office	High – Integrated Organizational Units
UFV	Office of Planning and Budget	High – Formal and Active Integration
UFRGS	CPA + Unit Evaluation Centers (NAUs) + Institutional Evaluation Secretariat	Moderate – Predominantly Report-Oriented Role
Unesp	CPA with links to planning and faculty career development processes	Moderate – Partial Integration
UFMG	CPA supported by technical units (DAI and NDE)	Low – Focus on Operational Execution
UFSC	CPA linked to the Office of Planning and Institutional Development (DPGI)	Low – Isolated Functioning
UFRJ	CPA linked to the Office of Undergraduate Education	Low – No Clear Relationship with Strategic Planning

Source: Prepared by the authors

international rankings reveals that, although the ForPDI framework has influenced the structure of Institutional Development Plans (PDIs), its adoption remains partial and heterogeneous. Paradoxically, the universities that achieve the highest performance in rankings, namely USP, UNICAMP, and UNESP, are precisely those that exhibit the lowest degree of formal alignment with the federal framework, while simultaneously demonstrating a high level of maturity in integrating planning, management, and evaluation processes.

The experiences of USP and UNICAMP illustrate robust institutional approaches characterized by dedicated structures for data governance and the integration of the Internal Evaluation Committee (CPA) into planning cycles. UFRGS, in turn, stands out for its hierarchical organization of planning instruments and its extended ten-year planning horizon, which facilitates alignment between institutional strategies and operational actions.

The presence of complementary planning instruments, such as management plans, unit-level planning documents, and project portfolios, emerged as a key factor in providing the flexibility and level of detail necessary for effective strategy implementation. Nevertheless, evidence of systematic PDI revision based on performance data remains limited, weakening the strategic feedback cycle.

Another important finding is that only a subset of the universities analyzed maintains dedicated organizational units responsible for data governance and performance indicators. This directly affects their capacity for monitoring activities and evidence-based decision-making. Although still emerging, the integration of external metrics, including university rankings and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), appears to strengthen institutional transparency and public legitimacy.

The findings of this study suggest that the quality of institutional planning cannot be reduced to compliance with normative frameworks. Rather, it depends on organizational arrangements capable of integrating evaluation, data, and strategy. Accordingly, the strengthening of Internal Evaluation Committees (CPAs), the consolidation of an evaluation culture, and the advancement of information governance should be regarded as fundamental pillars of contemporary university management.

5 Future Perspectives

The data analyzed reveal a lack of clarity regarding the processes used to develop PDIs and other complementary planning instruments, limiting transparency and making it difficult to understand the internal planning arrangements adopted by universities. Investigating these dynamics and the methodologies employed in planning processes may enrich future studies on university governance.

Another promising avenue for research involves examining the organizational culture of the universities that achieve the highest positions in institutional rankings. Understanding whether their performance results from deliberate strategic actions or from the convergence of internal and external factors may provide valuable insights for policies aimed at fostering and supporting effective university management.

Finally, the findings highlight the importance of integrating strategic, tactical, and operational levels through robust organizational structures supported by specialized units dedicated to data governance, performance indicators, and institutional evaluation. Such integration can contribute to the consolidation of an institutional culture grounded in evidence, quality, and public accountability.

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