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Communicative and strategic planning-action approach: social technology for the planning of postgraduate programs

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Abstract

The Communicative and strategic planning-action approach methodology (CSP) combines strategy and communicative rationality. It is coherent and enables strategic planning when applied to socially constructed contexts, such as in graduate programs (PPG). This study reports the experience of the Graduate Program in Environmental Sciences (GPES) of the Federal University of Rondônia (UNIR) using the CSP in the 2015/2016 Planning, setting the bases for the planning process of other graduate programs of the university. This is a qualitative and applied research, adopting a descriptive approach and using participatory procedures. The data were collected from research diaries where participant observation was registered, and from semi-structured forms used to obtain feedback about the planning process with the participants. The data collected was then submitted to descriptive and content analysis. Twenty-one professors participated in this process. A planning team was formed including professors from the GPES to adapt and apply the CSP. The planning process was structured in three rounds with meetings in two cities in order to write the GPES Development and Consolidation Plan for 2015/2016. It was possible to observe the positive results obtained in the planning process since the participants recognized the method's capacity to gather them to establish dialogues and connections regarding their projects, also facilitating a shared understanding about the programs context. The planning process originated a methodological proposal adapting and contextualizing the CSP in order to be used in other graduate programs of UNIR. The results show that the CSP is a useful social technology to improve graduate programs, helping them to achieve their potential, structuring the basis for the dialogue between the program and its environment, producing actions of scientific and social impact.

Keywords: Communicative and strategic planning-action approach. Theory of communicative action. Graduate programs.

Metodologia planeação estratégica e comunicativa: tecnologia social para o planejamento de programas de pós-graduação

Resumo

A metodologia planeação estratégica e comunicativa (PEC) combina estratégia e racionalidade comunicativa; mostra-se coerente em contextos socioconstruídos, como programas de pós-graduação (PPG) e viabiliza seu planejamento estratégico. Este artigo relata a experiência do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ciências Ambientais (PGCA) da Universidade Federal de Rondônia (Unir) com a PEC em seu planejamento para 2015/2016, com vistas a balizar uma proposição metodológica para os demais PPG da Unir. Trata-se de pesquisa com abordagem qualitativa, de natureza aplicada, com objetivo descritivo e procedimentos orientados por métodos participativos. Os dados são provenientes de diários escritos – a partir da observação participante no processo de planejamento e de formulários semiestruturados para colher *feedback* entre os participantes – e foram submetidos a análise descritiva e análise de conteúdo; 21 docentes participaram da pesquisa. Uma equipe planejadora foi formada com docentes do PGCA para adaptar e aplicar a PEC, estruturando o planejamento em 3 rodadas presenciais com encontros em 2 municípios, o que levou ao Plano de Desenvolvimento e Consolidação para 2015/2016. Constatou-se que o planejamento foi positivo, pois os entrevistados reconheceram que ele possibilitou estruturar um processo para reuni-los de modo que pudessem articular seus projetos e dialogar, proporcionando uma compreensão compartilhada de situação. Foi apresentada uma proposição metodológica para outros PPG da Unir, com a devida adaptação e contextualização. Os resultados apontam que a PEC constitui uma proveitosa tecnologia social para que os PPG atinjam suas potencialidades, estruturando as bases para que cada PPG dialogue com seu contexto e produza ações de impacto científico e social.

Palavras-chave: Planeação estratégica e comunicativa. Teoria do agir comunicativo. Programa de pós-graduação.

Plan estratégico de comunicación: tecnología social para la planificación de programas de postgrado

Resumen

El plan estratégico de comunicación (PEC) combina estrategia y racionalidad comunicativa; se muestra coherente en contextos socio-construidos, como programas de postgrado (PPG), y viabiliza su planificación estratégica. Este trabajo tiene como objetivo relatar la experiencia del Programa de Postgrado en Ciencias Ambientales de la Universidad Federal de Rondônia (Unir) con el PEC en su planificación 2015/2016, con vistas a demarcar una proposición metodológica para los demás PPG de la Unir. Definimos un diseño de investigación de enfoque cualitativo, de naturaleza aplicada, con objetivos descriptivos y procedimientos orientados por métodos participativos. Los datos provienen de diarios escritos, a partir de la observación participante en el proceso planificador y formularios semiestructurados para recoger *feedback* de los participantes. Utilizamos análisis descriptivos y de contenido. Participaron 21 docentes. Se compuso un equipo planificador que incluyó a docentes del PGCA para adaptar el PEC y aplicarlo. Estructuramos la planificación en tres ruedas presenciales con encuentros en dos municipios, lo que llevó al Plan de Desarrollo y Consolidación 2015/2016 del PGCA. Se verificó que la planificación fue positiva, pues los entrevistados reconocieron que esta permitió estructurar un proceso para reunirlos de forma que pudieran articular sus proyectos y, aún, dialogar, lo que propició una comprensión compartida de la situación. Se presentó una propuesta metodológica para otros PPG de la universidad, con la debida adaptación y contextualización. Los resultados apuntan que el PEC es una provechosa tecnología social para que los PPG alcancen más plenamente sus potencialidades, estructurando las bases para que cada PPG dialogue con su medio y produzca acciones de impacto científico y social.

Palabras clave: Plan estratégico de comunicación. Teoría del actuar comunicativo. Programas de postgrado.

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INTRODUCTION

Strategic planning in Graduate Programs is not a simple process. Following a model will not always suffice, since existing methodologies do not necessarily contemplate all of the needs that arise – including, but not limited to: building collaboration; including the views of internal and external actors; producing scientific and social impact; eliciting peer recognition; providing academic excellence; and continuously solidifying and developing the Graduate Program.

In the Federal University of Rondônia (Unir), the absence of a proper planning methodology may be highlighted as a deterrent factor to the development and strengthening of the Graduate Programs and the communicative and strategic planning-action approach methodology (CSP) represents the possibility of a solution (MAGALHÃES, PAES-DE-SOUZA, SIENA et al., 2016). The CSP facilitates a communication process, involving contributors and stakeholders and reconciling points of view within a shared understanding regarding the situation and proposals for consensual troubleshooting, thus, creating a more direct bond between planning and management. The CSP would need to be adapted in order to take into consideration the specific aspects of the Graduate Programs at Unir. Therefore, our research question is:

- How could the CSP be adapted to meet the planning demands of one graduate program at Unir, having a format that would also serve the other graduate programs at the university?

The goal was to draw a planning outline in a format that would be suitable for other Graduate Programs at Unir, bearing in mind the possibility of generalization in qualitative research (GODOY, 2005; ALVES-MAZZOTTI, 2006; GÜNTHER, 2006).

The opportunity to implement the study happened following a demand from the Graduate Studies in Environmental Sciences Program (GPES). The GPES began in August 2015, and ended in April 2016, as described in this article.

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIVE AND STRATEGIC PLANNING-ACTION APPROACH METHODOLOGY

Strategic planning is a well-known management concept that has become popular and largely promoted because it can make the organizational processes more efficient and effective. It helps to maximize the utilization of resources and efforts. Strategic planning also entails having a series of tasks performed by the organization (OLIVEIRA, 2007; RIGBY and BILODEAU, 2007; MINTZBERG, AHLSTRAND and LAMPEL, 2010).

At the end of a planning process, the organization reaches an action or strategic plan. It is a formal document that expresses decisions made through a process. This document lists actions to be undertaken, defining the individuals responsible for each task and the goals to be reached, according to a certain endowment of resources and within certain deadlines (OLIVEIRA, 2007; MISOCZKY and GUEDES, 2012). It is also common to outline a *SWOT matrix* (*strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats*). It is a technique for cross-referencing information about environment that facilitates the internal and external analyses of the organization: strengths and weaknesses are taken refer to the internal or organizational aspects; opportunities and threats refer to the external or environmental aspects (PEREIRA, 2012). They are crucial in defining the strategies and determining the *mission, vision* and *values*, which involve defining aspects of the essence, the practice and relation to the context. The *mission* refers to the reason for the existence of the organization, containing its essential purpose and an analysis of the broad context in which the organization is inserted. The *vision* determines what the organization wants to become, clearly portraying what it wants its status to be in the long term, aligned with the organization's mission and values. In turn, *values* define the high principles and ethical guidance that must be followed by the organization even during crises (PORTO, 1997; OLIVEIRA, 2007; PEREIRA, 2012).

Although it has been proposed for specialists to use while in direct contact with higher management, strategic planning can also be a communicative tool with the purpose of mobilizing members of the organization and stakeholders. Cavalcante and Ferraro Júnior (2002) argue that participatory planning is not just a technique, but also a political strategy for organizing civil society. For universities, participatory planning is a social technology that helps to structure communicative strategies – and these, in turn, have a social and scientific impact. Academia is a fundamental institution for social development, and planning can help universities optimize the strategies to fulfill their mission (ARAÚJO, 1996; CHAIMOVICH, 2000; MARRARA, 2004;

RIZZATTI and RIZZATTI JÚNIOR, 2005). Planning in universities can help build a dialogical path through which science sets the agenda for discussing topics that trouble a community.

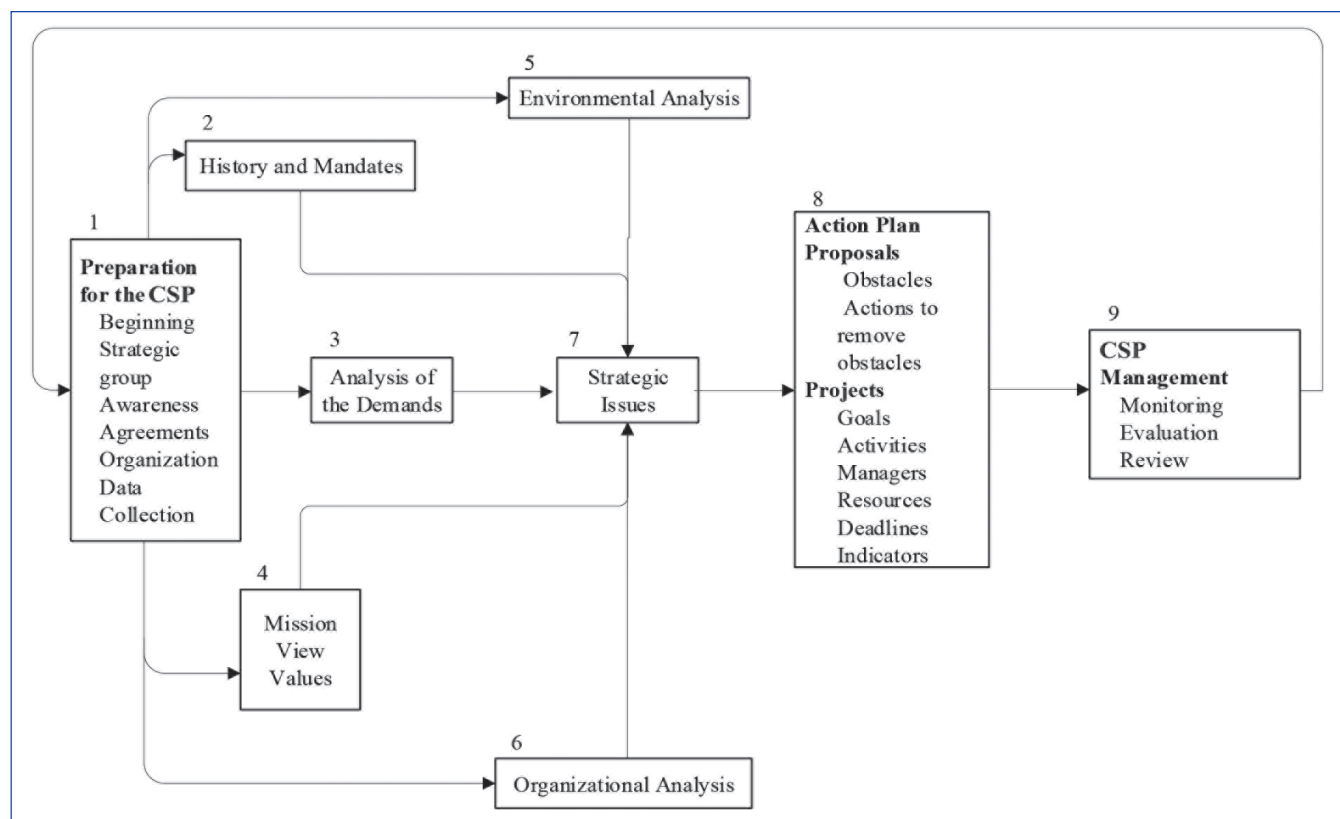
When analyzing how feasible strategic planning is inside universities, Araújo (1996, p. 82) considers that decisions must be negotiated agreements. In his words, “it is crucial to understand this aspect in order to carry out planning activities, because it is the basis for following the necessary steps to implement a systematic and long-lasting process”. Therefore, planning processes in universities must be communicative in order to become effective and sustainable. It is not possible to plan using only an instrumental rationale.

This debate continues in Souto-Maior (2012a, 2012b, 2013), who discusses the need for planning to be guided by communicative rationality, making it possible to unite the gifts of strategy with a consensus-oriented approach, which emphasizes agreements, and also the development common projects between internal and external actors of the organization. This orientation is based on Habermas’ (2012) Theory of Communicative Action (TCA), which states that action can occur in a dialogical manner, with agreements being built through arguments that are neither authoritative nor manipulative. Subjects who are guided by communicative rationality do not seek individual success as an end in itself but pursue their individual goals harmoniously among themselves. There must be a reason-motivated understanding through inter-subjective interaction between subjects capable of language and action (URIBE RIVIERA, 1995). In the TCA, reason and truth are not defined a priori, for they are constructed dialectally. Therefore, it is possible to use strategies without being utilitarian, since “the strategist’s communicative action involves interactional processes where all participants in the strategy conciliate their individual plans with a collective plan of action (ZWICK, SILVA and BRITO, 2014, pp. 396).

Souto-Maior’s CSP (2012a, 2012b, 2013) is a step towards enabling communicative strategies in organizations. Figure 1 presents its 9 structuring steps.

Figure 1

Stages of strategic and communicative planning



Source: Adapted from Souto-Maior (2012a, 2012b).

In Step 1, it is important to raise awareness and encourage managers to be committed, so they are able to: structure the planning process that will be developed; negotiate the planning breadth and horizons; decide upon logistic and financial support; define data collection and other actions to feed the process. In Step 2, the organization's history is studied, as well as its legal corpus and the obligations entailed by the legal mandates. In Step 3, the organization's main stakeholders are determined, and their expectations and demands are identified for the organization to respond with actions that will be created during the planning process, promoting effectiveness. During Step 4, the statements of mission, vision and values are formulated. In Step 5, the external environment is analyzed in order to identify threats and opportunities. In Step 6, the internal environment is analyzed. Resources, current strategies and the performance of the organization are studied. In Step 7, the strategic issues are formulated. During Step 8, strategies are defined and the action plan is formulated. Finally, Step 9 refers to the monitoring of planned actions and other post-planning activities. The techniques must be communicative, efficient and effective, according to the phases of the CSP (SOUTO-MAIOR, 2012a, 2012b).

In the context of a university, planning must focus on effectiveness and sustainability in order to avoid the risk of becoming obsolete, illegitimate or short lasting. Effectiveness is related to the analysis of the impact or the results of the action in its context, not analyzing the action itself, but the context in which it occurs (FIGUEIREDO and FIGUEIREDO, 1986; ARRETCHÉ, 2001; BRASIL, 2009). In order to become effective, it is not enough to have shrewd strategies – it is also necessary to talk to stakeholders. Sustainability can be defined as the process through which actors internal and external to the Graduate Program participate in the planning, allowing for its development to be socially sustainable. This definition is based on Sachs (1995, p. 44), who expanded the concept of development, not limiting it to its economic dimension. He proposed a hierarchy in which “the social aspect is most important, the ecological aspect is a binding constraint and the economic aspect has but an instrumental role”.

It is possible to respond to the difficulties pointed out by Araújo (1996) regarding planning in universities. The CSP would be the methodological solution that enables communicative planning, producing effectiveness and sustainability. It can be legitimized in academia and develop roots in universities. Thus, a planning methodology that gives the strategy a communicative rationale becomes coherent in a socially constructed context such as universities – and especially in its graduate programs, which have even more unique aspects. The TCA guides an ethos that is coherent with the mission of socially constructed organizations such as universities, permitting action that “emancipates man in the social space of work” (SERVA, 1997, 133). These potentialities of the TCA suggest the need for more research, so they can be broadly applied. There are several efforts in this direction, such as a recent special edition of the *Cadernos EBAPE.BR Journal* (ORGANIZATIONAL STUDIES, 2014).

The planning of the Graduate Program can also have the attainment of a certain degree of quality as its goal, as defined by the documents of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel – (CAPES, 2013b). This federal government agency encourages planning, so every graduate program that has a planning process is, from the start, better evaluated. However, in addition to presenting a document to CAPES about the planning process, it is worth having an effective and sustainable process of consolidation and development.

The Graduate Program brings together: faculty members that are dedicated to the development of science, technology and innovation; graduate students that are in a constant process of scientific learning; researchers and post-doctorate students associated with the program's mission; administrative personnel and various *stakeholders*. On one hand, there is academic freedom, on the other hand, there is the demand for excellence in training, academic production and social responsibility impact (MARRARA, 2004). Therefore, it is necessary to have a methodology that not only provides strategies for such an academic undertaking, but one which is fundamentally communicative, since Graduate Programs deal with complex issues and multiple actors.

The CSP is a social technology that brings together strategy, organization, processes and instruments that universities can use to develop and strengthen their Graduate Program, but it is necessary to adapt the methodology to regional and institutional specificities. In the next section, we analyze the methodological approach adopted to apply the CSP in a Graduate Program at Unir.

METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

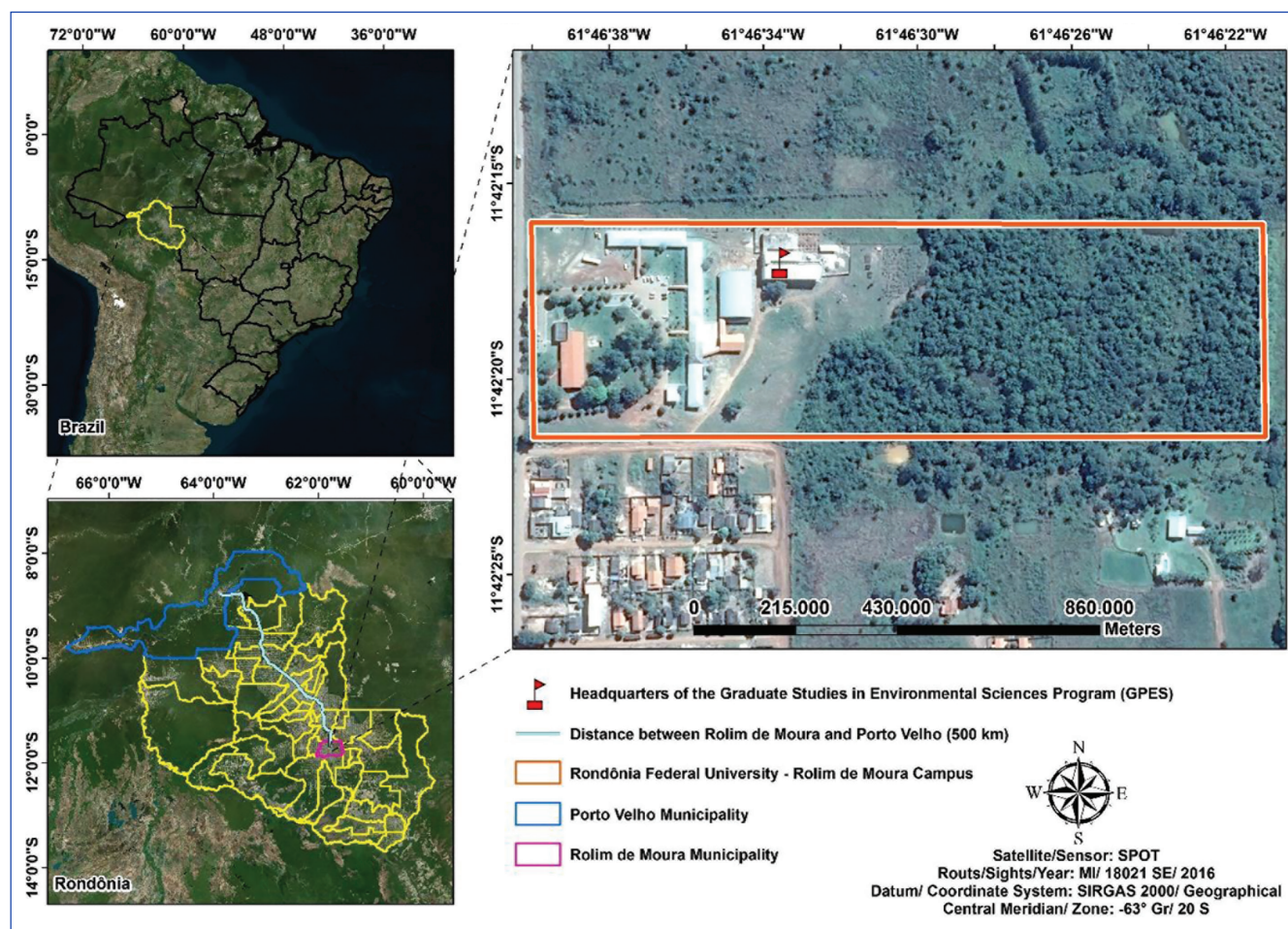
The present study is an applied, qualitative and descriptive research, guided by participatory methods (GIL, 2008; THIOLENT, 2009). We emphasize that this does not mean that the research is a participatory research or an action, because these two types of research have long traditions and their own idiosyncrasies (THIOLENT, 2009)

The data come from diaries written during observation of the planning process, resulting in a memorial (ZACCARELLI and GODOY, 2010). The notes were taken 24 hours after the facts, at most, in order to avoid data loss because of lack of memory. The notes were transcribed and a descriptive analysis was undertaken. There is also data from semi-structured questionnaires, with the goal of gathering feedback from participants. This material was subjected to qualitative content analysis.

The research universe of analysis comprised 21 individuals, all faculty members of the GPES Program. The program is new at Unir, and has a big and diverse group of faculty members. It has a partnership with a public research company and is located in the countryside of Rondônia, operating in the entire state. This graduate program began in 2013 and the faculty was distributed in the cities of Rolim de Moura, Presidente Médici and Porto Velho. Since 2013, the GPES program offers an academic master's program in the area of Amazon Biodiversity and Sustainable Agriculture (UNIR, 2016). Unir is the only public university in Rondônia and has a multi-campus structure. Its headquarters in Porto Velho are 500 km away from the headquarters of the GPES Program in Rolim de Moura. Figure 2 illustrates the defiant geographical aspect.

Figure 2

Rondônia headquarters of the graduate studies in environmental sciences program



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Among the faculty of the GPES, 10 are from Unir, 7 are from Embrapa, the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation, and one professor is from the Federal University of Pelotas. There are three postdoctoral researchers. Of these 21 faculty members, 16 are permanent members of the Graduate Program, 1 is a collaborator, 1 is a permanent doctoral researcher and 2 are doctoral researchers. Lectures and other activities are held all across the state, either at a Unir *campus* or at the Embrapa agencies.

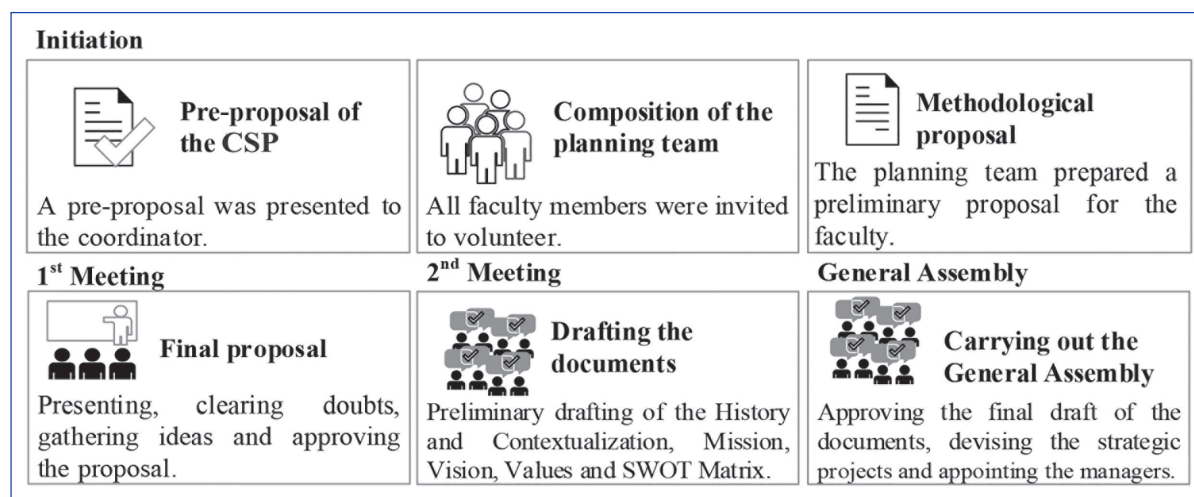
In August 2015, we consulted with the GPES Graduate Program coordinator, who enthusiastically welcomed our proposal and appointed the members of the planning team. We invited the faculty members and communicated to them a summary of the CSP. Out of the four invited, three accepted to participate. In the first meeting, we answered questions and discussed some aspects of the CSP. At that point, the proposal consisted of online activities and only one on-site activity at the end of the process. During the first meeting with the planning team, a faculty member suggested that its members should not be invited, but volunteer their participation. The proposal was accepted by all present, which is more coherent in a communicative process.

We invited all Graduate faculty members to join the planning commission and welcomed five self-appointed members. Once the team was formed, we sent a survey entitled “commitment term” to all the faculty members, in which we summarized the planning process and requested that they confirmed their willingness to participate in an online activity, so we could check the response rate. The first result was discouraging, so we sent another email as a reminder. Nine faculty members answered and it was clear that online communication was not a good channel for our process.

On October 6, 2015, the team met to analyze and define the adaptations in the methodology and decided that the planning would be carried out in on-site meetings (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Adaptation of the communicative and strategic planning-action approach to the graduate studies in environmental sciences program



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The CSP in the GPES was structured in the following manner:

- Presenting a preliminary version of the CSP to the Graduate Program coordinator, with his consent;
- Inviting members for the planning team among the faculty members who volunteered;
- Preparing a preliminary methodological proposal;
- Presenting the methodological proposal to the participants, asking questions and adding suggestions in two meetings (in Rolim de Moura and Porto Velho);

- e) Collecting data to develop the documents with the participants in two meetings (in Rolim de Moura and Porto Velho):
 - ✓ History and contextualization;
 - ✓ Mission, vision and values; and
 - ✓ SWOT Matrix;
- f) Conducting a planning meeting, called “General Assembly” (GAGPES) in the GPES in a single location, in order to approve the documents, formulate strategic project guidelines and define its managers.

In the GPES adaptation, we followed several aspects of Souto-Maior’s original methodology (2012a, 2012b, 2013). We rearranged the steps, however, in on-site blocks and opted to exclude Step 7, entitled strategic questions. We justify this based on Souto Maior’s own work, since he considers the possibility of skipping this step and instead using the SWOT matrix to formulate the strategies directly. We also renamed Step 2: instead of *history* and *mandates*, we used *history* and contextualization, utilizing the same elements. This adaptation was carried out in order to comply with the term adopted by *Capes* (2013b).

We held the first meeting on October 13, in Rolim de Moura, and on October 15, in Porto Velho. The purpose was to present the planning proposal, answer questions and add suggestions. In Rolim de Moura, 7 faculty members participated and 6 were absent. In Porto Velho, 6 faculty members participated and 2 were absent. The initial proposal did not suffer significant changes, the issues were solved and the collaboration was developed, allowing us to continue with the following steps.

The second meeting was held on October 23, in Rolim de Moura, and on October 26, in Porto Velho. The goal was to develop preliminary versions of the following documents: *history* and *contextualization*; *mission, vision* and *values*; and the *SWOT matrix*. In Rolim de Moura, nine faculty members participated and four were absent. In Porto Velho, six faculty members participated and two were absent. In Rolim de Moura, we initially presented the objectives of the meeting and the activities to be carried out. The coordinator of the PGCA conducted an activity called *historical memory*, encouraging everyone to share their experiences. Notes were taken about these experiences in order to build the *history* and *contextualization* document. In turn, a member of the team organized the mission, vision and values document. He presented his own version, and we noted that the vision and mission elements were not clearly organized, and everyone present agreed that it would be best to improve the document in the following meeting. The SWOT matrix was facilitated by two other participants, using the technique of brainstorming, by generating ideas and undertaken a discussion. In Porto Velho, we used the same procedures and were able to fulfill all the goals of the meeting. For the *mission, vision* and *values* document, we used a technique called *facilitated workshop*, with ideas coming up in the group discussion. We also took the opportunity to check with the Porto Velho faculty members what would be the best date to set up the GAGPES.

In the November 16 meeting, in Rolim de Moura, the declarations of *mission, vision* and *values* were finalized. Six faculty members were present and seven were absent. We applied the technique called *facilitated workshop* like the just as in Porto Velho. We were careful not to present the texts from Porto Velho to avoid influencing the faculty from Rolim de Moura, since both texts would be (re) negotiated in the GAGPES. We gave some considerations regarding the approaching GAGPES, and discussed the dates more suitable for the members of the faculty coming from other cities, deciding on the 10th and 11th of December, at Rolim de Moura.

Still on November 16th, we invited the entire faculty to the GAGPES. Twenty out of the twenty-one faculty members could be present, since they lived in Rondônia. We solicited through e-mail a confirmation of presence and received an answer form only nine members: four confirming the presence, two informing their absence and three unsure. However, we maintained the date, with the concurrence of the coordinator of the GPES, otherwise, there a new date would only be available in March.

The planning team prepared the General Assembly using the *facilitated workshop* in order to (re) define and approve the documents; *focal groups*, *brainstorms*, *plenary* and *voting* to develop strategies. However, the number of faculty members was lower than expected, precluding the usage of the technique prepared, which were readjusted.

The GPES took place in Rolim de Moura with eight faculty members present on the first day and ten on the second. We started at 2:30 pm, with a welcoming conversation and the validation of the group dynamics, delivered by the coordinator of the GPES. He continued by explaining the *history* and the *contextualization*, using a multimedia projector. The text was previously made available, through e-mail and on paper, and it was discussed and approved without major changes. At 3:15 pm began the strategy development works, with explanations on what are strategic projects, how to build them through

a SWOT matrix and answering to the document on the field of environmental sciences, regarding the evaluation criteria of academic programs (CAPES, 2013a, p. 32-41). The strategies were developed through the *nominal group technique*; in which ideas are individually written using an adhesive note and then attached to the wall, grouped inside the *program proposal* item – the first of the five items to be developed. Once this stage of the process was finished, the coordinator stimulated the discussion, initially grouping the ideas into clusters. During the discussion, the proposals were qualified and validated by the group, and broadsheets were written, giving structure to the indications of strategic projects with title, goals and actions. The broadsheets were attached to the wall.

The work was finalized at 5:17 pm. On the following day, the work began at 8:20 am with the application for the same work dynamic for the items *faculty*, *student body*, *academic production* and *social inclusion*, in this presented order. At the end, the coordinator asked those present to appoint them to manage, each person, a project and after the event appoint their staffs to readjust and finalize the projects. Using markers, each member wrote their name on one broadsheet. The managers would be formally nominated at a later moment. The coordinator made acknowledgements and finished the work at 12:45 pm.

On December 16, we prepared the Plan for Consolidation and Development (PCD) for the years 2015 and 2016 for the Graduate Program and handed in a preliminary draft to the program coordinator. He then reviewed it and, on March 3rd, 2016, he forwarded the PCD to the faculty members for yet more revisions, along with the formal appointments for the managers responsible for each project. On April 22, the planning team prepared the final evaluation report and finalized the process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS OF STRATEGIC AND COMMUNICATIVE POTENTIALS

The PEC was successful in the GPES, resulting in a substantial strategic plan that is in line with the Graduate Program. Four faculty members participated in all activities; four other members took part in three activities, eight participated in two activities, 4 members participated in 1 activity and one professor, who lives in another state, did not participate. It would have been ideal to have had everyone in order to make the process even more legitimate, since planning is a negotiated agreement (ARAÚJO, 1996), but the participation was satisfactory enough considering the context of the GPES in its first planning experience. The *mission*, *vision* and *values* are shown in Box 1.

Box 1

GPES mission, vision and values

Mission	Contribute to the advancement of Science, technology and innovation in environmental sciences, promoting sustainable development in the Amazon.
Vision	Being recognized as a center for excellence in science, technology and innovation in environmental sciences for the Amazon.
Values	Ethics and bioethics; socio-economic-environmental responsibility; synergy and commitment; excellence and pioneering; inter-institutional cooperation; sustainable techniques and Technologies for the Amazon.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

In order to prepare the *mission*, the *vision* and the *values*, we sought to use not only techniques that stimulate group creativity, but also – and mainly – a communicative process that validated and legitimated the document, as defended by Souto-Maior (2012a, 2012b, 2013). The text of the mission attempted to summarize the focal and research areas that interest the GPES, clearly specifying, “science, technology, and innovation”, but also environmental sciences, because it is in the interest of the Graduate Program to always attempt to gain better adhesion to the field. And, naturally, “sustainable development” could not be absent from these documents. The *vision* was in line with the *mission* and made clear what the Graduate Program aspires to be and what it is guided by. The context of the GPES, its field, the surrounding geography, the Amazon biome and the partnership between Unir and Embrapa are very clearly shown in the *values*. It is crucial to have these documents, and the *SWOT matrix*, well defined, in order to give support to the development of strategies.

Box 2

Indications for the GPES strategic projects

Title	Proposal
Education	Reorganizing the disciplinary matrix, with indications for the inclusion of disciplines and qualifying examination.
Network	Promoting actuation in network with other institutions.
Structure	Strengthening the infrastructure and raising the visibility of the GPES.
Leveling	Leveling faculty qualification by increasing adhesion to the field.
Faculty adjustment	Reorganizing the faculty staff to adjust to the norms form <i>Capes</i> .
Teacher-student Interaction	Broadening the interaction between faculty, students and graduates.
Promotion & marketing of the GPES	Promoting the GPES in local media and with local community.
Scholarships	Improving the management of scholarships.
Interlocation	Following the implementation of the Committee for Ethical Conduct in the Use of Animals and the Center for Technological Innovation.
Norms for the examinations board and orientations	Improving adherence to the field by promoting interdisciplinarity in the examinations boards and the orientations.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The development of strategies was enhanced based on the field document (CAPES, 2013a), which made it possible to respond to some demands indicates by this important stakeholder of the Graduate Program. Primordial, since Capes evaluates and fosters the Graduate Program and their evaluation also indicates performance and recognition. The faculty members connected to *Embrapa* may also be considered stakeholders. Their participation improved institutional relations between Unir and Embrapa, explicitly demonstrating the importance of the company for the Graduate Program. Counting on stakeholders is of utmost importance to make the planning communicative, as highlighted by Souto-Maior (2012a, 2012b, 2013).

The GPES, in its first planning experience, did not contemplate a large number of stakeholders, however, more of them should be incrementally integrated in the following years. The text regarding the history and contextualization is not detailed in this research because it is very extensive. The document describes the context of the GPES, defining the basic aspects of its profile, historical aspects of its creation and current situation in terms of constitution and academic production. The communicative shape in which this document was produced granted greater legitimacy to its text (ARAÚJO, 1996; SOUTO-MAIOR, 2012a). Everything resulted in a substantial document with a historic-critical text, indicating tendencies and detailed aspects of the situation of the Graduate Program. Furthermore, the field document served as a reference in order to increase adherence. (CAPES, 2013a).

There was an attempt to use communicative techniques that stimulated the creativity of the group, providing legitimacy to the strategic plan, something essential in the CSP, especially in the context of the University (SOUTO-MAIOR, 2012a, 2012b, 2013; ARAÚJO, 1996). The work was conducted in a communicative way, together with the entire team, enabling the transference of technologies. The goal was for the planning to be perceived as something built by the faculty in order to be more consistent with the CAT, providing a space where these actors can build their rationale and their truth, which also fosters professional emancipation (SERVA, 1997; HABERMAS, 2012). Broadly speaking, the intention was to develop an orientation for an understanding in the scope of the GPES, as opposed to only inducing a process for strategy development (URIBE RIVIERA, 1995). Hence, the development of strategies happened more naturally, because a conducive environment was creates; the actors were able to have a communicative space where their strategies converged in harmony, as it is possible to see in the project indications developed (ZWICK, SILVA and BRITO, 2014).

All of this is possible because the CSP is flexible, adapting to the context and being (re) created in each case. Not without a reason, the author of the method recommends being especially careful with the first stage, when the guidelines are defined (SOUTOR MAIOR, 2012a, 2012b, 2013).

For an application in other Graduate Programs, we suggest fostering this communicative space and promoting the transference of technologies. The conduction of the process by the planning team, avoiding interfering in the dynamic of the program, is crucial to prevent from being manipulative. Moreover, the planning team should not be permanent; there should be a constant rotation, always minding the use of communicative techniques.

The planning team was structured to have self-appointed members, limited to a small number of components. However, it was not possible to include stakeholders in the team; something that Souto-Maior (2012a, 2012b, 2013) recommends. The planning team adopted a posture of openness and dialogue. Among the ideas suggested by the members, which were discussed and implemented, we reinforce the proposal to allow for the reformulation of the team by self-appointments and also the reconfiguration of the activities into on-site blocks. It is important to maintain the practice of self-appointment for future groups. We also recommend including a stakeholder member, in addition to promoting decentralized work, stimulating creative ideas and promoting communicative spaces.

At the beginning of the work, it seemed clear that would be best for the activities to be prevalently held on-line. The low rate of response to the on-line survey, however, proved otherwise; in a context of many campuses and with Amazon-like distances, it seemed unreasonable to propose a great number of on-site activities, therefore, the solution was to hold a single great encounter at the end – the GAGPES – and two other local meetings in the centers of Rolim Moura and Porto Velho. We suggest maintaining this format, which enabled the participation and the CSP itself. We highlight the participation of the coordinator of the Graduate Program as a legitimate conductor of the process. The techniques we provided in this episode was a counseling, but the planning process must be led by the coordinator, who should be aware of the process in order to lead it and stimulate the faculty to do the planning. For that matter, we see the CSP as a social technology available to the Graduate Program coordinators to facilitate the consolidation of their sectors. The CSP, because of its guidelines in Habermas' TCA (2012), spouses well the university context (ARAÚJO, 1996), granted it presented not only a planning technique (CAVALCANTE and FERRARO JÚNIOR, 2002) but, in fact, a way of "channeling energy into converging actions" (MAGALHÃES, PAES-DE-SOUZA, SIENA et al., 2016, p. 41) to be conducted by the coordinator who, in turn, can promote a strategic discussion with the team. It is also essential that the coordinator remains constantly aware of the monitoring, evaluation and management of projects taking place under the faculty that leads those processes.

Feedback form the participant members

We sent to the participant members a semi-structured form, asking them to answer about the planning: 1) what was positive; 2) what was negative; and 3) suggestions. There were twelve answers and the data were submitted to a content analysis in three themes: 1) positive aspects of the planning; 2) usefulness of the planning for the program; 3) suggestions. The categories were thus subdivided. Each category is illustrated with a quote from a member.

Positive aspects of the planning

Mentioned 13 times, divided into 5 subcategories.

Seven entries affirmed that: a) the entire planning was positive:

I consider the entire planning action positive!

Three entries stated that: b) the integration/interaction among the faculty was positive:

The opportunity [was profitable] to discuss planning and the interaction with the closer colleagues "grounds" us.

Three entries mention, each, an aspect of the planning

That: c) the on-site approach was positive:

[...] The strategy of holding meetings was most suitable.

That: d) the creation of the strategic projects was positive:

The creation of the “strategic projects” that guide the program (should always take place) [was positive].

And that: e) the SWOT matrix technique was positive:

The interactivity to develop the SWOT matrix inside the groups (institutions) [was positive].

We, therefore, deduce, taking the points of view of the participant members, that the planning process was successful, allowing the opportunity to structure a moment for bringing together all those actors with the purpose of articulating joint projects, as supposed by the CSP, attempting to develop a process guided by the TCA (HABERMAS, 2012; SOUTO-MAIOR, 2012a, 2012b, 2013; ZWICK, SILVA and BRITO, 2014).

Usefulness of the planning for the program

Mentioned 10 times, divided into 2 subcategories.

Six entries stated that: a) the planning met a strategic demand of the program:

[The planning allowed to] collectively reflect on the activities of the program, its strengths and weaknesses, and attempt to suggest guidelines to overcome the problems.

And four entries affirmed that: b) the planning enabled dialogue and a shared understanding of the situation:

[The planning enabled] an open encounter [...].

The planning process made the actors dialogue, facilitating a shared understanding of the situation and the creation of communicative strategies for the GPES. Those are the aspirations of the CSP and they were clearly successful, perfectly suiting planning inside the context of the university (ARAÚJO, 1996; SOUTO-MAIOR, 2012a, 2012b, 2013).

Suggestions

There were 23 entries qualified as suggestions, divided into 7 subcategories.

With 8 mentions: a) greater participation:

Greater participation from all involved in the program [would be good].

With 7 mentions: b) improving the schedule:

I believe that the period was not the best because it coincided with other academic events

With 3 mentions: c) broader monitoring:

I suggest follow up meetings.

With 2 mentions: d) continuation:

[I suggest] that the meetings should take place at least once a year, following up on the results of the previous discussions.

Other 3 mentions give one different suggestion each:

e) Redefining goals and deadlines:

[It'd be best] to work with shorter term goals and shorter deadlines and more frequent meetings

f) More focus on pedagogical processes:

[...] On the next stage, a vision should be worked on: the combination of planning with the dynamics with the students.

g) Immediately disclosing the resolutions reached in the assembly:

There was a lack of feedback [or reporting] of the document consolidated in December after the meeting.

The suggestions given are very useful for future planning processes, because they allow the improvement of methodology in the GPES. We see in these suggestions an appropriation of the methodology and a (re) construction of the CSP in the GPES, making it legitimate and long lasting within the context, as discussed by Araújo (1996).

The entire process of the CSP in the GPES was communicative: the development of the proposal by the planning team itself, its discussion and adjustment with the members, in the group techniques and in the management, which was decentralized with the faculty. The planning merged people, institutions and ideas into a common project, also promoting a harmonic climate among the participants. Therefore, the work was coherent with the CAT, with original proposition of the CSP and with the context of the university (ARAÚJO, 1996; HABERMAS, 2012; SOUTO-MAIOR, 2012a, 2012b, 2013).

Methodological Proposition

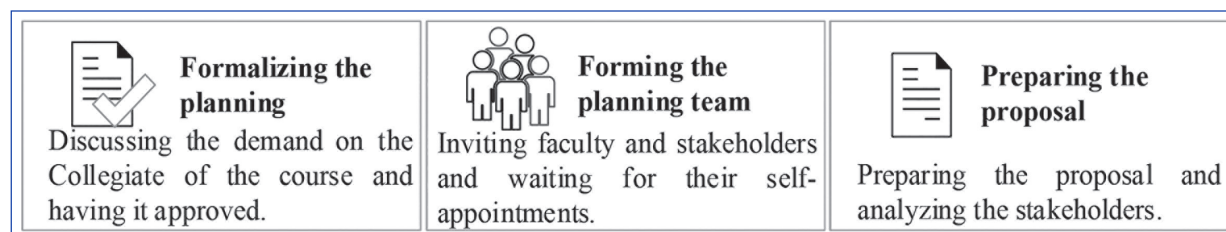
We schematized the methodological proposition for the Graduate Programs at Unir based on the qualitative generalization method, which opens possibilities for a proposition to be applied to other contexts, contemplating the due adaptations (GODOY, 2005; ALVES-MAZZOTTI, 2006; GÜNTHER, 2006). The script has 5 blocks and in each one we suggest a few basic steps.

Beginning the Work (Figure 4)

Beforehand, the planning needs some basic definitions and should be approved, because it will impact the entire Graduate Program, therefore, the discussion on the course collegiate is important. A preliminary analysis of the stakeholders is necessary to identify those who can be invited to the planning team, besides internal members.

Figure 4

Beginning the work



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

In order to form the planning team, it is possible to send an invitation to internal members and stakeholders, asking them to manifest interest within a certain period of time. The team must have an adequate number of members: 5 is an excellent number. Once the team is formed, it should prepare a viable planning proposal, adjusting the stages and sub-stages of the CSP into respective activities and taking into consideration the context of the Graduate Program. Inside the team, a broader analysis of the stakeholders should be performed, considering the initial list discussed in the Collegiate of the course and seeking other relevant ones that could be invited to participate. The amount of participants, both internal and stakeholders should be defined by the team according to the number deemed viable for a communicative process to take place. We suggest the following composition of participants:

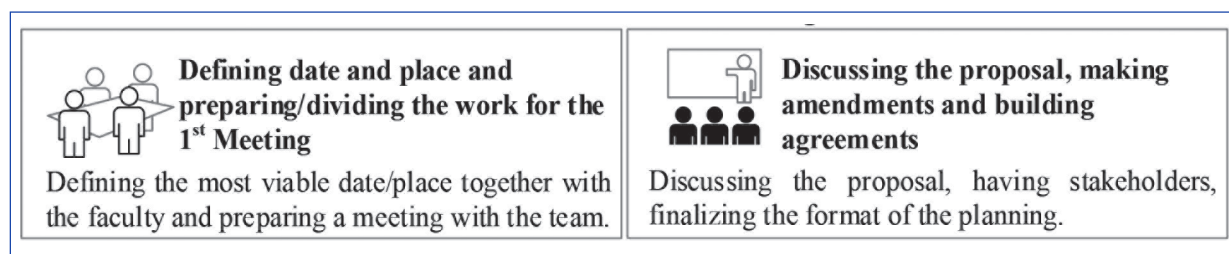
- a) At least half of the Professors of the Graduate Program;
- b) One representative of the respective Dean's Office;
- c) One or more students;
- d) One administrative technician;
- e) A guest from the local community;
- f) Other guests from institutions relevant to the Graduate Program.

Processes for the 1st meeting (Figure 5)

The agenda of the first meeting is, mainly, presenting and raising awareness about planning. Agreements and consensus are built and amendments and corrections to the proposition prepared by the planning team are made. To allow greater participation and discussion it is possible to hold the meeting in different dates and places, according to the schedules of the participants. The result will be a validated proposal with sufficient adhesion, making the planning viable and legitimate, only then making it possible to in fact begin.

Figure 5

Processes for the 1st Meeting



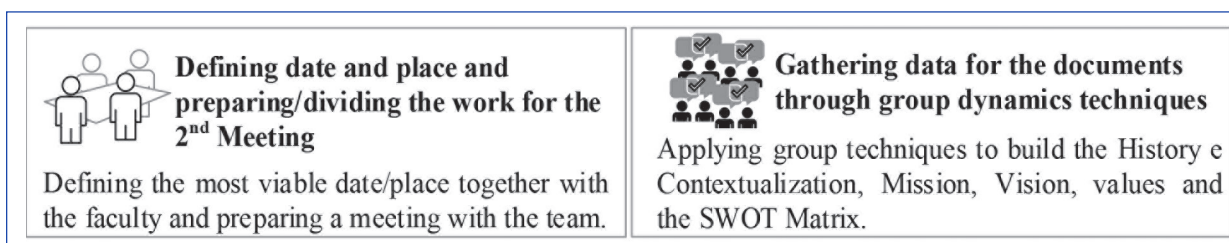
Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Processes for the 2nd meeting (Figure 6)

In the second meeting, the preliminary draft of the history and contextualization, mission, vision, values and SWOT matrix will be written. It is important to explain to the participants the characteristics of each document of the planning. For building the history and the contextualization, it is possible to apply a technique called historic memory, seeking to share experiences in the program. A member of the team writes the division while another one acts as a facilitator. The resulting text will need a specialized writer, also capable of performing documental searches to enrich it. For writing the mission, vision and values, it is possible to use a technique called facilitated workshop, through which a member facilitates the development of ideas in a dialogic process with the group, while another member takes notes and projects the texts that emerge. For the SWOT matrix, the usual technique is called brainstorming: a member facilitates the generation of ideas and another one writes and projects the items that will be subsequently discussed. The resulting documents are: history and contextualization, mission, vision, values and SWOT. If two or more sessions are held with different groups, there will be several versions that should be (re) negotiated at the planning assembly – except for the SWOT matrix, which would have its several versions blended together.

Figure 6

Processes for the 2nd meeting



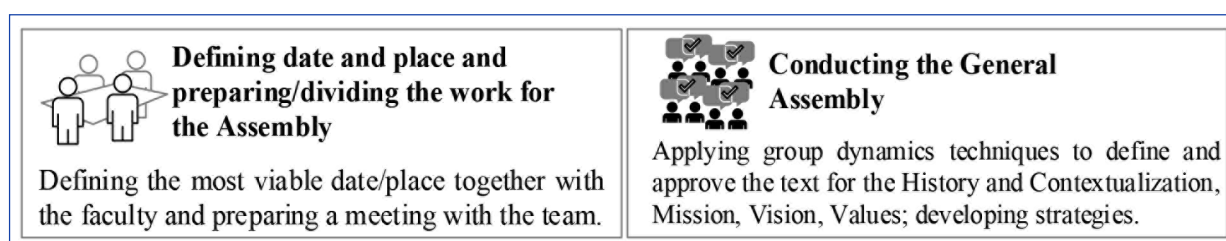
Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Processes for the General Assembly (Figure 7)

The General Assembly should take place in a single location and there the previous documents should be finalized, indications of strategic projects should be developed and responsibilities assigned. The participation of all involved is necessary, thereby raising the commitment of the group and the possibility of realization of the strategic plan. For the discussion and approval of the documents, the technique called facilitated workshop may be used, allowing the broad (re) negotiation of the texts, facilitated by a member who refers the final texts. As for the development of strategies the on-site group technique is suitable: the strategies are individually generated through the field document and the SWOT matrix, subsequently grouped into kinship clusters by the facilitator for the discussion of the group, where they should be defined and approved. The strategies are distributed through indications of strategic projects, which so far might have basic data, such as: title, goal, activities, and deadlines. Those responsible may be defined and they may deliver their finalized projects within a reasonable amount of time, also forming their respective work crew.

Figure 7

Processes for the general assembly



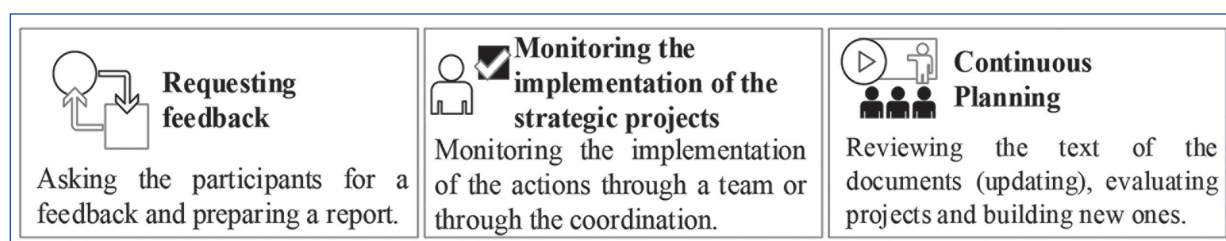
Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Finalizing the work (Figure 8)

This is the most dynamic stage of the process, considering that the planning at the General Assembly is not final, because it is continuous. It is necessary to ask the participants for feedback in order to improve the methodology, accumulating experiences. After the feedback, the planning team prepares the evaluation report on the work performed. A preliminary draft of the strategic plan should also be delivered to the coordination and to the participant members for reviewing. The monitoring of the plan might happen in many different ways, with follow up seminars, naming a monitoring team or only through the coordination of the Graduate Program. It is important to correct diversions and to avoid delays, to make sure not to arrive at the next planning process without any actions taken. The work begins again in the following year, being constantly revised and continuously updating the strategies of the Graduate Program in the face of its complex, dynamic and ever changing context.

Figure 8

Finalizing the work



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

FINAL REMARKS

The present article describes the experience of the GPES with the CSP, ascertaining its adequacy to the demands of this Graduate Program, despite having complex and challenging characteristics, especially in terms of geography, institutional composition and strategic demands. The study also made viable the offer of a methodological proposition consistent with the other Graduate Programs at Unir.

The effectiveness was observed in the development of basis for the Graduate Program to be able to dialog with its context; produce actions of scientific and social impact; become relevant in its geographical area of influence and in the scientific field of action. The CSP figured as a social technology suitable for producing communicative strategies for the Graduate Program at Unir, however, in other Higher Education Institutions, it might present different results.

The limitations of this study are: the lack of application to other Graduate Programs and the short period of time analyzed – little less than a year. Therefore, the need for new studies is appointed, especially multi-case studies, seeking to improve the methodology, and longitudinal studies, to asses the fulfillment and the efficiency of the strategies developed through the CSP through the use of those approaches.

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