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Article

Policies for the evaluation of graduate education in Brazil: elements to understand the formation of the National System of Graduate Education

As políticas de avaliação da pós-graduação no Brasil: elementos para compreender a formação do Sistema Nacional de Pós-Graduação

Políticas de evaluación de postgrado en Brasil: elementos para comprender la formación del Sistema Nacional de Pós-Graduação

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ABSTRACT

In 2025, the main regulatory framework for Brazilian graduate education will complete 60 years. The policies implemented over the decades gave rise to a robust National Graduate Education System, considered one of the most complex and sophisticated in the world. This article presents the results of a study carried out between July 2021 and November 2022, whose purpose was to understand the formation, characteristics, and specificities of the Brazilian evaluation system. Research showed that the Brazilian model is unique in international terms. It is a top-down, centripetal, centralized system, aimed at promoting greater internal homogenization and less differentiation. Assessment is predominantly external, normative, regulatory and performance-based. The results are used to establish comparisons between courses and, in addition, to define funding.

Keywords: Higher Education. Graduate Education. Evaluation Policies. SNPG.

RESUMO

Em 2025, o principal marco normativo da pós-graduação brasileira completará 60 anos. As políticas implementadas ao longo das décadas deram origem a um robusto Sistema Nacional de Pós-Graduação, considerado um dos mais complexos e sofisticados do mundo. O presente artigo apresenta os resultados de um estudo desenvolvido entre julho de 2021 e novembro de 2022, cujo propósito foi compreender a formação, as características e as especificidades do sistema brasileiro de avaliação da pós-graduação. A pesquisa mostrou que o modelo brasileiro é único em termos internacionais. Trata-se de um sistema *top-down,* centrípeto, centralizado e orientado a promover maior homogeneização interna e menor diferenciação. A avaliação é predominantemente externa, normativa, regulatória e baseada no desempenho. Os resultados são utilizados para estabelecer comparações entre os cursos e, além disso, definir o financiamento.

Palavras-chave: Educação Superior. Pós-Graduação. Políticas de Avaliação. SNPG.

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RESUMEN

En 2025, el principal marco regulatorio de los estudios de posgrado brasileños cumplirá 60 años. Las políticas implementadas a lo largo de las décadas dieron origen a un robusto Sistema Nacional de Posgrado, considerado uno de los más complejos y sofisticados del mundo. Este artículo presenta los resultados de un estudio realizado entre julio de 2021 y noviembre de 2022, cuyo objetivo fue comprender la formación, características y especificidades del sistema de evaluación brasileño. La investigación mostró que el modelo brasileño es único en términos internacionales. Es un sistema verticalista, centrípeto y centralizado que busca promover una mayor homogeneización interna y una menor diferenciación. La evaluación es predominantemente externa, normativa, reglamentaria y basada en el desempeño. Los resultados se utilizan para establecer comparaciones entre cursos y, además, para definir la financiación.

Palabras clave: Educación Superior. Postgrado. Políticas de Evaluación. SNPG.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, it has been repeatedly claimed that Brazilian postgraduation (PG) has reached high standards of academic quality, organization, and transparency (Saviani, 2000; 2003; Balbachevsky, 2005; Verhine and Dantas, 2009; CAPES, 2018; 2020; Martins, 2018; Saviani, 2020). The results achieved over the decades provide a solid evidence base to support that the PG has consolidated itself as "[...] the most successful dimension of the country's educational system" (Martins, 2018, p. 24) and one of the most robust and sophisticated evaluation systems in the world. The PG has been an important tool for the modernization of higher education and the institutionalization of research within institutions. Master's and Ph.D. programs are responsible for approximately 95% of Brazil's scientific production (Schwartzman, 1989; Balbachevsky, 2005; Martins, 2018; Brasil, 2020). The Brazilian science, technology, and innovation system is structured around graduate studies. The international scientific community has also recognized the quality of graduate studies and research developed in the country. Brazil has been ranked between 13th and 15th in the world in terms of scientific production (CAPES, 2020).

The regulatory framework and policies implemented have resulted in a robust National Postgraduate System (SNPG). In August 2021, the country had 7.054 postgraduate courses (4.553 master's degrees and 2.501 doctoral degrees), distributed among 4.632 postgraduate programs (CAPES, 2021a). In addition to its size, the SNPG stands out for its characteristics and specificities. It is a sui generis model internationally in terms of organization, evaluation, and funding. Continuous improvements have consolidated a top-down, centripetal, centralized, comparative, performance-based evaluation system that aims to promote greater internal homogenization and less differentiation. Although inspired by the North American academic tradition, the SNPG has taken on a distinctive form. The institutional design of the Brazilian system bears little resemblance to the model that once inspired it (Verhine, 2008).

In 2021, CAPES will celebrate its 70th anniversary, and in 2025 the main regulatory framework for the Brazilian PG (Opinion 977/CFE/65 [Brasil, 1965a]) will be 60 years old. These dates are good reasons to develop studies — with broader time frames — on the evolution and characteristics of the Brazilian evaluation system. Like all national evaluation systems, the Brazilian model must be

understood in terms of the reasons and contexts that gave rise to it. Its characteristics and specificities are the result of various historical, political, and cultural factors, especially the country's institutional culture and conceptions of higher education, university autonomy, academic quality, and science and technology governance. In this sense, historicity emerges as a fundamental analytical dimension. Historical analysis is particularly relevant in that it allows us to engage in a kind of hermeneutics of suspicion. Understanding the meanings and reasons that shaped the system also encourages us to question the relevance and appropriateness of the choices made over the decades. This sort of analysis is an exercise of reflecting on the experience built up.

This set of factors prompted this study, which took place between July 2021 and November 2022. The central focus of the analysis is the regulatory framework for higher education and the assessment policies implemented since the publication of the Francisco Campos' Decrees in 1931. Through historical and documentary analysis, we believe it is possible to understand the formation and main characteristics of the Brazilian assessment model. As one of the central pillars of the SNPG, the evaluation system, as Verhine and Dantas (2009, p. 296) point out, has contributed decisively to "[...] the outstanding quality of Brazilian postgraduate education". Against this background, the research sought to answer two central questions: (i) how have regulatory frameworks and evaluation policies contributed to shaping the SNPG?; and (ii) what are the main characteristics and specificities of the Brazilian PG evaluation system?

The results presented here stem from a postdoctoral research carried out at the Center for Science and Technology Studies at the University of Leiden, Netherlands. The study analyzed the characteristics and specificities of two very different systems (Brazil and the Netherlands) for the evaluation of postgraduate studies and research. The role of comparative studies is undeniable. By encouraging the analysis of differences, they also promote the understanding of specificities. Just as important as understanding what distinguishes us is understanding what characterizes us. Knowledge, in this case, is self-knowledge.

Given the length and complexity of the previous study, this article presents only a part of the results. Rather than analyzing the differences between the models studied, this text will prioritize the analysis of the specificities of the Brazilian system. Like all national evaluation systems, the Brazilian model was designed and improved based on the characteristics and needs of the country. By analyzing the evaluation policies for higher education, it is possible to understand the central aspects of the formation and organization of Brazilian higher education and the SNPG.

THE ORIGINS OF BRAZILIAN POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION

The emergence of PG in Brazil is often associated with the 977/65/CFE Opinion (Brasil, 1965a), which was approved by the Federal Education Council in 1965. Despite its enormous importance, the Sucupira Opinion — as it is known — did not introduce the PG in the country. Although it is not possible to establish a chronology, the first courses were created in the context of the opening of the first Brazilian universities, especially the University of Rio de Janeiro (in 1920, now UFRJ), the University of Minas Gerais (in 1927, now UFMG), the University of São Paulo (USP, in 1934) and the University of the Federal District (in 1937, abolished in 1939 and incorporated into the University of Brazil, now UFRJ). In 1965, when the Sucupira Opinion was approved, there were about 38 courses in the country, of which 27 were master's degrees and 11 were doctoral degrees (Balbachevsky, 2005; CAPES, 2020; 2021b). The origin of graduate studies is closely connected with the emergence of the institution "university". The relationship is so close that, after decades, the university segment continues to offer the vast majority of postgraduate programs (PPG). In 2019, the segment offered approximately 86.4% of PPGs (CAPES, 2021b).

The late nature of the Brazilian university has affected the implementation of graduate studies, the institutionalization of research and the training of researchers in the country. As Luiz Antônio Cunha (2007) points out, the Brazilian university was born out of time. Until the first decades of the 20th century, higher education was limited to colleges, most of which were created after the arrival of the royal family in Brazil (Chacon, 1974; Teixeira, 1989; Martins, 2009). Courses were established in a few cities and regions with the aim of training professionals in specific fields, especially agronomy, law, nursing, pharmacy, philosophy, and medicine.

Research was also limited to a few areas and institutions, such as the Emilio Goeldi Paraense Museum (founded in 1866), the Agronomical Institute of Campinas (founded in 1887), the Vacinogênico Institute of São Paulo (further incorporated by the the Butantã Institute, founded in 1892), and the Federal Serum Therapy Institute (today, the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation — Fiocruz, founded in 1900) (Schwartzman, 1989; Martins, 2018). The survival of these institutions and the continuity of their research depended on financial support from the State. Until the 1930s, scientific research remained a non-university activity, strongly linked to the production of practical solutions, especially in the fields of agriculture, biodiversity, the treatment of tropical diseases and the production of vaccines (Schwartzman, 1989; Sampaio, 1991; 2000; Martins, 2018).

The creation of the first universities in the 1920s introduced new issues to the Brazilian educational agenda and required significant changes in the regulatory framework for higher education. In the early 1930s, more precisely in April 1931, the then Minister of Education and Public Health, Francisco Campos, issued three decrees regulating the organization of higher education (Federal Decrees n. 19.850/31 [Brasil, 1931a], n. 19.851/31 [Brasil, 1931b] and n. 19.852/31 [Brasil, 1931c]). Research and higher education were addressed in several articles of the Federal Decree n. 19.851/31, which established the first Statute of Brazilian Universities. Article 1 of said decree established that "*the purpose of university teaching is* [...] *to stimulate scientific research in all fields of human knowledge* [...]" (Brasil, 1931b, emphasis added).

By including research as a core activity, this article contributed to the progressive institutionalization of scientific research in academia. The second pillar of the modern university was finally incorporated into Brazilian educational legislation and became a fundamental dimension of university life. From then on, the nascent Brazilian university had to prioritize the development of scientific research and critical thinking in the most diverse fields of knowledge. The changes introduced by the Federal Decree n. 19.851/31 (Brasil, 1931b) responded to some demands made by important scientific associations and educational institutions, especially the Brazilian Society of Science (founded in 1916), the Brazilian Educational Association (founded in 1924), and the New School Movement (from 1930). As Sampaio (1991, p. 8) points out, these organizations "[...] put on the agenda a project for a complete overhaul of the Brazilian educational system, from the primary level — the Escola Nova project — to the higher level, with the Brazilian University project, which would be its crowning achievement."

The decrees introduced important normative milestones, which is why Newton Sucupira stated in 1980 that "[...] Francisco Campos can be considered the pioneer of stricto sensu postgraduate studies" in Brazil (Sucupira, 1980, p. 5). The PG was addressed in Title X of the Statute of Brazilian Universities. According to Article 90, which refers to "university diplomas and dignities," universities could grant doctoral degrees to candidates who had defended their dissertations. According to paragraphs 1 and 2 of this article, "*the thesis [...] must constitute a publication of real value on a subject of a technical or purely scientific nature*" (Brasil, 1931b, § 1, Art. 90, emphasis added) and must be defended before "*[...] an examination committee whose members must have specialized knowledge in the subject*" (Brasil, 1931b, § 2, Art. 90, emphasis added).

It should be noted, however, that the first Statute of Brazilian Universities did not use the word "postgraduate". It referred to PG through the term "doctoral course" (Sucupira, 1980). According to Newton Sucupira (Sucupira, 1980), the first document that used the term "postgraduate studies" was Federal Decree n. 21.321/46 (Brasil, 1946b), issued in 1946 to establish the Statute of the University of Brazil (now UFRJ). The definitive incorporation of the term "postgraduate" into Brazilian educational legislation came later, in 1961, with the approval of the country's first Law of Guidelines and Bases of Brazilian Education (LDBEN). A similar observation should be made regarding the master's degree. The term was also not mentioned in Federal Decree n. 19.851/31. The academic degree "Master", although it already existed in some institutions, was regulated decades later, in 1965, by the Sucupira Opinion.

Furthermore, the Decree from 1931 did not create the first doctoral programs in the country. The practice of granting doctoral degrees already existed in Brazilian higher education institutions. In regulating "doctoral courses," the decree incorporated the European concept of postgraduate studies. According to the French academic tradition of the time, institutions, and professors — appointed from the ranks of full professors — had considerable autonomy and freedom to define the training paths of doctoral candidates (Sucupira, 1980). The organization of curricula was generally left to the discretion of the professorial community. Postgraduate training provided for only one level of training (the Ph.D.), the academic degree which was awarded to candidates who passed the defense of their dissertation.

Doctoral degrees in those days also did not require taking courses or attending seminars. Professors taught master classes, and students generally developed their dissertations outside the university. It was common for the candidate to develop the thesis alone, under the guidance of a professor in the field to which the work related. Given the European influence, the supervisor was limited to the role of examiner and chairman of the defense committee (Saviani, 2003). Degrees were awarded upon presentation of the final work, usually in the form of a thesis. A doctorate was not a prerogative for a teaching career, so this academic degree aroused little interest. The decrees of Francisco Campos also did not establish the doctorate as a requirement for access to higher education. As Sucupira (1980, p. 04) points out, "[...] what lacked for Francisco Campos was a structure for teaching careers in which the doctoral degree played a privileged role in entering into the career or advancing to its higher levels [...] Strictly speaking, one could not speak of a teaching career in the legislation of Francisco Campos". The first national legislation that established academic qualifications as a criterion for entry and advancement in the higher education career was Federal Law n. 5.540/68, approved in 1968 (Brasil, 1968; Martins, 2018).

Finally, it should be noted that the decrees did not establish external bodies for the recognition and periodic evaluation of courses. Universities continued to have the autonomy to create and regulate their courses. Doctoral programs operated autonomously and independently because of internal regulations and rules established by the professors in charge. Based on internal regulations, several institutions created their doctoral programs. The University of Rio de Janeiro (now UFRJ), for example, created its first doctoral programs after the approval of Federal Decree n. 19.852/31 (Brasil, 1931c) (which reorganized the university). A similar procedure was followed by the University of São Paulo in 1934. Based on the decree that created it (São Paulo's State Decree n. 6283/34 [São Paulo, 1934]), the then Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences, and Letters (FFCL) created its first programs, especially the Ph.D. in Philosophy, which became the benchmark for most Brazilian universities (Sucupira, 1980). USP's first doctoral theses were defended at the FFCL, with a total of 66 theses by 1949 (USP, s.d.). From this perspective, it is also worth highlighting the creation of the first graduate course in social sciences in Brazil, implemented by the Free School of Sociology and Politics of São Paulo in 1941 (Saviani, 2020).

However, the autonomy granted to the universities did not trigger a vigorous expansion process. The lack of research and the absence of experienced professors limited the opening of new courses. Until 1965, the PG in Brazil remained an artisanal and rather heterogeneous activity, developed by small groups of professors and students, mainly located in the Southeast of the country.

Although the decrees introduced important changes in the regulatory framework for higher education, they did not lead to a coherent policy in the areas of research and higher education. Almost all the universities created under Federal Decree 19.851/31 (Brasil, 1931b) prioritized graduate programs. Research remained limited to research institutes and a few universities. After two decades of the Statute of Brazilian Universities being in force, in 1950 Brazil had eight universities, seven of which were public (federal and state) and one was confessional (PUC-RJ). The expansion of higher education continued to be led by isolated colleges.

Discussions about the fragile presence of research in higher education resumed in the second half of the 1940s. The end of the Vargas dictatorship and the process of drafting the 1946 Federal Constitution (CF) (Brasil, 1946a) created a favorable environment for debating the role of the state in directing scientific development policies. The embryonic Brazilian scientific community, estimated at one hundred people at the time, became involved in campaigns to create a national research development agency. The involvement and mobilization of Brazilian scientists was instrumental in the creation of the Brazilian Society for the Advancement of Science (SBPC), in 1948.

The demand for investment in research increased due to the economic, political, and demographic dynamics underway. The process of industrialization and the emergence of an urban middle class required new technologies and the training of specialized workers, especially for sectors related to the provision of services (Sampaio, 1991). In addition to national demands, those of the scientific community were supported by the international context. The Second World War placed science and technology at the center of international geopolitics and forced the central countries to increase their investments in research. Like France and the United States, which created the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS, 1939) and the National Science Foundation (NSF, 1950), respectively, several countries debated the creation of their national research agencies.

In Brazil, the project to create the National Research Council (CNP, now National Council for Scientific and Technological Development — CNPq) was completed in 1946. However, its founding law (Federal Law n. 1.310/51 [Brasil, 1951]) was not passed until a few years later, in January 1951. The creation of the CNPq was accompanied by another important decision, assuming that research and graduate studies should be promoted separately and independently. In this sense, the federal government ought to create a second national agency to formulate policies for the development and financing of graduate studies.

Based on this understanding, the National Campaign for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (now Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel — CAPES) was established in July 1951, six months after the CNP was created. Activities began in 1952, with priority given to the analysis of grant applications. In 1953, in addition to scholarships, the agency began to support scientific events, the recruitment of foreign professors and cooperation between institutions. The program aimed at higher education institutions (the University Program) soon established itself as the agency's main line of action (CAPES, 2021d).

CAPES and CNPq were created, among other things, to (i) strengthen the scientific vocation of universities, (ii) induce the institutionalization of research and graduate studies, (iii) introduce a qualitative change in the funding system for these activities, (iv) support the training of teachers and researchers, and (v) respond to the growing demands of the industrialization process. In this context, it was understood that the creation of the agencies was a fundamental public policy to reduce the professionalization of higher education and to include research and higher education in the list of priority activities of universities (Sucupira, 1980).

Over the decades, CAPES and CNPq have played an important role in designing and shaping the SNPG and the National System of Science, Technology and Innovation (SNCTI). These agencies boosted the Brazilian scientific community. In 1951, the country had about one hundred researchers. Seventy years later, in 2021, the number of professors working in PPGs (permanent, collaborating and visiting) was 107.189 (CAPES, 2021c).

THE ORGANIZATION OF SYSTEMATIC POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

The limited presence of higher education and research in the day-to-day life of the universities contributed significantly to the postponement of debates on the regulatory framework for higher education. The 1946 Federal Constitution (CF) (Brasil, 1946a), for example, was rather vague about research and higher education. It limited itself to a single paragraph stating "[...] the law will promote the creation of research institutes, preferably in higher education institutions" (Brasil, 1946a, Art. 174, sole paragraph). The regulation of matters related to basic and higher education was referred to the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (Federal Law n. 4.024/61 [Brasil, 1961]), which was approved by the National Congress 13 years later, in 1961, after long debates and numerous substitute bills.

The 1961 LDBEN was the first general education law to present a "minimum" definition of PG. The letter "b" of art. 69 defined the modality as "a specific degree of academic training made available to [...] candidates who have completed a postgraduate course and obtained the corresponding diploma" (Brasil, 1961). The short and superficial definition reflected the lack of clarity about the nature, role, and scope of the PG (Sucupira, 1980). The various substitute bills during the passage of the initial bill through Congress showed "inadequate and imprecise ideas" on the subject (Sucupira, 1980, p. 13). The lack of consensus resulted in little progress at the normative level, which is why the finer regulation of the topic was referred to the Federal Education Council by Article 70 of 1961 LDBEN (Brasil, 1961). In the words of Councilor Newton Sucupira, expressed in the 977/CFE/65 Opinion (Brasil, 1965a, p. 1), at that time there was "[...] no precise conception of the nature and purposes of postgraduate studies, and its courses were often confused with those of simple specialization".

This normative and doctrinal gap led the then Minister of Education and Culture, Flávio Suplicy de Lacerda, to ask the Federal Education Council (CFE) to regulate the matter. According to the ministerial note sent to the CFE, the definition of the nature and objectives of the PG was fundamental in order to "[...] implement and develop the system of graduate courses in our country" and to overcome "[...] the imprecision that reigns among us about the nature of these courses" (*apud* Cury, 2005, p. 10).

The definition of a regulatory framework was demanded by the academic community itself, because of the process of expansion of higher education and the induction policies implemented by CAPES and CNPq. In 1964, Brazil had 35 universities and approximately 200 thousand undergraduates (Martins, 2018). According to Sampaio (1991, p. 07), between 1960 and 1968, 375 new higher education institutions were created in Brazil, including the University of Brasilia (created in 1961) and the University of Campinas (created in 1966).

In the early 1960s, several public higher education institutions (HEIs) created their first PG courses, including the Federal University of Viçosa (UFV), the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), the Aeronautics Institute of Technology (ITA), and the Luiz de Queiroz College of Agriculture, from the University of São Paulo (Esalq/USP). As Martins (2018, p. 24) points out, the emergence of the PG — in the form of master's and doctoral programs — was a new phenomenon in Brazilian higher education and a "[...] fundamental instrument for the modernization of higher education in the country, profoundly changing its physiognomy and way of being".

The gaps in the educational legislation were increasingly pointed out as obstacles to the development of the university's scientific vocation. In this context, the definition of regulatory frameworks was fundamental for higher education to assume new roles. This perception was summed up in 1965 by Newton Sucupira, a CFE consultant who drafted the 977/65 Opinion:

> [...] until now, we have clung to the simplistic belief that, in the same graduate course, we can train the ordinary professional, the scientist, and the technologist indifferently. The result is that, in many sectors of science and technology, the advanced training of our scientists and specialists has to be done in foreign universities [...] *In our opinion, an efficient postgraduate studies program is a basic condition for giving our university a true university character so that it is no longer just an institution that trains professionals and becomes a center that creates science and culture*. (Brasil, 1965a, p. 164-165, emphasis added)

The overemphasis on professionalism had kept Brazilian higher education disconnected from science and alien to the task of training university professors and high-level scientists. The development and growing specialization of scientific knowledge challenged the university to be "[...] a creative center of science and culture". Higher education had expanded "with improvised professors" and without "[...] mechanisms capable of ensuring the production of qualified teaching plans" (Brasil, 1965a, p. 165). According to the opinion (Brasil, 1965a, p. 164), "[...] the purpose of postgraduate studies is to provide, within the university, the environment and adequate resources for free scientific research [...]". According to the Sucupira Opinion (Brasil, 1965a, p. 165), the establishment of master's and doctoral programs was essential:

> 1) to train competent professors who can meet the quantitative expansion of our higher education while ensuring that current levels of quality are raised; 2) to stimulate the development of scientific research by adequately preparing researchers; 3) to ensure the effective training of technicians and intellectual workers of the highest standard to meet the needs of national development in all sectors.

In this context, the regulation of the PG was urgent. The competence of this law had been clearly defined since December 1961. Article 70 of the 1961 LDBEN attributed this task to the Federal Education Council (CFE). In addition, the Ministry of Education and Culture and the group in charge of drafting the Statute of University Teaching Career (Federal Law n. 4.881-A/65 [Brasil, 1965b]) had requested proper. Article 25 of the mentioned Statute established that the CFE had up to 60 days to design the PG courses and define their characteristics.

Based on these powers, on December 3, 1965, the Federal Education Council approved what can be considered the "founding text of systematic postgraduate studies" in Brazil (Cury, 2005, p. 18). In addition to establishing the doctrine and foundations of PG, the 977/CFE/65 Opinion (Brasil, 1965a) presented the normative bases for the organization of the National Postgraduate System. In this sense, it can be said that all the documents that constitute the PG normative corpus are closely related to the Sucupira Opinion.

The Chart 1 shows the lines of continuity — and improvement — between the 977/CFE/65 Opinion (Brasil, 1965a) and the regulatory frameworks and postgraduate policies approved subsequently.

Until 1965, postgraduate courses operated autonomously, independently and based on the internal regulations of the institutions. The Sucupira Opinion introduced important changes to the way PG was conceived and organized.

Chart 1 – Main regulatory frameworks and postgraduate policies implemented between 1965 and 2020.

Opinion 977/CFE/65	It marked the beginning of the institutionalization of postgraduate studies in Brazil. After almost six decades, it remains the main regulatory and doctrinal framework for the PG in Brazil (Cury, 2005; Saviani, 2020). The document sought to remedy the historical gaps present in educational legislation, resulting from inaccuracies, misunderstandings, and a lack of clarity regarding the nature, aims, objectives, and structure of postgraduate studies. In the words of Newton Sucupira, the Opinion "[...] did not impose a system of courses foreign to Brazilian higher education". It reflected the very process of modernizing higher education and sought to respond to the demands posed by the "[...] university reform movement that began in the second half of the 1950s" (Sucupira, 1980, p. 17).
Federal Law n. 5.540/68	The University Reform (RU) bill was approved three years after the 977/CFE/65 Opinion. Federal Law n. 5.540/68 introduced significant changes to the organization and functioning of the university system, including the abolition of professorships, the introduction of the credit system and the institutionalization of the departmental structure in HEIs. As far as PG is concerned, the RU did not introduce any structural changes. Instead of ruptures and discontinuities, the law opted to clarify and improve aspects approved by the Sucupira Opinion (Brasil, 1968).
CFE Opinion 77/69	The 77/69 Opinion, also drafted by Newton Sucupira, was approved around two months after the publication of the Federal Law n. 5.540/68. It complied with Article 24 of the University Reform bill, which gave the CFE the power to regulate the accreditation process for new courses (Brasil, 1969). The 77/69 Opinion had an immediate effect on the academic community. According to Martins (2018), in the first five years that Opinion was in force, the CFE analyzed 202 applications for accreditation. In the period between 1965 and 1975, the number of master's courses grew by 1,488% (from 27 to 429 courses) and doctoral courses by 1,254% (from 11 to 149) (Balbachevsky, 2005).
Decree nº 73.411/74	The Decree, published on January 4, 1974, established the National Postgraduate Council and made it compulsory to draw up the National Postgraduate Plan (PNPG) (Brasil, Art. 2, 1974).
I PNPG (1975–1979)	The first PNPG was approved in December 1974. It established guidelines and targets for the expansion and financing of PG courses and recommended periodic evaluation of courses as a strategic policy for the permanent improvement of PG quality (CAPES, 1974).
II PNPG (1982–1985)	The II PNPG highlighted the need to (i) improve the evaluation system; (ii) increase the efficiency and reliability of the information systems; (iii) make the evaluation criteria and mechanisms known and accepted as legitimate by the courses evaluated and, (iv) increase the engagement of institutions and the scientific community (CAPES, 1982).
III PNPG (1986–1989)	The III PNPG recommended, among other things, a greater role for CAPES and CNPq in funding and tougher evaluation processes, especially for new course projects. The SNPG was tasked with finding solutions to (i) the high dropout rate; (ii) the excessive number of students per professor; (iii) the high average time to degree; (iv) the low level of research carried out; (v) the deficiencies in the student selection process; and (vi) the low number of scholarships (CAPES, 1986).

Continue...

Chart 1 – Continuation.

IV PNPG (1990–2004)	During the period in which the IV PNPG was in force, numerous improvements were implemented, including (i) the creation of the professional master's degree; (ii) the adoption of a single, standardized evaluation form; (iii) the introduction of a new grading scale for the evaluation of courses (grades from 1 to 7); (iv) the extension of the evaluation periodicity (from two to three years); (v) the creation of the Qualis system for assessing the quality of scientific production published in journals; (vi) the creation of the multidisciplinary area; (vi) the linking of funding to the productivity of programs (with emphasis on the average time taken to obtain a degree); and (vii) the implementation of the so-called CAPES Collection (Ferreira and Moreira, 2002; Barata, 2016; CAPES, 2019; Siqueira, 2019).
V PNPG (2005–2010)	The 5th PNPG established guidelines to reduce regional asymmetries and proposed several improvements to the evaluation system, including (i) diversifying the model, (ii) increasing the weight of qualitative questions, (iii) valuing indicators relating to scientific and social expression in the national and international context and (iv) encouraging innovation (CAPES, 2004).
VI PNPG (2011–2020)	The VI PNPG was drawn up in a context of political stability, economic growth and major expansion of higher education. The plan established a series of policies aimed mainly at (i) the expansion and internalization of the PG; (ii) the reduction of regional asymmetries; (iii) the creation of a new national research agenda; (iv) the improvement of the evaluation system; (v) the strengthening of multi and interdisciplinarity; and (vi) the integration between postgraduate studies and basic education (CAPES, 2011).

Source: Based on the main regulatory frameworks and PG policies approved between 1965 and 2020.

REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS AND THE DESIGN OF THE EVALUATION SYSTEM

"Systematic" postgraduate education was conceived and improved based on at least nine fundamental guidelines. These dimensions are fundamental to understanding the characteristics that the Brazilian evaluation system has taken on over time.

ADOPTION OF THE NORTH AMERICAN POSTGRADUATE MODEL

The Sucupira Opinion introduced a fundamental qualitative change in the way the Brazilian PG was conceived and organized. The European concept was replaced by the North American model. The North American experience was used as a reference and inspiration for, among other things, (i) the extension and diversification of the levels of education between undergraduate and postgraduate; (ii) the introduction of the Master's and Doctorate as distinct, autonomous and complementary levels; (iii) the introduction of more flexibility in the curricular structure (major and minor); (iv) the introduction of credits, the obligation to take a certain number of courses, to attend seminars, to carry out research, to pass various partial and general examinations, etc.; (v) the establishment of requirements for the admission of candidates; and (vi) the setting of deadlines for the completion of courses (Brasil, 1965a; Cury, 2005; Verhine, 2008).

The European concept — clearly present in the Brazilian PG since the 1931 decrees — has been revised and improved. According to the Sucupira Opinion, the broad autonomy and intellectual freedom — typical of the European model — had to be complemented by "[...] intensive training with the aim of providing a solid scientific education [...]" (Brasil, 1965a, p. 168). Research became the primary objective of the PG. The Opinion introduced the concept of "vertical diversification" of the training process. Vertical diversification and expansion were

incorporated with the aim of modernizing and qualifying Brazilian higher education and "[...] providing students with in-depth knowledge that will enable them to achieve a high level of scientific or technical-professional competence that cannot be acquired in the context of an undergraduate degree" (Brasil, 1965a, p. 164).

DISTINCTION BETWEEN *LATO SENSU* AND *STRICTO SENSU* POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMS

This was the second important dimension introduced by the Sucupira Opinion. Until 1965, the educational legislation did not make a distinction between *lato* and *stricto sensu*. The 1961 LDBEN, in its Article 69, differentiated the three types of courses that made up higher education (graduate courses, postgraduate courses, specialization, training, and extension), but was not sufficiently clear about the nature and purpose of each type. In addition, the Federal Law n. 4.024/61 (Brasil, 1961) included specialization courses in Article 69(c), implying that these courses were not graduate courses.

The 977/65 Opinion recognized these inaccuracies and considered it necessary to present an "official interpretation" and a "legal" conceptualization of the matter (Brasil, 1965a). Based on doctrinal arguments, the Opinion distinguished between *lato* (specialization) and *stricto sensu* (master's and doctoral) postgraduate programs. While the former have an eminently practical-professional purpose and do not confer an academic degree (only a certificate), the latter are scientific in nature and confer an academic degree (diploma). In the Opinion, PG *stricto sensu* was defined as a regular modality of systematically organized courses aimed at promoting high-level scientific, cultural and professional training and leading to the award of the academic degrees of Master and Doctor (Brasil, 1965a; Sucupira, 1980). The distinction between *lato* and *stricto sensu*, approved in 1965, was consolidated in subsequent educational legislation.

STRUCTURING POSTGRADUATE *STRICTO SENSU* INTO TWO LEVELS: MASTER'S AND DOCTORAL

Until 1965, educational legislation did not consider the master's degree as an academic degree. Based on the North American academic tradition, the 977/65 Opinion institutionalized a broader and more flexible concept of the PG. It structured the PG *stricto sensu* into two levels. The master's degree and the doctorate were conceived as distinct and complementary academic degrees. This initiative introduced an important innovation in the Brazilian system, since complementarity between the levels had not previously been present in the international models that served as an inspiration (American and European) (Cury, 2005; Verhine, 2008).

The inclusion of the master's degree extended the duration of postgraduate training and diversified the objectives of the PG. The master's degree was consolidated as an intermediate level between the bachelor's degree and the doctorate, fulfilling a propaedeutic function in the training of researchers and as an alternative for institutions that did not have the conditions to offer doctoral courses. The levels were designed to be hierarchical but flexible. The master's degree was not included as a prerequisite for the doctorate.

ASSESSMENT FOR ACCREDITATION PURPOSES (*EX ANTE*)

Until 1965, universities had the autonomy to create courses. The Sucupira Opinion was the first regulatory framework to recommend external evaluation as a requirement for the creation of courses. Accreditation was proposed with the aim of avoiding indiscriminate proliferation and loss of quality in the PG. According to the Sucupira Opinion, the existence of an undergraduate degree was not a sufficient indicator that institutions were "[...] really qualified to institute postgraduate

studies" (Brasil, 1965a, p. 70). External evaluation would thus prevent "[...] Brazilian postgraduate education — essential for the renewal of our university — from being demeaned in its infancy [...]" (Brasil, 1965a, p. 170).

The recommendation was regulated three years later. The accreditation of courses became obligatory after the University Reform (RU) bill of 1968. From then on, only recommended courses (accreditation) could be implemented. Article 24 of Federal Law n. 5.540/68 established that the validity of PG courses nationwide would be subject to the authorizing acts issued by the then CFE (Brasil, 1968). Based on this article, the CFE regulated the accreditation process — through the 77/69 Opinion — and established the criteria and procedures for the submission of applications. Accreditation required that projects be analyzed and approved by most CFE members and then approved by the Ministry of Education (MEC). The application for accreditation had to demonstrate that the university had experience in research, adequate infrastructure, qualified faculty, and scientific production (Brasil, 1969; Saviani, 2003; Martins, 2018).

PERIODIC EVALUATION (*EX POST*)

The debates on periodic evaluation gained momentum in the first half of the 1970s, especially after the publication of Federal Decree n. 73.411/74, which created the National Postgraduate Council (CNPG) and gave it the task of "drawing up the National Postgraduate Plan and proposing the measures necessary for the implementation and constant updating of the National Postgraduate Policy" (Brasil, Art. 2, 1974).

The 1st PNPG was approved shortly thereafter, in December 1974. In addition to establishing guidelines and objectives for expansion and funding, the I PNPG recommended the periodic evaluation of courses as a strategic policy for the permanent improvement of the quality and efficiency of PG (CAPES, 1974). According to the document, it was necessary to implement a "[...] comprehensive system of statistical data, information, documentation, and publications [...]" (CAPES, 1974, p. 143). The regular collection of information would thus make it possible to evaluate the performance of the PPGs and support the development of new policies and guidelines. Based on the guidelines established by Federal Decree n. 73.411/74 and the 1st PNPG, the first data collection from the PPGs was carried out in 1975, using paper forms. The first evaluation of the quality of the courses took place the following year, in 1976 (Viana, 2018; Siqueira, 2019) (Table 1). As can be seen in Table 1, 22 periodic assessments were carried out between 1976 and 2020. In the first years, the assessment was annual. In 1984, it became biannual; in 1998, it became triennial; and, from 2013, it became quadrennial (Viana, 2018).

Since 1976, the periodic evaluation has been carried out according to a single calendar, defined for all the country's institutions. The entry (accreditation) and permanence of courses in the SNPG depend on the results obtained in the external evaluations (*ex ante* and *ex post*).

PERFORMANCE-BASED EVALUATION AND FUNDING

Since the first evaluation cycle, external *ex post* evaluation has been carried out with the aim of (i) analyzing the performance of PPGs; (ii) monitoring quality at a national level; (iii) establishing *rankings* and comparisons; (iv) evaluating the effectiveness and results of the policies implemented; and (v) generating parameters and indicators for the distribution of scholarships and other funding modalities (Sobrinho, 2003; Verhine, 2008; Verhine and Freitas, 2012). Considering the characteristics that the system has taken on over time — periodicity, homogeneity of methods, and comparability between PPGs and areas of knowledge — it can be said that in Brazil there is what the specialized literature has called a "performance-based evaluation system" (Sobrinho, 2000; Hicks, 2012; Vught and Westerheijden, 2012; Ochsner, Kulczycki and Gedutis, 2018).

Table 1 – Periodic evaluations of postgraduate programs carried out between 1976 and 2020.

PERIODICITY				SCALES	RESULTS
1976				Concepts A to E	1977
1977				Concepts A to E	1978
1978				Concepts A to E	1979
1979				Concepts A to E	1980
1980				Concepts A to E	1981
1981				Concepts A to E	1982
1982				Concepts A to E	1983
1983				Concepts A to E	1984
1984	1985			Concepts A to E	1986
1986	1987			Concepts A to E	1988
1988	1989			Concepts A to E	1990
1990	1991			Concepts A to E	1992
1992	1993			Concepts A to E	1994
1994	1995			Concepts A to E	1996
1996	1997			Concepts A to E	1998
1998	1999	2000		Grades 1 to 7	2001
2001	2002	2003		Grades 1 to 7	2004
2004	2005	2006		Grades 1 to 7	2007
2007	2008	2009		Grades 1 to 7	2010
2010	2011	2012		Grades 1 to 7	2013
2013	2014	2015	2016	Grades 1 to 7	2017
2017	2018	2019	2020	Grades 1 to 7	2022

Source: table based on data available in Viana (2018, p. 75).

In this context, evaluation has a normative and regulatory vocation; it emphasizes aspects related to accountability, control, efficiency, productivity, and benchmarking between courses, institutions, and areas of knowledge. The evaluation process seeks to ascertain whether — and to what extent — the PPGs meet the quality standards established at the national level. Since 1976, the evaluation results have been expressed through concepts and grades. Between 1976 and 1983, a system of scales consisting of five concepts was adopted: A (very good), B (good), C (fair), D (poor) and E (insufficient) (Viana, 2018). In 1984, the concepts were replaced by grades. Grades 1 and 2 indicate that the course does not meet the minimum requirements to join the SNPG or, in the case of an already accredited course, to continue offering new entries. Grade 3 indicates that the course meets the minimum quality standards. A grade of 4 indicates a good performance. Grade 5 indicates a high level of performance. Grades 6 and 7 are awarded to courses with high-quality standards (Brasil, 2020; CAPES, 1986; 2019).

Grades have numerous consequences in the system. The consequences, however, are known and legitimized by the academic community and the PPGs. Both the evaluators and those being evaluated are aware of the *modus operandi* and consequences of the evaluation process. The evaluation defines, among other things, (i) the accreditation of new courses; (ii) the grades of existing courses; (iii) the number of scholarships; (iv) the amount of funding; and (v) access to special

funding programs. The grades establish comparisons between programs, institutions, and areas of knowledge and, in doing so, induce institutions to improve the quality of their courses.

Over the decades, evaluation and funding have consolidated themselves as the central pillars of the SNPG. Evaluation has several consequences. The results are used, among other things, to calculate the distribution of financial resources. According to the quality and efficiency criteria adopted, the best-rated courses receive more grants and resources for funding and research infrastructure. The funding is a kind of award and reward (Ferreira and Moreira, 2002; Martins, 2018; Brasil, 2020).

INFORMED PEER REVIEW SYSTEM

Over the decades, Brazil has consolidated a complex, sophisticated and stable system whose organization was defined on the principle that evaluation should be external, independent, and impartial and carried out by peers. The system based on peer evaluation took shape with the creation, in 1977, of the Technical-Scientific Council for Higher Education (CTC-ES) and the Advisory Commissions for the different sectors. In this context, CAPES was given the responsibility of evaluating both the accreditation processes for new courses and the periodic evaluations (Vianna, 2018; Siqueira, 2019). The regulatory framework, organization, and evaluation procedures were defined through a complex system of collaboration, dialogue, and division of responsibilities between the main regulatory body and the scientific community. Over the decades, CAPES has become the institution responsible for the meta-evaluation and macro-effectiveness of the SNPG. The quality assessment is carried out entirely by the specialists and ad hoc consultants that are part of the 50 knowledge areas.

DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

This differentiation was introduced by the 47/95/CAPES Ordinance, issued 30 years after the approval of Opinion 977/65. Three years later, in 1998, CAPES issued a new regulation (Ordinance n. 80/98) to regulate the recognition of professional master's degrees. The first professional master was accredited by CAPES in the first year of its validity. Since 1998, the program has grown considerably. Over the next two decades, it grew by about 2,850%, from 28 courses in 1999 to 826 in 2019 (CAPES, 2011; 2020). The regulation of professional doctorates is more recent. The modalities were regulated in 2017 by the 389/17/GAB/MEC Ordinance. The first professional doctorate was implemented by the National Institute of Industrial Property (INPI) in 2018. The following year, in 2018, there were 25, of which ten were professional doctorates in the southeast, seven in the south, four in the northeast and four in the north (CAPES, 2020).

TRANSPARENCY OF POSTGRADUATE INFORMATION

Transparency is another important feature of the SNPG. The most important measures in this direction have been implemented in the last decades. In the early 1980s, during the II PNPG (1982–1985), the first measures were introduced to increase the transparency of the evaluation process. The results of the periodic evaluations, previously restricted to federal agencies, were made available to each PPG evaluated (CAPES, 2019). In 1987, CAPES created DataCAPES. Information was no longer collected by filling out paper forms.

Further improvements were made during the 5th PNPG (2005–2010). In 2009, the CAPES Georeferenced Information System was implemented. GeoCAPES now provides up-to-date information on PG courses throughout the country (courses, enrollment, teachers, students, grades, funding, international cooperation, etc.). Currently, users can access the main PG data since 1995 (CAPES, 2022a; 2022b). In 2013, Coleta CAPES was replaced by a robust online system for data

collection, updating and transparency. The Sucupira platform became the main tool for managing PG information in the country (CAPES, 2022a; 2022b).

In addition to the information available on GeoCAPES and the Sucupira Platform, CAPES has an institutional website where all the information related to the evaluation process is regularly updated, especially the evaluation form, the area documents, the quadrennial evaluation regulations and the results of the periodic evaluations.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Having completed our analysis of the formation — and transformations — of the Brazilian evaluation system, it is worth returning to one of the central questions raised in the introduction. In conclusion, we believe it is appropriate to present a summary of the aspects that characterize and distinguish the Brazilian model in the international context. As we have seen, the regulatory framework and PG policies have contributed decisively to the organization of a complex, sophisticated and unique system. The specificities become clearer and more evident when we compare the Brazilian model with other national systems for the evaluation of research and higher education. The analyses are derived from the extensive international literature on the subject — especially the works of Leeuw and Furubo (2008); Capano (2010); Hicks (2012); Molas-Gallart (2012); Verhine and Freitas (2012); Drooge (2013); Molas-Gallart and Davies (2016); Lepori, Reale and Spinello (2018); Ochsner, Kulczycki and Gedutis (2018); Ochsner *et al*. (2020); Morriello (2019); Brasil, Trevisol and Drooge (2022); Trevisol (2022); Trevisol and Brasil (2023); Brasil and Trevisol (2025) — which help us to better understand what distinguishes us from other countries.

Based on the international literature, we present below a chart summarizing the main characteristics of the current Brazilian evaluation system (Chart 2).

Chart 2 – Summary of the main characteristics of the Brazilian postgraduate evaluation system.

Institutional design of the system	It is a centripetal system, which organizes, regulates and reproduces itself from top to bottom and from the whole to the parts. Centralization stems from the leading role that the Brazilian state has played since 1965 in formulating, coordinating and evaluating policies for the expansion, evaluation, and financing of higher education.
Regulatory milestones	The regulatory frameworks and policies establish the competencies, attributions, and responsibilities for all the institutions that form the SNPG.
Institutional autonomy	The autonomy of the entities is closely linked to the regulatory frameworks defined at national level.
Entity responsible for evaluation	In Brazil, unlike other countries, there is a national public agency responsible for evaluating and funding graduate studies. CAPES is the macro-coordinator of the SNPG.
Internal and external evaluation	External evaluation takes precedence over internal evaluation. Self-evaluation is a recent practice. The Brazilian system is essentially based on informed peer review, which is carried out independently and impartially by consultants and experts from 49 areas of knowledge.
Ex ante and ex post evaluation	Both *ex ante* (accreditation) and *ex post* (periodic) evaluations are mandatory. Only courses that meet the minimum quality standards can be set up and/or kept running.

Continue...

Chart 2 – Continuation.

Evaluation objectives	The assessment is normative, regulatory, and performance based. It aims to ascertain whether courses meet the quality standards required at national level.
Evaluation cycle	Periodic evaluation has been practiced — without discontinuity — since 1976. The current cycle is four years.
Level	The periodic evaluation is based on common criteria defined nationally. All PPGs are evaluated according to a single calendar.
Evaluation units	The PPGs are the two basic evaluation units. The criteria vary partially according to the academic degree and the nature of the courses (academic masters, professional masters, academic doctorate and professional doctorate).
Benchmarking	The evaluation is measured using a scale of grades from 1 to 7. The scores allow comparisons to be made between courses, institutions, and areas of knowledge.
Evaluation and financing	Evaluation and funding are the central pillars of the SNPG. The results of evaluations are used to calculate the distribution of financial resources (grants, funding, and infrastructure).
On-site visit	It is carried out on an exceptional basis, only when there is a recommendation from higher authorities (Area Coordinators, CTC-ES or CAPES Higher Council).
Bibliometric data	Web of Science, Scopus, Google Scholar, Current Research Information System (CRIS), etc.
Homogenization and differentiation	Considering the characteristics described above, the evaluation system tends to promote greater internal homogenization and therefore limits differentiation, diversity and institutional autonomy.

Source: based on the main regulatory frameworks and PG policies approved between 1965 and 2020.

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