

## 'THE UNIVERSAL THROUGH THE REGIONAL': an analysis of the historical trajectory of the internationalization policy at the Federal University of Ceará

'O Universal pelo Regional': uma análise da trajetória histórica da política de internacionalização na Universidade Federal do Ceará

'Lo Universal por lo Regional': un análisis de la trayectoria histórica de la política de internacionalización en la Universidad Federal de Ceará

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**Abstract:** This article aims to analyze the historical trajectory of the internationalization policy of the Federal University of Ceará (UFC), seeking to understand the process of establishing an internationalization policy at UFC across different historical periods and to identify the policies and strategies adopted by UFC's Senior Administration over time. To this end, we draw on the propositions of Mary Douglas (1998) to understand the processes of policy institutionalization and on the concept of the institutional trajectory of a policy, developed by Gussi (2008). Methodologically, bibliographic research and analyses of documents produced by the Senior Administration were conducted. The analysis of the historical trajectory of UFC's internationalization policy reveals that the desire to become international emerged even before the University's foundation. However, it was guided by a Euro-North-centric perspective, and over the years, UFC's internationalization policy has acquired different meanings under different administrations and historical contexts.

**Keywords:** higher education; institutional policy; internationalization; historical trajectory.

**Resumo:** Este artigo tem como objetivo analisar a trajetória histórica da política de internacionalização da Universidade Federal do Ceará (UFC), buscando compreender o processo de instituição de uma política de internacionalização na UFC em diferentes períodos históricos e identificar as políticas e estratégias adotadas pela Administração Superior da UFC ao longo do tempo. Para tanto, fundamentamo-nos nas proposições de Mary Douglas (1998) para compreender processos de institucionalização e na noção de trajetória institucional de uma política, desenvolvida por Gussi (2008). Metodologicamente, foram realizadas pesquisas bibliográficas e análises de documentos produzidos pela Administração Superior. A análise da trajetória histórica da política de internacionalização da UFC revela que o desejo de ser internacional surgiu antes da fundação da Universidade, sendo orientada, contudo, por uma perspectiva euro-norte-centrada e que, ao longo dos anos, a política de internacionalização da UFC foi adquirindo variadas trajetórias em distintas gestões e contextos históricos.

**Palavras-chave:** educação superior; política institucional; internacionalização; trajetória histórica.

**Resumen:** Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar la trayectoria histórica de la política de internacionalización de la Universidad Federal de Ceará (UFC), buscando comprender el proceso de institucionalización de una política de internacionalización en la UFC en diferentes períodos históricos e identificar las políticas y estrategias adoptadas por la Administración Superior de la UFC a lo largo del tiempo. Para ello, nos basamos en las propuestas de Mary Douglas (1998) para comprender los procesos de institucionalización de una política y en la noción de trayectoria institucional de una política, desarrollada por Gussi (2008). Metodológicamente, se realizaron investigaciones bibliográficas y análisis de documentos producidos por la Administración Superior. El análisis de la trayectoria histórica de la política de internacionalización de la UFC revela que el deseo de ser internacional surgió antes de la fundación de la Universidad, aunque estuvo orientado por una perspectiva euro-norte-centrista y que, a lo largo de los años, la política de internacionalización de la UFC adquirió distintos significados en diferentes gestiones y contextos históricos.

**Palabras clave:** educación superior; política institucional; internacionalización; trayectoria histórica.

## INTRODUCTION

Our university will be regional to the point where, based on the concrete data of the Northeastern reality, it does not lose its characteristic universality and, thus, its basic norm of action to achieve 'the universal through the regional' (Martins Filho, 1965, p. 89, author's emphasis).

The Federal University of Ceará (UFC)<sup>1</sup> was created by Law No. 2,373, on December 16, 1954, and its motto is the term 'the universal through the regional', institutionalized by the first rector of the University, Prof. Antônio Martins Filho. This philosophy guides the university's policy in its 70 years of existence and over time it has gained new meanings.

Thus, considering that the ideas of the first rector of UFC have a strong foundation in the management of the University in guiding the educational policy to this day, I seek, in this article, to understand the place of the 'regional' in institutional policy based on a historical review of its internationalization process.

The motivation for carrying out this research arises from my participation, from 2023 to 2024, in the extension course in Management of Latin American University Internationalization, developed by the 'Red de Investigadores y Gestores en Internacionalización de la Educación Superior de América Latina'<sup>2</sup>, which aims to develop a training cycle on university internationalization in Latin America, with a focus on the needs of the region.

After this course, I was encouraged to reflect on the university where I work, seeking to understand how the process of establishing an internationalization policy took place<sup>3</sup>. Thus, this article has the general objective of analyzing the historical trajectory of UFC's internationalization policy. As specific objectives, we intend to: a) understand how the process of establishing an internationalization policy took place at UFC in different historical periods; and b) identify the policies and strategies adopted by the Senior Administration of the Federal University of Ceará over time.

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<sup>1</sup> Translator's note: All abbreviations in this work will be kept as their original in Brazilian Portuguese, in order to avoid any possible misunderstandings.

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<sup>3</sup> This article is the result of initial analyses of an ongoing ethnographic research, started in 2021 within the scope of the doctorate in Education, in the area of Anthropology of Education, whose objective is to analyze the institutional trajectories of UFC's internationalization policy (the university where I have worked since 2011 as a technical-administrative employee) through the discourses, the practices of the subjects and the power relations mobilized in this process at the University.

Methodologically, to rescue this historical process, bibliographical research and analyses were carried out on the main documents produced by the UFC Senior Administration, such as historical bulletins, institutional development plans, resolutions, among others, seeking elements that reveal how the University awakened to the international dimension of education, what discourses and practices have been produced since then and how they have been transformed over time.

This study is relevant for a better understanding of UFC's internationalization process, especially considering that historical studies on Brazilian university internationalization are rare. For Le Goff (1990), history allows a dialogue between the past and the present, making it possible to obtain information about processes and facts that occurred in the past that can explain the present.

By exploring the historical trajectory of UFC's internationalization, we hope to contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics that shaped and continue to shape this institution. In addition, the study can contribute to the advancement of knowledge, covering not only internationalization, but also the management of this process within institutions.

This study gains even greater relevance as the University celebrates its 70th anniversary, contributing to the reconstruction of UFC's historical trajectory of internationalization by mapping the evolution of this policy. This 'inward' look will also serve to point out new paths and possible trajectories of internationalization.

Thus, this article is organized into five parts, in addition to this introduction. In the second part, I present the theoretical-methodological perspective chosen for the development of the research. In the third part, I will discuss the historical development of UFC's internationalization policy from its foundation to the present day. In the fourth part, I develop an analysis of the historical trajectory of the policy, and, finally, I present the final considerations.

## THEORETICAL-METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

This work is theoretically based on the ideas of anthropologist Mary Douglas (1998), who, in her work *How Institutions Think*, argues that individuals do not make decisions alone, but are guided by the existence of an institutional thought that guides their perceptions and actions. The author argues that there is a shared knowledge base, which causes individuals to make institutionally oriented decisions. For her, “[...] the institution provides the categories of thoughts of its members [...]” and “[...] fixes identities” (Douglas, 1998, p. 132).

Douglas's (1998) propositions are important for understanding how the process of institutionalizing a policy takes place, which allows us to understand how the concepts and values surrounding internationalization are instituted at the University.

This occurs because, from this point of view, the university is an institution that produces shared meanings, values, practices and logics. In this sense, it is necessary to understand how internationalization is instituted at the University.

To construct the historical trajectory of UFC's internationalization policy, we rely on the notion of a policy trajectory proposed by Gussi (2008), who understands that policies are subject to incessant transformations arising from internal and external forces and intentions, in addition to being circumscribed by cultural aspects of the institutions that operate with the policy.

To recover this historical process, I initially visited the UFC Memorial in order to access documents produced between 1956 and 1970 by the Department of Education and Culture (DEC), which was the sector responsible for UFC's international relations during that period, with the aim of finding elements that showed how the University became aware of the international dimension of education, what discourses and practices were produced since then and how they were transformed over time.

In this process of discoveries, I also looked at books that tell the history of UFC, as well as documents produced by the University's management, because, according to Smith (2005), institutions are 'textually mediated social organizations', in which every textual record is capable of outlining chains of action, since they constitute organizational arrangements fundamental for the construction of the historical path of UFC's internationalization policy.

The documents, from Vianna's perspective (2014, p. 47, author's emphasis), "[...] create a 'process' as a sequence of acts in time, occurring in specific conditions and with multiple and unequal actors and authors [...]", and help track discourses, connections, interactions, institutional tensions and shed light on the internationalization movement at UFC.

Based on this, I analyzed institutional documents from different historical periods in order to understand how the institutional culture related to internationalization was formed, as shown in Table 1:

**Table 1** – Institutional documents analyzed

<b>Institutional documents</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Newsletters issued between 1956 and 1970;</li><li>- Reports, Ordinances, Provisions, Resolutions;</li><li>- Management reports produced between 2003 and 2023;</li><li>- Institutional Development Plans ( IDPs );</li><li>- UFC Internationalization Plan;</li><li>- Institutional materials produced to publicize internationalization actions;</li><li>- News published on the University's institutional page.</li></ul>

Source: Elaborated by the author (2024).

These documents are like cultural artifacts, whose understanding is fundamental to unveiling how certain institutional narratives were produced. The analysis of institutional documents allowed a deeper understanding of the founding movement of the University and the historical process of UFC's internationalization.

## **HISTORICAL DIMENSION OF THE INSTITUTION OF AN INTERNATIONALIZATION POLICY AT THE FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF CEARÁ**

To present the historical dimension of the process of establishing an internationalization policy at UFC, this section is divided into three parts. The first is related to the formation of institutional thinking, in the terms of Douglas (1998) about the idea of internationalization, more specifically, during the management of the first rector of UFC, Prof. Antônio Martins Filho (1955-1967), who oversaw the University's management for 12 years.

In the second part, we present how UFC's internationalization expanded between 1970 and 1990, a period marked mainly by the expansion of postgraduate courses at the University. And, in the last part, we develop the process of establishing the internationalization policy from the 2000s onwards, marked, above all, by the increase in internationalization programs formulated by the federal government, such as the Science without Borders Program (CsF), created during the government of Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016) and the Institutional Internationalization Program (PrInt), established during the Temer government (2016-2018), and which is still being implemented in Brazilian universities.

### **The formation of institutional thinking focused on internationalization at the Federal University of Ceará (1954 to 1967)**

UFC was created in 1954 in a developmental context, post-World War II (1939-1945). Its founder, Prof. Antônio Martins Filho, rector of UFC between 1955 and 1967, understood that the University had a commitment to collective issues with a view to contributing to regional development as a means of achieving universality. For Rector Martins Filho,

[...] the mission of the modern University [is] to, by assimilating the spirit of the times in which we live, cooperate with the Government in solving collective problems. In our hypothesis, this mission should constitute the basis of all university activities, giving regional characteristics and content to the study of various specializations. Since it is located in a geographical area that is still

underdeveloped, the University of Ceará has the most serious commitments to its environment, and it is its duty to decisively influence the economic and social recovery of the Northeast (Federal University of Ceará [UFC], 1958).

Based on this idea of university, the motto 'the universal through the regional' emerged, a philosophy that has guided UFC's educational policy since its foundation and, over time, has gained new meanings in institutional discourses, in an attempt to express UFC's institutional desire to become increasingly internationalized.

On my first visit to the Memorial's collection, I stepped into the same space where the Department of Education and Culture (DEC) was located, which at the time was responsible for the University's internationalization activities. I was received by the Memorial's historian, who introduced me to the collection and provided relevant information about the University. He explained that UFC's international aspirations began even before its founding, with the Clóvis Beviláqua Embassy. This initiative, held in 1949, consisted of a trip by five undergraduate students from the Faculty of Law, led by Professor Antônio Martins Filho. They visited European countries such as Portugal, Spain, France, Switzerland, and Italy with the purpose of conducting a '[...] visit of cordiality and cultural exchange to the noble and venerable University of Coimbra and also to other University Centers of the Old World [...]'. This information is recorded in the 1949 edition of the *Revista da Faculdade de Direito do Ceará* (Faculdade de Direito do Ceará, 1949). The idea of holding a cultural exchange in Europe seemed, at first, 'unfeasible', due to the lack of budgetary resources, since the excursion was considered a 'bold' undertaking and a 'luxury'. However, Professor Martins Filho "[...] personally assumed full responsibility for the financial part of the trip" (Faculdade de Direito do Ceará, 1949). Thus, on July 19, 1949, the students departed aboard the national ship 'Mauá', from the Port of Recife bound for Europe, where they had the opportunity to visit universities, museums, embassies, important cultural and historical facilities of the Old World, in addition to experiencing the culture of each place. This event shows that UFC already began with the idea that a university operates internationally.

From the analysis of historical documents and the historian's report, it is observed that, in its creation phase, the UFC imported the idea of a university from Europe<sup>4</sup> and, later, from the United States. The newsletters show that the first visit received and recorded was from the Portuguese Ambassador on July 15, 1956, as shown in Figure 1:

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4 Universities in the Global South have been, from the beginning, shaped by a Western civilizing project, which had modern science as its paradigm of progress and reason (Sousa Santos, 1998). This project brought (and brings) with it a Eurocentric way of producing knowledge and culminates in an epistemological dependence that makes knowledge, in Mignolo's terms (2017), an export commodity of modernization.

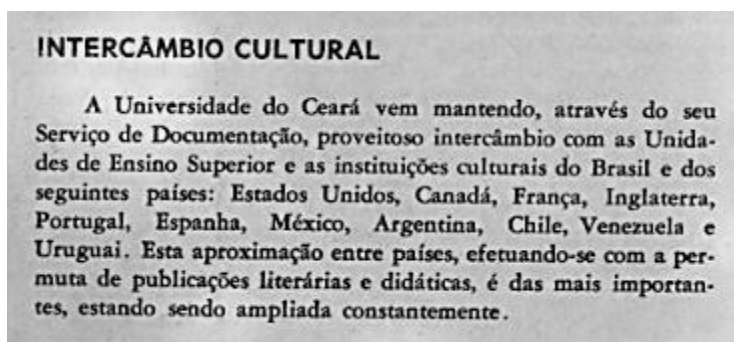
**Figure 1** – Visit of the Portuguese Ambassador to UFC

Source: UFC (1956, p. 8).

It is observed that the insertion of the international dimension in UFC occurred gradually after the establishment of the University, marked in 1957 by the creation of the Division of Exchange and Cultural Expansion, linked to the Department of Education and Culture (DEC). During this period, UFC's international relations mainly involved visits by foreign government representatives, such as ambassadors, consuls, and foreign professors, as well as trips by the rector and some professors abroad in search of establishing cooperation.

I found, in the writings, exchanges established with educational institutions in the Global North and with Latin American countries, such as Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Venezuela and Uruguay, as shown in Figure 2:

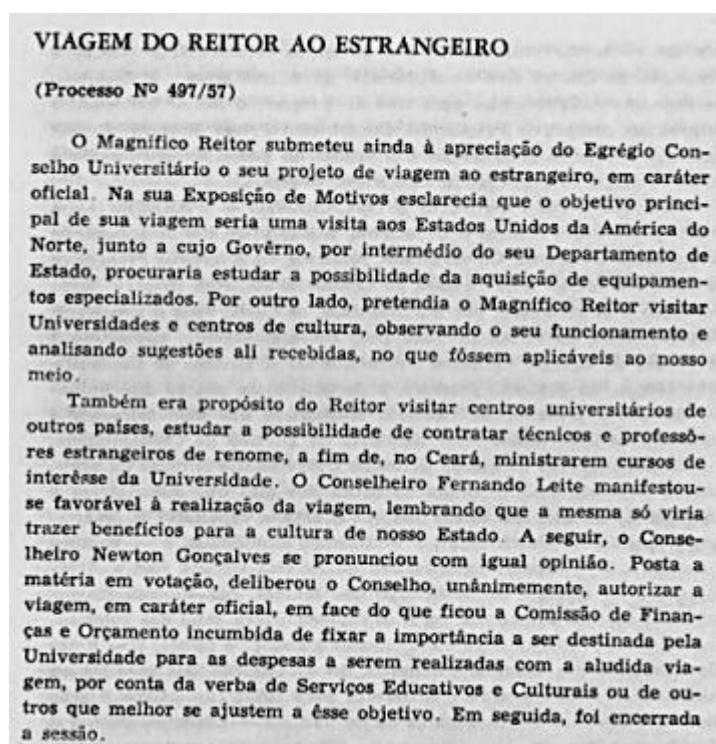
Figure 2 – Cultural exchange



Source: UFC (1958, p. 13).

The first overseas mission of the then rector Martins Filho was to the United States, to visit universities and official institutions with the purpose of acquiring equipment and bringing foreign professors to teach courses at the University, as shown in Figure 3:

Figure 3 – Rector's Trip Abroad



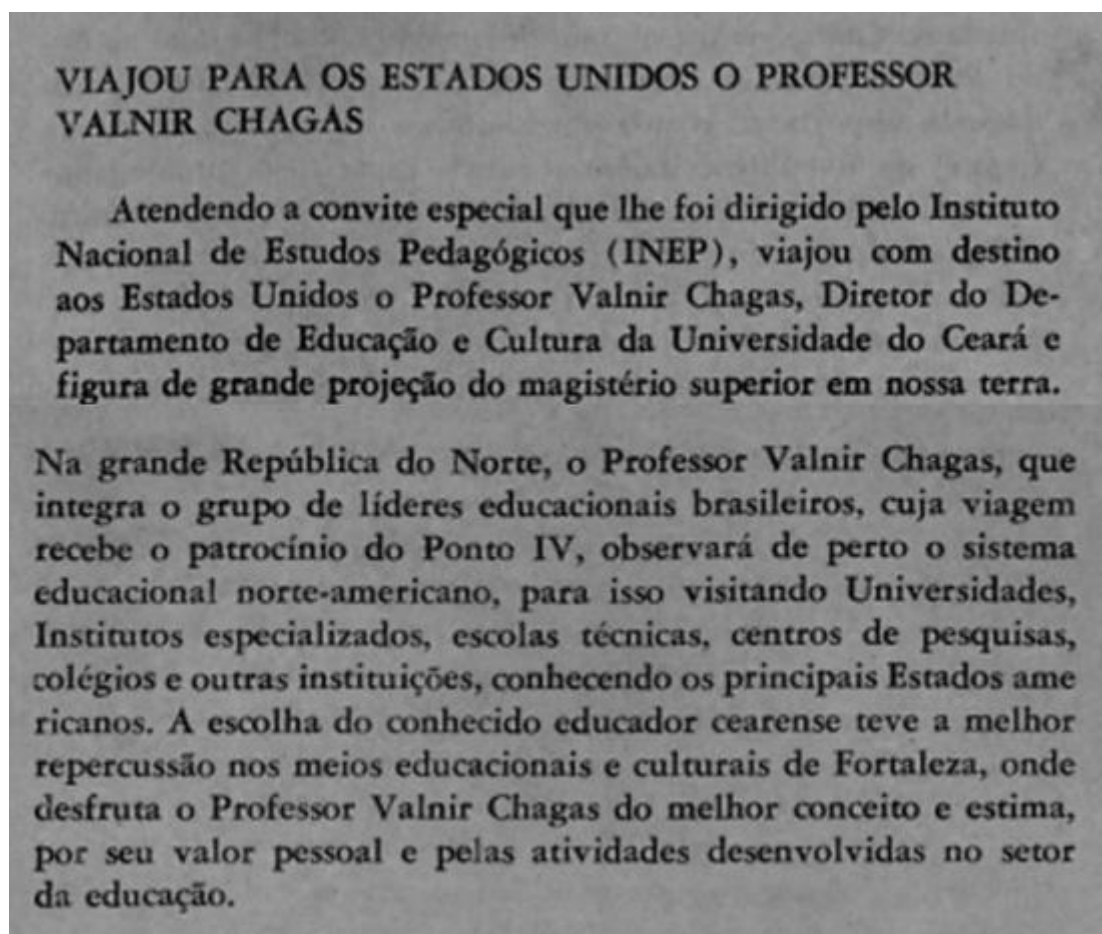
Source: UFC (1957, p. 31).

Maia and Farias (2005) show that UFC was a pioneer in the State in seeking, through international relations, resources to complement the financing of programs.

Although the term 'internationalization' did not exist at that time, objectives focused on international education already appeared in UFC's planning in 1959. Among the objectives for expanding the University's structure were the "[...] intensification of exchange services with universities and other cultural institutions, both national and foreign [...]" and "[...] internships for professors in other university centers, scientific and cultural institutions in the country and abroad" (UFC, 1959a, p. 132).

In that same year, Professor Valnir Chagas, a professor at the Faculty of Education and one of the main authors of the 1968 University Reform, traveled to the United States to learn about the North American educational system, possibly the beginning of field work to incorporate technicist pedagogy into Brazilian educational policies and educational institutions, which culminated in 1968 in the University Reform, as described in the text in Figure 4:

**Figura 4** – Professor Valnir Chagas traveled to the United States

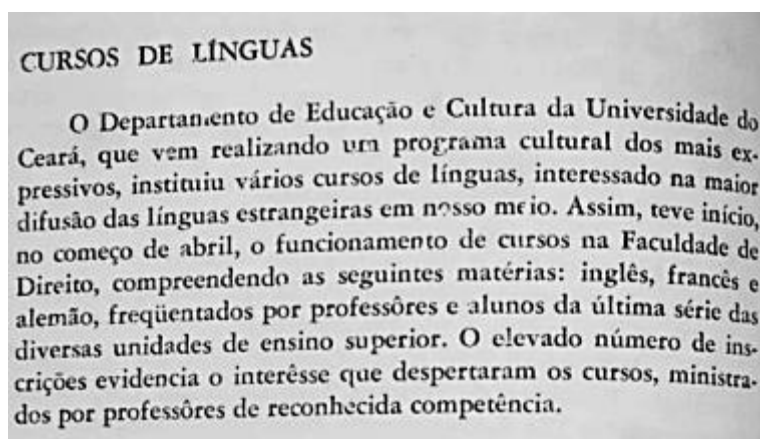


Source: UFC (1959b, p. 403-404).

Still in 1959, two years after the first trip to the United States, the rector, Prof. Martins Filho, made another trip to the United States and Europe with the aim of raising funds for international cooperation.

In addition to international cooperation and the mobility of teachers and students, international education in that period also involved the learning of foreign languages, as shown in Figure 5:

**Figure 5 – Language Course**



Source: UFC (1959a, p. 8).

It was in the 1960s, long before the creation of the Literature courses, that the Foreign Culture Centers were created, which had, at that time, the function of promoting the cultures of the countries, a way of bringing UFC closer to European culture. Currently, the Foreign Culture Centers constitute an internationalization tool of the University, with the purpose of promoting “[...] the dissemination of knowledge and the promotion of artistic and cultural values, as well as the internationalization of the institution” (UFC, 2024, p. 1). In addition, they are responsible for preparing and administering proficiency exams for candidates to be selected for postgraduate courses locally and nationally.

In 1961, the dean made a third trip to the United States at the invitation of the State Department to visit the Universities of Florida, North Carolina, Duke and Richmond, as well as the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), which served as inspiration for the creation of SUDENE.

As a result of these missions to the United States, *Bulletin* No. 41 states that in 1963 an important international agreement was formalized between UFC, SUDENE, the Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Ministry of Education and Culture, which, through the first agreement with the University of Arizona, had the objective of “[...] providing technical and material conditions to achieve the goals that are closely linked to the system that impedes the economic and social development of Brazil [...]” (UFC, 1963, p. 121), said the deputy director of USAID in the Northeast,

Mr. Arthur Byrnes, during the signing ceremony, which took place in the University Council room, as shown in Figure 6:

**Figure 6** – Signing of the UFC/MEC/USAID Agreement



Source: UFC (1963, p. 130).

The University of Arizona helped train technicians in agricultural matters within the UFC School of Agronomy, the current Center for Agricultural Sciences (CCA). In return, USAID financed a contract of up to 800 thousand dollars to expand the School of Agronomy, in addition to training technicians abroad (UFC, 1963).

According to Maia and Farias (2005), this agreement was supported by resources from the North American political project Alliance for Progress, a program that intended to apply, over a ten-year period (1961 to 1970), US\$20 billion provided by the North American government to be used in programs for income distribution, elimination of illiteracy, agrarian reform, industrialization, public housing and the integration of Latin American economies. This project aimed to contain the Soviet advance in Latin America, which occurred mainly after the Cuban Revolution in 1959. Thus, international cooperation between the United States and Latin American countries aimed to maintain national security and political and economic dominance in the region (Lage, 2001).

Also in 1963, within the scope of the Alliance for Progress, another Cooperation Agreement was signed, under the argument of solidarity, between the UFC, the Organization of American States (OAS), and the University of California (UCLA) for the development of the Morris Asimow Project, a project conceived by a North American professor of the same name, which had as its objective, according to the

records in the bulletin, the “[...] carrying out social and economic research, combined with training in rural and industrial technology and the implementation of medium and small industries in the interior of Ceará” (UFC, 1963, p. 130).

Following this process, in 1966, a Master Plan for the Development of UFC was drawn up for the five-year period 1966-1970, signed by Rector Martins Filho with the aim of obtaining financing from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) for improvements and expansion of UFC. During this period, universities were experiencing budgetary restrictions that compromised their operations. Professor Martins Filho recounts in his book entitled *História abreviada da UFC*, released in 1996, that:

Before the 1964 Revolution, Rectors still dared to react against the repeated budget cuts, the prohibitions on hiring staff (even in cases of replacements) and against other measures that threatened university autonomy. With the new political-administrative order installed in March 1964, we thought it was prudent to silence or, at least, to attenuate the fervor with which we had previously fought. In reality, the situation of the Federal Universities was becoming increasingly difficult. The restrictive measures in the distribution and release of funds were becoming more severe, making the planning approved at the beginning of the year, based on budgetary allocations and funds from the Patrimonial Fund, practically unfeasible (Martins Filho, 1996, p. 194).

In order to ensure the continued expansion of the UFC, Prof. Martins Filho says that he took out a loan from the IDB in the amount of twenty-six billion four hundred million cruzeiros to “[...] build works, install laboratories, acquire equipment and enrich the bibliographic collection” (Martins Filho, 1996, p. 195).

In short, it can be seen that UFC's international relations in the 1950s and 1960s mainly involved visits by foreign government representatives, such as ambassadors, consuls, and foreign professors, as well as trips by the rector and some professors abroad in search of establishing international cooperation, marked by North American hegemony exercised through cooperation agreements such as the Alliance for Progress and the MEC-USAID agreement.

## **The expansion of the international dimension of the Federal University of Ceará (1970 to 1990)**

Between the 1970s and 1990s, there are few documentary records about the University. When asked whether this lack of records was in any way related to the period of the military dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1985), when there was censorship

and suppression of information, the historian of the Memorial informed that it is more related to the dynamics of the University itself.

In the 1970s, after investments were made abroad to expand UFC, the University's postgraduate courses began to expand, contributing to its international dimension. During this period, analysis of the bulletins shows that a sociocultural perspective of UFC's internationalization predominated and that this was mainly marked by the mobility of faculty and students, who received scholarships to study abroad, mainly in the United States and Europe, as shown in Figures 7 and 8:

**Figure 7 – Scholarships Abroad**

#### **Bôlsas no Exterior**

A Pró-Reitoria de Pesquisas e Pós-Graduação da Universidade Federal do Ceará informa aos interessados que estão sendo oferecidas bôlsas de estudo (Engenharia, Química, Matemática, Direito, Economia, Administração, Física, Odontologia e Medicina) nos Estados Unidos, Japão e em vários países europeus.

Informes mais detalhados os pretendentes conseguirão na Pró-Reitoria de Pesquisas e Pós-Graduação, ou escrevendo para o Centro de Integração Empresa Escola — PR — Rua Cândida de Abreu, 200 — 5.º andar — Curitiba, Paraná.

Source: UFC (1970, p. 319).

**Figure 8 – Postgraduate courses sponsored by UNESCO**

#### **Cursos de Pós-Graduação**

A UNESCO está patrocinando vários cursos internacionais de pós-graduação em hidrologia, a serem realizados em diferentes países — Áustria, Espanha, Hungria, Israel, Itália, Países Baixos, Checoslováquia, Estados Unidos, U.R.S.S.

Na Pró-Reitoria de Pesquisas e Pós-Graduação da Universidade Federal do Ceará, os interessados poderão obter informações pormenorizadas sobre esses cursos.

Source: UFC (1970, p. 331).

In 1974, the Division of Exchange and Cultural Expansion (DIEC) became an International Affairs Committee, evolving in 1975 into the Department of International Affairs (DAI), whose purpose was to “[...] offer the necessary support to other University bodies in terms of relationships with foreign bodies and entities” (UFC, 1975, p. 93).

In 1987, the DAI was transformed into the International Affairs Coordination Office (CAI), linked to the Rector's Office, which was responsible for coordinating the University's relations with foreign institutions, through mobility programs, especially the Undergraduate Student Exchange Program (PEC-G) and the establishment of agreements with foreign universities.

Contextually, in the 1990s, with the globalization of the economy and the opening of the country to foreign capital, higher education was required to meet new professional training requirements. Furthermore, with the introduction of neoliberalism in Brazil, the Brazilian higher education underwent an accelerated process of privatization and commodification. In this movement, the term 'internationalization of higher education' emerged, which became central to educational policies because it involved the relationship among nations, peoples, cultures, institutions and systems.

At the international level, a key development during this period was the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), signed in 1995. In an effort to eliminate international barriers to educational services, the World Trade Organization (WTO) established new rules and principles for higher education, defining it as a service subject to commercialization, much like a commodity (World Trade Organization [WTO], 1998); and b) the World Declaration on Higher Education in the 21st Century: Vision and Action, issued by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1998 during the World Conference on Higher Education, which attributed to higher education a sociocultural perspective, based on the principles of mutual cooperation and solidarity, recognizing international cooperation as a means to promote social well-being and strengthen national capacities (UNESCO, 1998).

This dispute over meanings in the field of higher education has repercussions on the concept of internationalization and the way in which the international dimension is institutionalized in universities, as we will see, from the 2000s onwards.

### **Consolidation of a policy of internationalization of higher education at the Federal University of Ceará (2000-2023)**

To understand the institutional movement around internationalization in this period, I initially analyzed the University's Management Reports from 2003 to 2023, seeking to analyze what was accomplished in the scope of internationalization, similar to the analysis of historical bulletins. However, I identified an intermittency in the presentation of data, which could limit the intended analysis. Thus, I chose to examine UFC's Institutional Development Plans (PDI), which are only available on the

University's website from 2007 onwards, in order to understand the idea of internationalization in force in different administrations.

When analyzing UFC's PDI from 2007 to 2011<sup>5</sup>, related to the first term of rector Jesualdo Pereira Farias<sup>6</sup> (2008-2015), it is possible to observe that the international dimension of UFC was restricted to data on the Houses of Culture and on the International Affairs Coordination (CAI)<sup>7</sup> as an integral unit of the Rector's Office. In addition, there was academic mobility, understood as a way to broaden students' education from a sociocultural perspective, as shown in the following excerpt:

UFC also provides its students with a broader education and a more comprehensive view of today's society and world, offering them the opportunity to participate in various academic exchange or double degree programs at institutions in other countries. The exchange programs, which can last one or two academic terms, allow students to take courses at various accredited and partner universities, taking advantage of the respective credits earned on their resumes – in addition to the sociocultural experience that this represents for the student's education. At the same time, UFC welcomes students from several continents to its campuses, through the same partnerships, thus increasing the diversity of the academic community and enriching it (UFC, 2007, p. 48).

The University was awakening to the importance of strengthening its international dimension. Among the strategies and actions included in the Planning and Management axis, there are:

1. To consolidate the institutionalization of international cooperation.  
Actions: a. Strengthen the management structure for international cooperation; b. Establish mechanisms to support

<sup>5</sup> During this period, Brazil was experiencing increased access and democratization of universities, because of policies created during the Lula administration (2003-2009), such as the Support Program for Restructuring and Expansion Plans of Federal Universities (Reuni), established by Decree No. 6,096/2007. Thus, the priority of Prof. Jesualdo Pereira Farias' administration was the expansion and internalization of UFC.

<sup>6</sup> He holds a degree in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Fortaleza (1982), a master's degree (1985) and a PhD (1993) in Mechanical Engineering from the Federal University of Santa Catarina. Throughout his career, he has been actively involved in university management. At UFC, he served as Head Department, Postgraduate Course Coordinator, Vice-Director and Director of the Center, and Vice-Rector. From April 2008 to April 2015, he was Rector of the Federal University of Ceará, later serving as Secretary of Higher Education at the Ministry of Education (MEC) from April 2015 to May 2016. Additionally, he held leadership roles as Vice-President and President of the National Association of Directors of Federal Higher Education Institutions (ANDIFES). He also served as City Secretary for the State of Ceará.

<sup>7</sup> The coordinator of the International Affairs Coordination (CAI) was Professor Maria Elias Soares, who was in charge between 2003 and 2010. Professor Maria Elias Soares, linked to the UFC Humanities Center, has a PhD in Literature and carries out studies in the area of linguistics.

- project and agreement coordinators; c. Promote and enhance support mechanisms for exchange students.
2. To strengthen internationalization activities in teaching, research and extension.
- Actions: b. Identify demands for international cooperation in teaching, research and extension activities; c. Coordinate with the Houses of Culture to support the translation of scientific texts for international publication; d. Enable operational conditions in academic institutions; e. Identify and make available information on sources of funding for international activities (UFC, 2007, p. 75).

In 2012, in the Institutional Development Plan (PDI) in force at the time I entered the University, these strategies and goals were repeated in the Planning and Management axis. According to this PDI, the great advances in science and the important economic transformations that have occurred in recent decades required greater flexibility from UFC in its actions in favor of a democratic and quality education that would contribute to the reduction of social and regional inequalities. The “universal through the regional” teaching, by Rector Martins Filho, was understood by this administration as “[...] one cannot claim to be universal without knowing one's own village” (UFC, 2012, p. 9).

These resignifications attributed to the UFC motto ratify Smith's (2005, p. 32) understanding that institutions are “[...] textually mediated social organizations [...]”, as texts are used both to inform and to legitimize the present.

In the 2013-2017 PDI<sup>8</sup>, a change in the definition of internationalization strategies is observed. In the Management axis, with the objective of “strengthening UFC's international insertion policy”, the following strategies are found:

- a) Implement and consolidate actions in the area of signing agreements with universities and other foreign institutions and/or organizations;
- b) Consolidate and implement projects in the area of academic mobility for Brazilian and foreign students;
- c) Strengthen and consolidate the PEC-G and PEC-PG programs;
- d) Redesign and restructure the International Affairs Coordination portal;
- e) Strengthen relations among CAI and the immigration sector of the Federal Police, local honorary consulates, and foreign vice-consulates (UFC, 2013, p. 145).

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8 During this period, the coordinator of the International Affairs Coordination was Prof. Tito Lívio Cruz Romão, who was in charge from 2012 to 2015. The professor, linked to the Humanities Center, has a PhD in Literature and develops studies in the area of translation.

What we can observe is that, during this period, institutional strategies to internationalize the University still occurred in a way that 'guided', 'provided support' and 'enabled', which demonstrated that UFC was still organizing its processes, raising the number of agreements established between the university and foreign institutions, updating the CAI portal, seeking approaches with the immigration sector of the Federal Police and structuring itself to apply proficiency tests, etc.

It is worth mentioning that, in the period from 2012 to 2017, in addition to the PEC-G and PEC-PG Programs, the Science without Borders Program (CsF) was in the process of being implemented, which appears timidly in the strategy "Consolidate and implement projects in the area of academic mobility for Brazilian and foreign students [...]" of the PDI 2013-2017, with the goal of "Consolidating, with other advisory bodies, directors or coordinators of UFC, the Science without Borders Program within this University" (UFC, 2013, p. 146).

CsF Program was created during the Dilma Rousseff Government (2011-2016) and, among its objectives, according to Decree No. 7,642, of December 13, 2011, it aimed to boost the internationalization of Brazilian universities by granting more than 101 thousand scholarships to study abroad, especially to undergraduate students, in areas considered priorities for Brazil's economic development.

At UFC, more than 2,000 scholarships were implemented, 87% of which were for undergraduate students, according to data from the Program Control Panel (MEC, 2022), which contributed to increasing academic mobility rates at the University and raising awareness in the academic community about the possibilities involving the internationalization of higher education (Garcia, 2020).

Its implementation was the responsibility of the CAI, whose structure, composed of six employees, was insufficient to deal with the high demand of the Program, according to Garcia (2020). However, in 2017, under the administration of President Michel Temer (2016-2018), the CsF was suspended and an internationalization program was created, the Institutional Internationalization Program (PrInt), which was restricted to postgraduate programs.

Despite changes in the national scenario, within the UFC, internationalization took on its own dynamics based on the international experience of the rector Henry de Holanda Campos (2015-2019)<sup>9</sup>, who prioritized strengthening the internationalization process (UFC, 2015).

The year 2017 was significant for the University's internationalization process. In that year, the UFC's Internationalization Plan (PIN) was prepared with the purpose

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<sup>9</sup> Physician, graduated from the Federal University of Ceará (UFC), master in Nephrology from the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ) and PhD in Nephrology from the Federal University of São Paulo (USP). He completed a postdoctoral internship at Hôpital Necker, Université René Descartes - Paris V and Unité INSERM 25, in transplant immunology. Among other management positions within the Ministry of Education, he was Pro-Rector of Extension, Vice-Rector for two terms and Rector of UFC from 2015 to 2019.

of submitting the University's proposal to receive resources from the government's new internationalization program, PrInt.

Another relevant fact in 2017 was the transformation of CAI into the Pro-Rectorate of International Relations (PROINTER)<sup>10</sup>, through Provision No. 01, of January 20, 2017, gaining greater administrative autonomy (UFC, 2017a). This transformation points to the priority that internationalization was beginning to gain in institutional policies. According to the Internationalization Plan, PROINTER, at that time, had the following functions:

[...] articulate and improve internationalization actions; make our curricular and academic structures compatible with international models; acclimatize foreign teachers and students; guide UFC students, teachers and staff on missions abroad; consolidate partnerships with foreign institutions; promote actions aimed at linguistic internationalization at UFC (UFC, 2017c, p. 5).

Also in 2017, the UFC Internationalization Committee (COMINTER) was created, through Resolution No. 46/CONSUNI, of September 11, 2017, with the purpose of “[...] monitoring, evaluating and improving the institutional internationalization policy, within the scope of the UFC Internationalization Plan, in the spheres of research, teaching, extension and management” (UFC, 2017b, p. 1).

In 2018, UFC was one of the 36 Brazilian universities selected to participate in PrInt, whose objective was to foster the implementation of strategic internationalization plans in the areas prioritized by universities, stimulate the formation of international research networks, promote the mobility of professors and postgraduate students and transform universities into an international environment (Ordinance No. 220, 2017).

Based on the analysis of the 2018-2022 PDI, as a result of the ideas of the rector Henry de Holanda Campos, a significant change can be observed in the vision and institutional principles that have guided the management of the institution since 2007, highlighting the desire to 'be internationally recognized' and the inclusion of 'internationalization' as an institutional principle. The international dimension was expanding from the management and research axes to the teaching and extension axes of the University. In addition, indicators were established to assess internationalization.

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<sup>10</sup> Between 2017 and 2019, the Pro-Rector of International Relations was Prof. José Soares de Andrade Júnior, affiliated with the Physics Department of the UFC Science Center. The professor holds a master's and a doctorate in Chemical Engineering from COPPE/Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and develops studies in the areas of Statistical Physics, Computational Physics and Complex Systems.

New transformations occurred in 2020 under the management of Rector José Cândido Lustosa Bittencourt de Albuquerque (2019-2022), when the Pro-Rectorate of International Relations was renamed 'Pro-Rectorate of International Relations and Institutional Development'<sup>11</sup>, according to Provision No. 01/CONSUNI, of February 7, 2020 (UFC, 2020).

As reported by the Provision, the adoption of this new function added new attributions to PROINTER, such as:

- a) institutionalize entrepreneurship activities; b) prospect and implement innovation; c) foster partnerships for social and technological innovation in close collaboration with the innovation agency; d) direct actions for the development of the Institution based on the axes of Internationalization, Entrepreneurship and Innovation.

With the function of 'institutionalizing entrepreneurship activities', during this period, the incorporation of market principles into internationalization began to be observed, an alignment with the *Programa Future-se*<sup>12</sup>, proposed by the Ministry of Education (MEC) during the Bolsonaro Government (2019-2022), which had "[...] the objective of giving greater financial autonomy to universities and institutes by encouraging the raising of their own resources and entrepreneurship" (MEC, 2019).

Another notable event during this administration was the resumption of the Agreement with the University of Arizona in April 2022, the first Agreement signed by UFC with a foreign university during the administration of Rector Martins Filho. Regarding the importance of this agreement for UFC, the then Pro-Rector of International Relations and Institutional Development, Prof. Augusto Teixeira de Albuquerque, commented that:

We maintained contact and identified some possibilities in the areas of Agronomy, Social Sciences, Entrepreneurship and Telemedicine. In addition, a disciplinary group will be formed with the aim of researching a global theme present in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (UN). The objective is to use this work to prospect financing from international agencies (UFC, 2022, p. 1).

<sup>11</sup> During the administration of Rector Cândido Albuquerque, from 2019 to 2022, the Vice-Rector for International Relations was Prof. Augusto Teixeira de Albuquerque, who holds a degree, master's degree and doctorate in Civil Engineering. He is affiliated with the Department of Civil Engineering at the UFC Technology Center. He was Deputy Vice-Rector for Planning and Administration during the administration of Rector Henry de Holanda Campos (2015-2019) and won the *Latin America Silver Award* in 2016 (Reimagine Education, University of Pennsylvania) in Innovation in Higher Education.

<sup>12</sup> The *Programa Future-se* involved three axes: I – management, governance and entrepreneurship, II – research and innovation and III – internationalization (Ministry of Education [MEC], 2019).

It is important to highlight that, in a neoliberal context, internationalization is used as an instrument to prospect resources for universities (Garcia & Gussi, 2023). In May 2022, a Cooperation Agreement was signed between UFC and the United States Embassy to set up an *Education USA* office, an official body of the American government that provides information to higher education institutions about studies in the United States (USA).

Therefore, in 2023, at the beginning of the administration of Rector Custódio Luís Silva de Almeida (2023-2027), a new modification occurred in the administrative structure of the Pro-Rector's Office, which was renamed Pro-Rector's Office for Interinstitutional Relations<sup>13</sup>, maintaining the previous powers, in accordance with Resolution No. 37/CONSUNI, of August 23, 2023:

Art. 12. The Pro-Rector's Office of Interinstitutional Relations is responsible for promoting, coordinating and articulating actions for the development of the Institution based on the axes of Internationalization, Entrepreneurship and Innovation, with the following administrative structure: Administrative Secretariat, Administrative Support Division for the Confucius Institute, Internationalization Coordination, Entrepreneurship and Innovation Coordination, Interinstitutional Relations Coordination, Projects and Partnerships Coordination, Technology Park (UFC, 2023, p. 1).

In this change, it is observed that internationalization actions are once again restricted to a Coordination Office, now linked to a Pro-Rector's Office. In addition, the Technological Park (PARTEC) becomes part of the PROINTER structure, which aims to strengthen relations between universities, governments and companies.

These transformations that have occurred at PROINTER show how the idea of internationalization is changing, moving from a principle as a form of institutional legitimacy to being an instrument for prospecting resources as a budgetary 'solution' in times of fiscal austerity under Bolsonarism (2019-2022). In this way, internationalization, in the sense of solidarity cooperation, is losing materiality.

It is observed that the desire to be increasingly international has changed over time. Only in the 2018-2022 PDI did internationalization become an institutional principle. During this period, the term 'the universal through the regional' was redefined. The understanding of management, described in the PIN, was that:

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<sup>13</sup> During the administration of Rector Custódio Almeida, from 2023 to 2027, the Pro-Rector of Interinstitutional Relations and Vice-Rector was Professor Diana Cristina Silva de Azevedo, who holds a degree, master's and doctorate in Chemical Engineering. She is affiliated with the Department of Chemical Engineering at the UFC Technology Center and conducts research in Adsorption and Separation Processes.

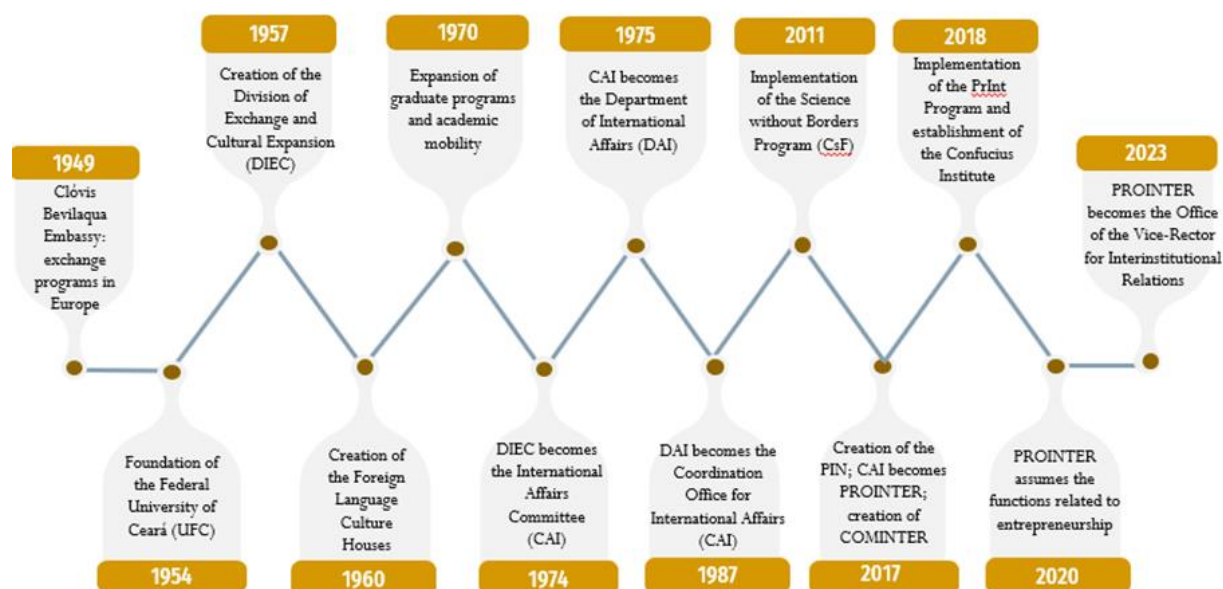
[...] to achieve international standards, we need to foster our contributions that are already internationally visible for their excellence. In another sense, it is necessary to seek international partnerships to develop new regional potentials, generating high-impact knowledge and solutions to the State's problems (UFC, 2017c, p. 2).

The historical trajectory presented here makes us understand that the internationalization of higher education is not only an academic movement, but, above all, a political one. This is because these actions are guided by an idea of internationalization that varies according to the configuration of the State, the games of interests within the scope of power relations, the cultural universes and the political agendas of the different institutional agents responsible for thinking and implementing these policies at the University (Carvalho & Gussi, 2011). This is the institutional arena in which the internationalization policy was constituted at UFC.

## THE PATHS OF INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF CEARÁ

The timeline in Figure 10 shows the main milestones in the process of establishing an internationalization policy at UFC:

**Figure 9** – Milestones of UFC's internationalization policy



Source: Elaborated by the author (2024).

It is clear that the desire to be international arose long before the foundation of the University, as was seen with the trip made by the Clóvis Beviláqua Embassy in 1949, when students from the Faculty of Law visited Europe in order to get to know its universities and cultural centers. From then on, the formation of UFC was based on European education and culture.

In an attempt to expand its borders, UFC adopted as a guideline for its educational policy the philosophy 'the universal through the regional', instituted by the first rector of UFC, Prof. Martins Filho, which, for him, meant "[...] giving prevalence to the study of the regional as a means of reaching the universal" (UFC, 1966, p. 8).

Despite being guided by a motto that expresses a vision in which the regional prevails over the universal, it is observed that UFC, like other universities in the Global South, was born within a Eurocentric scientific perspective, supported by the assumption of universality, that is, what concerns one part of the world, Europe, is valid for the rest, in this case, Ceará.

From Mignolo's (2003) perspective, this occurs because European local knowledge and stories were and are seen as global projects based on a narrative that situated and situates Europe as a point of reference and arrival. Within this Eurocentric perspective, the Houses of Foreign Cultures were created in the 1960s, with the purpose of teaching European languages and cultures at UFC.

During the period that included the military regime in Brazil, from 1964 to 1985, in addition to the University Reform of 1968, which imported North American technical education to Brazil, the UFC was forced to seek financing from international organizations in order to fulfill its plans, resorting to the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), thus generating economic dependence of the USA.

From 1990 onwards, with the process of globalization and the adoption of neoliberalism in Latin American countries, internationalization gained prominence in educational policies because it involved the relationship between universities and countries. However, during this period, UFC's international relations coordinated by CAI were focused on the University's relations with foreign institutions, through mobility programs, especially PEC-G, and agreements with foreign universities (Garcia, 2020).

It was in the 2000s, when the Brazilian government developed policies aimed at promoting the internationalization of HEIs, that universities were encouraged to institutionalize them. During this period, UFC's international relations underwent successive and accelerated transformations. The implementation of the CsF Program between 2012 and 2017 increased UFC's academic mobility rate, especially to the USA and European countries, and raised awareness among the academic community about internationalization, encouraging UFC to structure itself in order to implement the policies proposed by the Federal Government (Garcia, 2020).

In structural terms, shortly after the creation of UFC, the Division of Exchange and Cultural Expansion (DIEC) was established in 1957, linked to the Department of Education and Culture (DEC). In 1974, the 'International Affairs Commission' was implemented, linked to the Office of the Vice-Rector for Extension (PREX), which adopted the name 'Department of International Affairs' (DAI) the following year. In 1987, the DAI became the Office of the Coordinator of International Affairs (CAI), linked to the Office of the Rector, remaining in this position for 30 years, until, in 2017, it was transformed into the Office of the Vice-Rector for International Relations (PROINTER), which was a milestone in the institutionalization of an internationalization policy at the University by becoming a unit with greater administrative autonomy and its own cost center.

In 2020, the Office of the Vice-Rector took on new responsibilities focused on entrepreneurship and innovation. In 2023, the Office of the Vice-Rector was renamed as Interinstitutional Relations, and internationalization was no longer a priority in institutional policy. With this change, internationalization activities were once again conducted by a coordination office linked to the Office of the Vice-Rector.

These changes in the administrative structure responsible for conducting the University's internationalization policy reveal, in a certain way, the meanings that internationalization assumes in different administrations and historical periods, moving from a sociocultural perspective to a market perspective. As can be seen from Figure 10, this trajectory is not linear but moves in the social space and is not linked only to one subject, but to social subjects or institutions (Gussi, 2008).

The analysis of the historical trajectory of UFC's internationalization policy highlights a management focused on relations with countries in the Global North, especially the USA, such as cooperation agreements like the Alliance for Progress, the MEC-USAID agreement, mobility during the CsF Program and, more recently, the installation of the *Education USA Office* in 2022.

In view of the above, it is understood that, in its 70 years of existence, despite wanting to focus on its region, on the regional, the international relations policy established by the UFC's Senior Administration has historically shown a tendency to submit to a subservient power structure. On this issue, Laisner and Pavarina (2022, p. 29) understand that it is

[...] essential to construct a theoretical interpretation of the international dimension of Higher Education in Latin America, which can constitute a model to move away from patterns aimed at subordinate and dependent international integration, which references and reproduces, for the most part, authors and ideas from outside the region, in favor of a critical and dialogical, but autonomous model.

To this end, from the perspective of a new regionalism, Paikin et al. (2016) point out the need, among others, to introduce an agenda of regional policies aimed at stimulating development with social inclusion; to promote cooperative-solidarity ties and the reduction of intra-regional asymmetries; and to expand relations with countries of the 'Global South'. This involves enabling institutional thinking, in the terms of Douglas (1998), with an emphasis on the regional.

## FINAL REMARKS

Based on Douglas' (1998) propositions on 'how institutions think' and Gussi's (2008) notion of a policy trajectory, this article aimed to analyze the process of establishing the internationalization policy at UFC in different historical periods. In addition, it sought to construct the historical trajectory of UFC's internationalization policy, identifying the policies and strategies adopted by the Senior Administration of the Federal University of Ceará over time.

To achieve the proposed objectives, a methodological analysis of institutional documents produced by UFC management since its foundation until 2023 was carried out. Throughout the research, it was possible to perceive how much these documents express and materialize disputes, classifications and discourses that construct an institutional thought (Douglas, 1998) around internationalization at a given time.

The bulletins produced during the University's founding serve as a valuable documentary source. Reading them feels like embarking on a journey through time, as they not only illustrate the institution's development but also preserve memories of UFC's early efforts in establishing international relations.

The documentary analysis showed that, between the 1950s and 1960s, the UFC's international activities consisted mainly of visits by foreign government representatives, the establishment of cooperation agreements with North American and European institutions, and the teaching of foreign languages. From the 1970s onwards, academic mobility intensified, especially for teachers who went abroad to specialize. In the 2000s, specifically from 2011 onwards, with the creation of the CsF Program by the Dilma Rousseff government (2011-2016), there was an induction into the UFC's internationalization process, mainly in the increase of the academic mobility rates of students, including undergraduate students.

The management of UFC's internationalization policy has evolved continuously since the University's founding, with significant changes occurring in 2017 following the establishment of the Office of the Vice-Rector for International Relations. These changes were not only structural, but also affected the meanings attributed by UFC's Senior Management to internationalization, which has been adopting market principles over the last few years.

In short, UFC's internationalization process has undergone successive transformations caused both by aspects internal to the institution, such as changes in management, different management agendas and political motivations, and by external agents, such as demands from international organizations, changes in governments, globalization of the economy, etc.

Thus, it is understood that it is not possible to analyze the internationalization process of a university without considering it as an institution that is part of a socio-historical process, constituted in specific spaces and times based on disputes and power relations that are not exhausted there. This makes us understand that the internationalization of higher education consists of a movement that is not only academic-institutional, but, above all, political.

The reflections presented here encourage us to re-signify the motto 'the universal through the regional' in the context of the institutional policy of internationalization, placing the regional as a priority over the universal, as proposed by the rector Martins Filho when he said that "[...] the university must turn to itself, seeking to know what it is, why it was created and what it exists for" (Martins Filho, 1965, p. 40). One of the possibilities is the establishment of a Latin American integrationist thought that enables the construction of its own knowledge, committed to the needs and problems of our peoples.

From this new perspective, it is necessary to expand the studies initiated here, seeking to understand how institutional subjects understand and resignify the internationalization policy instituted by the Senior Administration at UFC, revealing the place of the regional in the universal for other subjects and in different areas of knowledge at the University.

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