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Contributions of public procurement practices to sustainability: a case study at the University of International Integration of Afro-Brazilian Lusofonia (Unilab)

Contribuições das práticas de compras públicas para a sustentabilidade: um estudo de caso na Universidade da Integração Internacional da Lusofonia Afro-Brasileira (Unilab)

Contribuciones de las prácticas de contratación pública a la sostenibilidad: un estudio de caso en la Universidad de Integración Internacional de la Lusofonia Afrobrasileña (Unilab)

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KEYWORDS

Public Procurement.
Higher Education
Institutions.
Sustainable Logistics
Master Plan (PLS).
Sustainability.

Abstract: Public procurement plays a crucial role in promoting sustainability within public institutions, especially universities. This study aims to analyze the contributions of public procurement practices at the University of International Integration of Afro-Brazilian Lusophony (Unilab) to sustainability. A case study was conducted at the Coordination of Bids, Contracts and Assets (CLCP) of the university, using a qualitative approach with three data sources: documentary analysis, interviews with those involved in the procurement process, and direct observation. Despite the inclusion of sustainability criteria in the bidding processes, participants perceive these practices as superficial, and their real impact on sustainability was questioned. Furthermore, the absence of a Sustainable Logistics Master Plan (PLS) and the exclusive reliance on the Annual Procurement Plan (PCA) were identified as major limitations. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by universities in incorporating sustainability into their procurement and highlights the need for strategic approaches, such as the PLS, to improve sustainability outcomes.



PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Compras Públicas.
Instituições de Ensino Superior.
Plano Diretor de Logística Sustentável (PLS).
Sustentabilidade.

Resumo: As compras públicas desempenham um papel crucial na promoção da sustentabilidade dentro das instituições públicas, especialmente as universidades. Este estudo tem como objetivo analisar as contribuições das práticas de compras públicas na Universidade da Integração Internacional da Lusofonia Afro-Brasileira (Unilab) para a sustentabilidade. Foi realizado um estudo de caso na Coordenação de Licitações, Contratos e Patrimônio (CLCP) da universidade, utilizando uma abordagem qualitativa com três fontes de dados: análise documental, entrevistas com os envolvidos no processo de compras e observação direta. Apesar da inclusão de critérios de sustentabilidade nos processos de licitação, os participantes percebem essas práticas como superficiais, e seu impacto real na sustentabilidade foi questionado. Além disso, a ausência de um Plano Diretor de Logística Sustentável (PLS) e a dependência exclusiva do Plano de Contratações Anual (PCA) foram identificadas como grandes limitações. Este estudo contribui para uma compreensão mais profunda dos desafios enfrentados pelas universidades na incorporação da sustentabilidade em suas compras e destaca a necessidade de abordagens estratégicas, como o PLS, para melhorar os resultados sustentáveis.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Contratación Pública.
Instituciones de Educación Superior.
Plan Maestro de Logística Sostenible (PLS).
Sostenibilidad.

Resumen: La contratación pública desempeña un papel crucial en la promoción de la sostenibilidad dentro de las instituciones públicas, especialmente las universidades. Este estudio tiene como objetivo analizar las contribuciones de las prácticas de contratación pública en la Universidad de Integración Internacional de la Lusofonia Afrobrasileña (Unilab) a la sostenibilidad. Se realizó un estudio de caso en la Coordinación de Licitaciones, Contratos y Bienes (CLCP) de la universidad, utilizando un enfoque cualitativo con tres fuentes de datos: análisis documental, entrevistas a los involucrados en el proceso de compras y observación directa. A pesar de la inclusión de criterios de sostenibilidad en los procesos de licitación, los participantes perciben estas prácticas como superficiales y se ha cuestionado su impacto real en la sostenibilidad. Además, se identificaron como principales limitaciones la ausencia de un Plan Maestro de Logística Sostenible (PLS) y la dependencia exclusiva del Plan Anual de Contratación (PCA). Este estudio contribuye a una comprensión más profunda de los desafíos que enfrentan las universidades al incorporar la sostenibilidad en sus adquisiciones y destaca la necesidad de enfoques estratégicos, como PLS, para mejorar los resultados sostenibles.

Introduction

Public Administration plays an important role in sustainable development due to its breadth and capacity of influencing the market in which it is inserted. This is given since the government creates laws and public policies, be it in the federal, municipal or state sphere. Furthermore, it is also a wide-scale customer hiring a great number of services and products involving a large sum of money (Araújo & Teixeira, 2018). Hence, governmental purchases using socio environmental criteria are relevant for promoting in the market a great support for the offering of products/services that meet such criteria in addition to serving as an example for other organizations (Betiol et al., 2012).

Public procurement in Brazil involves a consumption of resources which revolves around 10% to 15% of the yearly GDP, being made in 2022 a number of 2.236.835 acquisition of items, attaining the total hiring value of about R\$ 254,9 billion (Cabral & Castro, 2020; Ministry of Economy, 2023). Such figures highlight the importance of public procurement in the economy and its ability to stimulate productive sectors of goods and services. In this context, Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP) becomes a relevant public policy which generates positive outcomes in the search for a society valuing cost-effectiveness, social justice and, above all, environmental protection.

The SSP are important tools when seeking sustainable development in governmental bodies, characterized by the inclusion of sustainability criteria in the process of acquisition of goods and services (Alencastro, 2014; Justen Filho, 2012; Meneguzzi, 2011). Among the Public Administration entities, universities occupy a strategic position given that their primary regulatory functions (teaching, research, and extension) promote compliance with the legislation through good practices, especially sustainable public procurement. (Santana, 2015).

Santos (2018), after carrying out bibliographical research on environmental

sustainability in Brazilian universities, concluded that there is a vast theoretical approach; however, still a small number of studies with a practical application of the topic, and, therefore, recommended the conduction of future research focusing on this sustainable practice in Higher Education Institutions.

Adding up to that, the authors Rohrich and Takahashi (2019) highlight the importance of studies mapping the university practices when investigating the profile of environmental sustainability research in Brazilian Higher Education Institutions (IES) through a bibliometric-analysis study.

In front of the variety of theorists on practice theories, in the present study, it will be used the understandings of the authors Shove, Pantzar, and Watson (2012) about which practice is defined as a routined behaviour which consists in three interdependent elements by themselves: materials, competences and meanings. Materials are formed by objects, tools, infrastructure and the human body itself, that is, they are tangible resources used by individuals. Competencies are composed of incorporated knowledge and abilities concerning everything that individuals understand about what they do. In turn, meanings are cultural conventions, expectations, and socially-shared meanings, in other words, the importance attributed by the individuals to their participation (Medeiros, 2020; Shove, Pantzar & Watson, 2012). This way, inspired by the literature, the present research will attempt to link the topic of sustainable practices in universities with public procurement, searching for better understanding of how it is being performed.

To carry out this analysis, Unilab was selected as an object of study due to its singular role as a federal public university, compromised with the promotion of sustainable practices according to their institutional guidelines (Rodrigues, 2021). Additionally, the university aims to foster the regional development and the cultural, scientific, and educational exchange, aligned with its mission to graduate professionals and citizens capable of contributing to the integration between Brazil and

the countries belonging to the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP), especially those in Africa (Diógenes & Aguiar, 2013).

Such characteristics make Unilab one relevant scenario for the analysis of sustainable public procurement practices since they reflect its capacity of leadership in Brazil and in the CPLP countries by the example of the implementation of policies articulating theory and practice in a consistent manner. In this sense, following the perspective that Higher Education Institutions (HEI) should portray what they teach in their actions (Careto & Vendeirinho, 2003), investigating the practice of sustainable public procurement in Unilab is understood as of great importance.

Based on the content exposed, the present study has as a main goal to analyse contributions of public procurement practices executed by the University of International Integration of Afro-Brazilian Lusophony (Unilab) in the promotion of sustainability. For such, the specific objectives are: verifying Unilab's strategic actions aimed at sustainable public procurement practices and identifying the public employees' perception around the impact of sustainable public procurement on sustainability promotion.

Research is justified by the necessity to understand the current situation regarding the inclusion of sustainability criteria in public university bids. Thus, it is expected that this work contributes to the academic area by stimulating debates centered on the sustainable public procurement practices and collaborating with the advancement of organizational studies, filling the gaps of the environmental and managerial dimensions of the practice theory.

Theoretical elements of the research

The damage generated in the ecosystems and verified by numerous researchers led to a greater interest by part of modern society in seeking solutions targeting balance between economic development and the environment. This way,

historically, it is verified that several nations came to use sustainable management agendas, establishing criteria to provide sustainable development within the respective public administrations. One concern seen in most of these nations was to take advantage of its purchasing power in their institutions, so the market is stimulated to develop sustainable practices. (Cabral & Castro, 2020; Lindfors & Ammenberg, 2021).

Governments make an expressive amount of yearly procurement, representing between 15% and 30% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in a single country and, specifically, in the case of Brazil, it is equivalent to around 10% to 15% of the annual GDP (Rosset & Finger, 2016). Because of these outstanding figures, actions in the area of Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP) end up being impactful in the sense of instigating and leading the market to adopt sustainable criteria for manufacturing goods and offering services (Calvacanti et al., 2017).

Literature highlights the role of the government, with authors like Betiol et al. (2012), Souza and Ventura (2020), Valente (2011) and Vieira and Puerari (2021), to promote actions aimed at Public Procurement for sustainable development. This relevance is supported by data from the Purchasing Panel, which evidence the representativeness of public procurement in both volume and financial impact. Only in 2022, the Federal Institutions of Higher Education (IFES) in Ceará - UFC, IFCE, UFCA, and Unilab - acquired 8.102 items, summing up to an amount of R\$ 405.610.280,54, which highlights the financial impact of these purchases (Ministry of Economy, 2023).

Bouwer et al. (2005) define the SPP as a tool used by the public sector to include environmental criteria in all phases of procurement, researching and choosing solutions with lower impact on the environment over the product life cycle and encouraging the distribution of environmental technologies and the development of ecologically-correct products. According to Lindfors and Ammenberg (2021), the SPPs are a tool capable of

stimulating purchases in favor of the environment and promoting innovations targeted at sustainability. In turn, Calvacanti et al. (2017) affirm that, in spite of the different designations used, the SPPs present a common purpose in every nation promoting them: to generate attitudes so that the usage of natural resources be as efficient as possible.

Cardoso and Chaves (2015) point out six principles of SPP which are essential to guide the successful implementation of these practices and promote good governance. Such principles were, based on the authors, developed by Marrakesh's task-forces, making use of a systemic step-by-step approach for the SPP development. This way, it stands out the fact that these principles are relevant for all the parts interested in public procurement and good governance and it is recommended that countries and organizations include in their respective policies and procurement practices (Cardoso & Chaves, 2015). The Principles of Sustainable Public Procurement previously mentioned are:

- Principle 1: Good public procurement is sustainable public procurement.
- Principle 2: The implementation of SPP necessitates leadership
- Principle 3: The SPPs contribute to expand the policy objectives.
- Principle 4: The SPPs engage every interested part.
- Principle 5: The implementation of SPPs is based on sensitive principles of organizational management.
- Principle 6: The SPPs monitor their results. (Cardoso & Chaves, 2015, p. 2-3).

Betioli et al. (2012) remind that appropriation management is an important activity for the success of any organization, whether it is from the public or private initiative, since they have a straightforward impact on reaching the institution goals. Within the perspective of the public sector, the author points out that the incorporation of sustainability during procurement management may contribute to the promotion of nationwide sustainable development, higher efficiency in public management and the collective wellbeing.

Thus, through an efficient management of Sustainable Public Procurement is possible to ensure meeting specific necessities providing several benefits, such as (Secretariat of Logistics and Information Technology, 2013):

- Promotion of socio environmental protection;
- Money saving when observing the costs associated with the life cycle of the product/service to be appropriated;
- Opportunity to promote innovation for the inclusive, green economy;
- Market movement, economy stimulus and competitiveness increase amongst companies in future markets, creating businesses and increasing the number of job titles;
- Promotion of local development;
- Improved products and services, bringing direct benefits to the population of public service users as a result of new ideas and market standards, which will enable service provision in a more effective and efficient way, and with a lower price.
- Scientific and technological findings resulting from innovation processes that might help resolve some of the main social challenges such as health and wellbeing, food safety, sustainable agriculture, clean and efficient energy, sustainable and integrated transportation, climate change and efficiency in the use of natural resources;
- Tool to enhance the government organizational efficiency, allowing an improved decision-making on procurement and appropriations;
- Reputational and image gains for actively acting in socio environmental protection;
- Compliance with the legislation;
- Attraction and engagement from collaborators who see socio environmental concern as a different factor;
- Increase in the local community's awareness on socio environmental themes (Secretariat of Logistics and Information Technology, 2013).

The initiatives of sustainable procurement

were introduced in countries as programs to adopt good environmental practices among which the access to information on sustainable products and services, legal mechanisms to ensure preference to sustainable products and public agents' qualification are (Cabral & Castro, 2020; Lindfors & Ammenberg, 2021). Literature presents some examples of countries which stood out in the

elaboration of guidelines about the SPPs, such as Japan, Sweden, United Kingdom, and Canada. (Biderman, Macedo, Monzoni & Mazon, 2008; Calvacanti et al., 2017).

Table 1 presents the benchmark countries regarding the area of Sustainable Public Procurement.

Table 1

Benchmark countries in Sustainable Public Procurement

Country	Reasons for pioneering
South Korea	One of the most advanced models in terms of SSP monitoring.
Germany	A reference in the use of environmental labelling systems
The United States	Policy developed with social meaning in addition to the environment.
Sweden	Actions of public employees' qualification and dialogue with the productive sector.
The Netherlands	Plan and Action established in 2003 prior to most of the other European countries.
Japan	Pioneer in the creation of a SPP global network.
Portugal	Possesses tools for monitoring the benefits brought by SPP.
Spain	Policy supported by specialized institutions for the criteria definition of products and services and concerned with local procurement.
The United Kingdom	Use of life cycle thinking for the establishment of SPP-related criteria.

Source: Adapted from Calvacanti et al. (2017, p. 14).

Brazil is signatory to several international agreements and conventions, such as the 2030 Agenda for the Sustainable Development Goals (ODS) and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) which tackle the promotion of sustainable development and responsible environmental practices (Calvacanti et al., 2017). In this scenario, experiences carried out in other countries prove the efficiency of SPP practices as a tool to pursue a more sustainable development. Seeking to fulfill the assumed international compromises and adequate the national legal system with these agreements, the Brazilian Federal Government has been mobilized to establish several norms, practices and guidelines for the implementation of SPP (Souza & Ventura, 2020).

To sum up, it is emphasized that Sustainable Public Procurement represents a valuable opportunity for Brazilian universities as they are important tools for reducing the negative impacts caused by the institution on the environment as well as they promote a culture of conscious consumption and valuable environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainability (Lavor &

Turatti, 2021; Soares & Deglinomeni; Rosa, 2021; Souza & Ventura, 2020).

Methodological elements of the research

The present work is a study case which was carried out through field research using a qualitative approach. The research was conducted in the Coordination of Bids, Contracts and Assets (CLCP), unit which is part of the Dean of Administration and Infrastructure (PROADI) of the University of International Integration of Afro-Brazilian Lusophony (UNILAB), located in the Liberdade Campus, in the city of Redenção (Ceará)

Unilab was built with the mission of graduating professionals and citizens that contribute with the integration between Brazil and other member-states of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP), especially the African countries, in addition to promoting local development and the cultural, scientific and educational exchange (Diógenes & Aguiar, 2013). Therefore, Unilab was institutionalized on July 20th, 2010, through the

Law nº 12.289 and has the legal nature of a federal authority while linked to the Minister of Education and located in the Maciço do Baturité (Ceará) and in the Recôncavo Baiano (Bahia)

The University of International Integration of Afro-Brazilian Lusophony (UNILAB), according to Rodrigues (2021), contains in its guidelines the primary challenge of promoting sustainable practices. By doing so, the university has developed different actions, as presented in this section. Firstly, the 2022 Management Report affirms that Unilab has been encouraging the use of environmental sustainability criteria during the stages of appropriation of goods planning and service acquisition, conducting analysis and adjustment of the Terms of Reference and Public Notice, in accordance with the National Guidelines of Sustainable Biddings by AGU. Moreover, Unilab has improved awareness and encouragement of their Demanding Units for the inclusion of items related to environmental sustainability in its requests (UNILAB, 2023a).

The key strategy in qualitative research to enhance reliability of study descriptions and analyses is the triangulation involving independent research sources, that is, sources that do not keep mutual interactions (Yin, 2015). This way, following the suggestion of the author Yin (2015) for the case study, making use of three data sources: documentary analysis of files and other available official documents referring to the process of Unilab's sustainable procurement; the interviews with managers, auctioneers and employees directly involved in any of the purchasing process stages, using a semistructured scripted questionnaire; and the direct observation, in this case, focusing on actions took towards the practice of sustainable procurement.

Flick (2009) claims that triangulation overcomes the limitation of using only one method. Each of the sources, during triangulation, offers a unique perspective, contributing to the construction of a more thorough analysis. The documental analysis allows understanding the formal marks and the institutional guidelines; the interviews shed light on the public employees'

perceptions and experiences, reflecting the practical implementation; and the direct observation provides contextual data on the interactions and behavior during the purchasing process (Flick, 2009; Yin, 2015).

However, it is important to point out the limitations concerning each one of these techniques. Documental analysis, for instance, can be limited by the availability and quality of the documents in addition to not conveying layers of the process which can only be revealed through human interaction. As for the interviews, though they provide a deep understanding of the participant's perception, they can be influenced by subjective factors and by the way questions are formulated. Lastly, even though direct observation proposes a view of practices in real time, it can be affected by the presence of the researcher, leading to possible distortions of the analysed behaviour. This way, triangulation of these three different data sources seeks out to mitigate these limitations, providing a more robust and balanced analysis of results.

The script used in the interview was semistructured, which was elaborated grounded on the understanding of the practice theorists Shove, Pantzar, and Watson (2012) with means of identifying Unilab's contributions for sustainability procurement practices. A total of 11 interviews were conducted, between the months of March and July 2023. Participants opted to participate in the interview during home-office working days and, therefore, requested that the interview occur remotely via Google Meet.

The phase of direct observation took place in the CLCP rooms, which makes it important to note that they are two sites located in different campuses (Liberdade Campus and Palmares Campus). The direct observation was registered through pictures and videos along with the notes in a field activity journal and the description of the observed reality.

The subjects in this research are practice "holders", "practitioners" or "actors", designated by Reckwitz (2002) and Schatzki (2001; 1996). Thus, taking into consideration Shove, Pantzar and

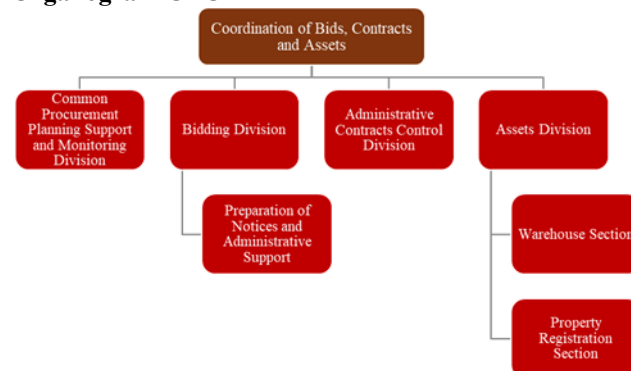
Watson's (2012, p. 22) understanding that practitioners are those who "reproduce simultaneously practices in which they are engaged and elements that these practices are made of", the criteria for selection of the research subjects were employees who work directly in any of the stages of the purchasing process or assigned to the Unilab Coordination of Bids, Contracts and Assets (CLCP).

Both male and female subjects were sought in the group of public employees at the university who met the following criteria: (1) accepted to participate in the research; (2) assigned to the Coordination of Bids, Contracts and Assets (CLCP); and (3) worked directly in any of the steps of the procurement process of the University of International Integration of Afro-Brazilian Lusophony (Unilab). This way, the objective of this selection was to identify the constituent elements of practice (materials, meaning and competence), according to Shove, Pantzar, and Watson (2012), and to learn the particularities of the Sustainable Public Procurement in Unilab.

The CLCP is a unit of the Dean of Administration and Infrastructure (PROADI) of Unilab, which according to the Ordinance GR nº 193/2021, is responsible for the purchasing activities, elaboration of Notices and its indexes, as well as operationalization of bids; in addition to managing the university assets concerning Storeroom items, Movable and Immovable Property; and, finally, the monitoring of activities executed by managers and contractors (UNILAB, 2021). The organogram of the coordination is represented in Figure 1.

The CLCP staff is composed by 18 employees, being assigned in the following sub-units: - 02 faculty members in the Coordination; - 04 members in the Common Procurement Planning Support and Monitoring Division (DAPC); - 04 members in the Bidding Division (DILIC); - 03 members in the Administrative Contracts Control Division (DCCA); - 05 members in the Assets Division (DP) (UNILAB, 2023b).

Figure 1
Organogram CLCP



Source: Unilab (2023b).

In order to recruit participants for this study, each CLCP civil servant was spoken to individually to invite them to take part in the interview and to explain the research objectives in detail, clarifying the importance of their contributions to the development of the investigation. During this invitation, we tried to emphasize confidentiality and respect for individual opinions and experiences, but some civil servants chose not to take part in the research.

In the end, a total of 11 CLCP employees agreed and took part in the interviews, providing valuable information that significantly enriched the research.

The interviews were carried out with eleven civil servants of both genders who work at the same operational level and are directly involved in complementary stages of the contracting/purchasing process and are assigned to Unilab's Bids, Contracts and Assets Coordination (CLCP). To preserve the anonymity of the interviewees, their positions have not been revealed, and they have been identified with codes from 1 to 11 in the order in which the interviews were carried out (e.g. E1, E2 and others). Table 2 shows the profile of the Unilab employees who were interviewed.

The data collected was recorded digitally (photos and audio) and later transcribed to make up the empirical data, along with the notes and field diaries. After collecting the data, an analysis was carried out using the content analysis method in order to critically understand the data collected and categorize the content, with categories based

on Shove, Pantzar and Watson's (2012) Theory of Practice. Shove, Pantzar and Watson (2012) state that practice can be characterized as an established behaviour comprising three interconnected components: materials, competence and meanings.

Table 2

Interviewee's profile

Code	Gender	Age	Schooling	Time in the sector
E1	Male	58	Specialist	5 years
E2	Male	43	Incomplete university degree	4 years
E3	Female	34	Doctor	9 years
E4	Male	41	Specialist	5 years
E5	Male	35	Specialist	11 years
E6	Male	31	Specialist	3 years
E7	Female	56	Specialist	1 year
E8	Female	40	Master	8 years
E9	Female	31	Specialist	2 years
E10	Male	32	Specialist	5 years
E11	Female	37	Specialist	5 years
Average		39,8 years		5,3 years

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

For Bardin (2011), content analysis is a type of analysis in which the researcher goes beyond the apparent reality and superficial statements, seeking to understand the meanings behind the discourse. Corroborating this, Severino (1996) defines it as a set of techniques designed to analyze communications, whether oral, written, images or gestures, with the aim of describing, analyzing and interpreting the information found. Bardin (2011) adds that content analysis is divided into three major chronological phases: pre-analysis; exploration of the material; and treatment of the results, inference and interpretation.

Following Bardin's (2011) understanding, data analysis was divided into three major stages. The initial stage, called pre-analysis, was the organization phase, in which the collected material was systematically organized and the first reading of the documentation, interviews and field diary was carried out, in an attempt to identify common aspects. In the material exploration stage, the actual analysis and categorization of the content was carried out. Finally, in the treatment of results, inference and interpretation phase, a critical relationship was established between the data obtained and the bibliographic sources previously

consulted, thus allowing for a more contextualized and robust analysis of the research results.

Therefore, the data treatment and analysis adopted in this research followed a structured and rigorous approach, in accordance with the theoretical and methodological precepts established by the reference authors, thus giving substance and relevance to the findings of this study. Thus, it should be emphasized that the detailed analysis of the data collected was not restricted to a mere isolated evaluation, but instead was carried out with due contextualization

Analysis and discussion of results

This section presents a detailed analysis of the results obtained from the survey of eleven civil servants assigned to the Coordination of Bids, Contracts and Assets (CLCP), a unit of the Dean of Administration and Infrastructure (PROADI) of the University of the International Integration of Afro-Brazilian Lusophony (UNILAB). The CLCP is responsible for managing and coordinating the university's bidding processes, contracts and assets, and its role is important in ensuring transparency, efficiency and legality in the purchases and contracts made by the university (UNILAB, 2022).

The CLCP is composed by four (4) sub-units that work in an integrated manner: the Division for Support and Monitoring of the Planning of Common Contracts (DAPC), the Bidding Division (DILIC), the Administrative Contracts Control Division (DCCA) and the Assets Division (DP). In addition to drawing up, publicizing and updating the university's annual contracting calendar, the DAPC is responsible for carrying out critical analyses of procurement/contracting processes, as well as monitoring and advising on these processes, including the conduct of direct contracting (waiver of bidding and unenforceability) (UNILAB, 2021).

The Bids Division (DILIC) is responsible for conducting bidding procedures, from the preparation of invitations to tender to the approval of the result and has to follow up on any requests for objections, clarifications and appeals. The

DCCA manages the contracts signed by Unilab, ensuring compliance with the deadlines, clauses and conditions agreed. Finally, the Assets Division is responsible for controlling and inventorying the university's assets, as well as managing disposal, transfer and write-off processes (UNILAB, 2021).

The four CLCP sub-units are divided into two rooms on different campuses of the university, one on the Liberdade campus, at Avenida da Abolição, nº 03, in Redenção, where the CLCP Coordinator and three divisions are located: DAPC, DILIC and DCCA. The other room is the Heritage Division, which is located on the Palmares campus, on Rodovia CE-060, Km 51, s/n, in Acarape. Figure 2 shows each of the rooms and their respective campuses.

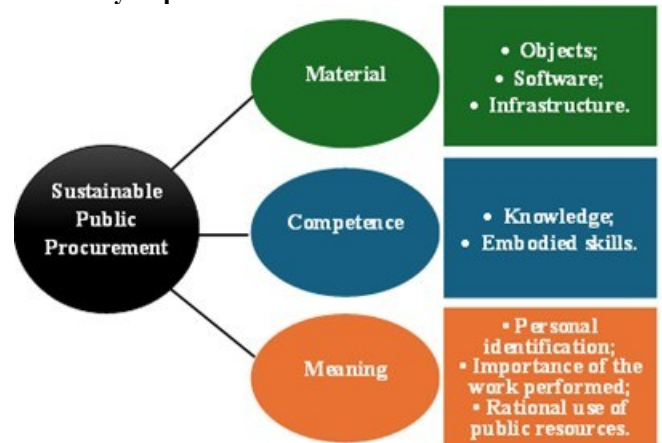
Figure 2
Coordination of Bids, Contracts and Assets



Source: Research data.

The constituent elements of sustainable public procurement practices at Unilab were identified using the Practice Theory approach outlined by the authors Shove, Pantzar and Watson (2012), who consider practice to be a routinized behavior made up of interdependent material elements, competencies and meanings. The elements identified in this research include the material, consisting of objects, software and infrastructure; the competence, encompassing knowledge and incorporated skills; and the meaning, which involves personal identification, the importance of the work carried out and the rational use of public resources. Figure 3 summarizes these elements identified in the research.

Figure 3
Summary of practice elements



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Before the aforementioned information, in the present section, we proceed to analyse the contributions of Unilab's sustainable public procurement practices. It is worth noting that Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP) is defined as the inclusion of sustainable criteria in acquisitions made by public entities, prioritizing products and services with lower environmental impact, respecting labor rights, promoting social equality and contributing to the local economy (BETIOL et al., 2012). All over the world, governments are acknowledging the SPP transformative power as a tool to attain sustainable development goals to the same extent that they are demonstrating leadership in the pursuit of sustainable solutions (Cavalcanti et al., 2017).

The SPP implementation in the context of the Brazilian Public Administration is grounded on the legal basis of the article 3, of the Law nº 8.666/93, which stipulates that tenders must ensure several aspects, including the promotion of nationwide sustainable development. The focus on sustainability is also given by the Normative Instruction nº 1/2010 which establishes criteria to be considered in the appropriation of goods and hiring of services or construction works in the area of federal public administration; and by the Decree nº 7.746/2012 which determines criteria, practices and general guidelines to be followed for sustainable hirings carried out by the direct, autarchical and foundational public federal

administration as well as dependent state-owned companies (Valente, 2011).

The University of International Integration of Afro-Brazilian Lusophony (Unilab) is subjected to the legal system of sustainable public procurement established in Brazil, which implies an intrinsic obligation to adhere the principles and regulations as well as the inclusion of sustainable criteria in the acquisition of goods and services. In this context, the affirmation of the university's commitment to using sustainable criteria for the stages of procurement planning was verified in the Unilab 2022 Management Report. The university states, in its Management report, that it carries out analysis and adjustment of the Terms of Reference and Public Notice, in compliance with AGU's National Guide to Sustainable Bidding, in addition to spreading awareness and encouraging its Demanding Units for the inclusion of environmental sustainable related items in its requests.

The AGU's National Guide to Sustainable Bidding, cited by the Unilab's Management Report, refers to an instrument whose objective is to guide the organs belonging to the federal public administration to incorporate environmental, social and economic sustainability criteria in their bidding and hiring processes (Clare et al., 2023). The use of the Guide is widely recommended by entities such as the Federal Court of Accounts and the Union's General Counsel as presented respectively below:

204. The book aims to offer legal certainty to public managers in the implementation of socio-environmental practices, in accordance with Article 3 of Law 8.666/1993 (Brazil, 1993). The guide presents sustainability criteria, practices and guidelines and provides guidance on planning and assessing the need for procurement. (Acórdão nº 1056/2017 - Plenário-TCU, 2017)

The advisory role in the analysis of public procurement processes should encourage the use of documentary checklists, the National Guide to Sustainable Bidding and the drafts of public notices, contracts, agreements and agreements,

available on the websites of the Federal Attorney General's Office and the National Treasury Attorney General's Office. (CGU, 2016, p.30)

In order to deepen the information provided in the Unilab's 2022 Management Report (UNILAB, 2023a), the public employees were questioned about the use of sustainability criteria and the practices of SPP. The interviewees confirmed the utilization of sustainability criteria and the AGU's National Guide to Sustainable Bidding:

Here at Unilab we use sustainability criteria as a rule, in our terms of reference and in our preliminary technical studies. There are specific fields for this. So there's no tender that forgets to at least mention the sustainability criteria for that contract. There may be contracts where no sustainability criteria are identified. And then they write it down in the terms and conditions saying that a term wasn't identified. But today we have various guides on the internet, we use the AGU's National Guide to Sustainable Procurement a lot. There's this AGU Guide to Sustainable Bidding, which has practical examples, you know? (E4)

(...) the person puts in some sustainability criteria, because there's a section in the terms of reference that talks about sustainability criteria (...). (...) there's an AGU Guide. It's a Guide to sustainable bidding by the federal government. This guide has tables of some types of product that accept sustainability criteria. (E8)

The insertion of sustainability criteria narrated by the interviewees E4 and E8 occur in the internal step of the bid, more specifically in the technical specifications of the object in the term of reference/preliminary technical study. According to what Justen Filho (2012) established, the tenders are composed of an internal and an external phase, which the internal phase is the procurement planning moment when the parameters guiding through the entire bidding process are outlined. It is during the internal phase that the adequate quantification and specification of the to-be-procured goods and services takes place, making up the bidding object. The choice of the bidding method and the elaboration of the

notice call for tenders also occur during this stage, influencing all the subsequent processes (Alencastro, 2014; Justen Filho, 2012)

Silva (2016) explains that the internal phase of bidding is an extremely important factor of the procurement success. It is recurrent that significant failures are observed in the process of procurement planning as the internal phase is not well executed due to managers having to meet Administration emergency demands. These failures are manifested under different ways, including, but not limited to, mistakes in the object specifications, quantity sizing in the case of those that do not meet real needs, and problems with the Public Notice requirements. Such misunderstandings and deficiencies are, unfortunately, frequent obstacles in the daily life of the purchasing manager and it is imperative that they are properly approached and overcome. (Silva, 2016).

The incise I of the article 40 of the Law nº 8.666/1993 determines that the Notice contains a clear, succinct description of the object, which allows the inclusion of sustainability requirements in a transparent and objective way (Brasil, 1993). Alencastro (2014) claims that this approach enables the bidders to understand the expectations of the Public Administration concerning sustainable aspects of procurement. It is important to highlight that, according to Meneguzzi (2011), the insertion of sustainability criteria should appear in the technical specifications of the notice, not as eligibility requirements once these criteria must be directly related to the characteristics of products and services to be procured so as to encourage the effective incorporation of sustainable practices in the execution of the contract.

The interviewees detailed that when the procurement processes are formalized and arrive at the Common Procurement Planning Support and Monitoring Division (DAPC), through the Electronic Information System (SEI), an analysis of what is up for bid is made and, in this moment, the possibility of including sustainability criteria is verified along with the demanding sector. The

mentioned demanding sector is the one responsible for the technical specifications which will be included in the notice, according to what Meneguzzi (2011) pointed out, and the verification of whether there is a possibility or not of including the sustainability criteria in the procurement process. At this point, the interviewees emphasize that the decision of including or not the sustainability criteria is exclusive of the demanding sector, as understood by the interviewees' statements, as follow:

(...) Whenever an item comes up that has sustainability issues developed, we point it out and inform you. (E2)

(...) The focus during our work is: does that tender, that contract, have items that address sustainability criteria? If it does, then OK. We're content with that. We don't criticize the sustainability item. We accept what the requester has raised, as he is the technician in the area, he is the one who will say. (...) if the requester thinks that it doesn't apply to Unilab, it won't apply. (E4)

The requesting sector uses the preliminary technical study, in which it will have to specify the characteristics of the product and also analyze the possible environmental impact of the product, with the treatment measure. However, this is the sole responsibility of the applicant. (E6)

Though the inclusion of sustainability criteria in the technical specification section of the notice is done by the technical sector, it was checked that the interviewees do not consider that its practices in the execution of sustainable public procurement impact significantly on sustainability. This perception, according to the servants, is linked to a predominantly operational action, in which sustainability criteria are treated as bureaucratic requirements and barely integrated to the strategic planning of the university. This way, even with the inclusion of sustainability criteria which have qualification on Sustainable Public Procurement and know how to act to demand it along with the suppliers who meet the criteria, and consider that

the lack of integration and strategic alignment of the actions limit the positive impact of these practices, making them superficial. Thus, to the employees, for several times, sustainability is seen as “merely a box to check in the checklist” as evidenced by the following statements:

I think we're still very immature when it comes to sustainability. Unilab is still using the general and very general legal approach, so I see that our job is not to make sustainability happen. We point out to the applicant when we see objects that can be included in the sustainability criteria. But I still find it very superficial. (E2)

In practice, we don't say that we're going to do a sustainable tender (laughs)... So I can't even say that I've ever worked on a sustainable tender and seen the results later at the university. We check the checklist to see if the sustainability criteria have been met and that's it. I think it's just something on the checklist, without any analysis of whether it's really going to have a positive impact on sustainability. (E3)

I see that the sustainability criteria are placed in most processes as a kind of standard text. And, another thing, these sustainability criteria are such a superficial “reading” that I don't see any change in the organization as a whole, I don't see the impact of our tenders on sustainability... I think that sustainability in tenders ends up being like a footnote in the day-to-day operations, just there to be mentioned, you know? (E8)

The point of view reported by the employees in which their practices do not significantly impact sustainability was best detailed by them, under the fact that they have studied the topic and have been familiar with the Triple Bottom Line Model (Elkington, 1997). This model recognizes the economic, social and environmental dimensions; and supports that the spread of sustainability in an entity occurs, primarily, through their economic capital, aggregating the financial, physical, human and intellectual capitals; social capital which encompasses initiatives related to quality of life and social responsibility; and natural capital, representing wealth supportive of the ecosystems and its resources, be it renewable or nonrenewable.

According to Marques, Santos, and Aragão (2020), the dimensions noted by Elkington (1997) are interdependent (do not act in an isolated form) and consist of a highlight classification in the literature in spite of the acknowledgement of other sustainable dimensions.

The current Unilab focus on the area of sustainable public procurement is plainly in compliance with the legislation and the case law, as observed by the interviewee E2: “Unilab is still using a very generalist and legal nature”. It is noteworthy that the interviewed faculty are experienced employees who work through different procurement stages, that is, since planning until the contract execution phase, a fact that allows the staff to have a more analytical view. This way, considering the insight proposed by Elkington (1997), the participants interviewed evaluate that during bidding practices what prevails more is a mechanized concern with whether including or not the already pre-elaborated sustainability criteria, which ends up neglecting a profound, innovative, and more strategic analysis on new forms of integrating sustainability in the hiring processes.

It was found, through documentary analysis, that Unilab has advanced in the process of absorption of the sustainability dimensions, developing multiple sustainability-related actions. However, actions driven by the university at a strategic level which focused on sustainable public procurement were not observed, pointing to its three dimensions: economic, social, and environmental. According to Marques, Santos, and Aragão (2020), in their study conducted in the Federal University of Ceará, it is necessary the realization of a strategic management able to articulate the organization's strategic goals with the sustainability dimensions in conjunction with being indispensable the improvement of a management control and assessment system as a means of maintaining a continuous monitoring between the planned and the executed.

Unilab does not yet have a sector at a strategic level which shows - among its attributions - planning, articulating, executing, and monitoring projects able to put into practice a more strategic

management in terms of sustainable public procurement, based on Elkington's (1997) three sustainability dimensions: economic, social and environmental. Such a reality is contrasted with Gazzoni et al's (2018) recommendation pointing that the policy of sustainable development must be an institutional context policy but developed at an operational level. Currently, the university possesses only an Energy Efficiency and Environmental Management Division (DEEGEA) created by means of the Rectory Ordinance n° 538, of July 14th 2022, which acts at the operational level and is subordinated to the Coordination of Infrastructure and Development (CIED).

The main goal of DEEGEA is to examine and assess potentialities for the reduction in construction expenses as well as to give suggestions in the context of environmental practices, waste management, and document regularization referent to the environmental permits and correlated procedures (UNILAB, 2023a). Nevertheless, by analysing the set of DEEGEA attributions, it can be noted that they are aimed only at the environmental dimension of sustainability (UNILAB, 2024), contrary to the understanding of the interdependence between dimensions of the Sustainability Triple Bottom Line Model by Elkington (1997). Another point is that the Division has only two active servants; which is a small number considering the university proportion and the multidisciplinary of sustainability. As a matter of fact, the university itself comments on the low quantity of employees in its website (UNILAB, 2024).

At a strategic level, through documentary analysis, it was found that Unilab has not instituted the Sustainable Logistics Master Plan (PLS), which is an essential tool of governance to establish hiring and logistics strategies in the entity. The PLS considers the goals and actions regarding sustainability criteria encompassing the economic, social, environmental and cultural dimensions. This absence in the university might compromise the alignment of the public procurement practices with the institutional goals in addition to limiting the integration of

sustainable policies to the university's strategic planning.

The elaboration and implementation of the PLS is determined by the Ordinance SEGES/ME n° 8.678, from July 19th 2021 and defines it as governance instruments for public hiring alongside other instruments such as: the Annual Hiring Plan, the Stock management policy, the Shared procurement policy, the Competence-based management, the Market interaction policy; the Risk management and preventive control; the Guidelines for contract management; and the Definition of the structure of the public procurement area. Those instruments, according to the sole paragraph of the article 6 of the Ordinance, must be aligned with each other, granted that their guidelines complement and enhance the results (Brasil, 2021).

The Ordinance mentioned, SEGES/ME n° 8.678/2021, reports on the public procurement governance in the context of Federal Public Administration. However, according to what was exposed by the interviewees, the only instrument used by UNILAB currently concerning strategic planning is the Annual Procurement Plan (PCA). The exclusive use of this instrument contrasts with the determination that governance mechanisms must be aligned with each other and that senior management should implement and maintain these instruments in an articulated manner (§1 of article 1 and sole paragraph of article 6 of the SEGES/ME Ordinance). Thus, it is believed that the sole use of the PCA restricts Unilab capacity to adopt a strategic approach to sustainable public procurement, making generation of comprehensive income difficult in the economic, social and environmental dimensions.

The Sustainable Logistics Master Plan must be vinculated to the entity's strategic plan and to the multi-annual plan (art. 9° of Ordinance 8.678/21) and orient the elaboration of the Annual Procurement Plan (PCA), the preliminary technical studies, the preliminary projects, the basic projects and the terms of reference of each procurement (art. 8°, § 1, I e II) (Brasil, 2021). As a governance tool, the PLS plays a crucial role in

the promotion of national sustainable development, being capable of creating new internal management paradigms and exert influence on the supplier's market (MGI, 2023). In this sense, in Unilab's case, the absence of a Sustainable Logistics Master Plan (PLS) and the sole use of an Annual Procurement Plan (PCA) puts into risk the implementation of governance in the practices of sustainable public procurement, restricting its outcomes in the promotion of national sustainable development in the economic, social and environmental dimensions.

Final Considerations

In view of the reflections presented throughout this work, the crucial role of Sustainable Public Procurement in achieving sustainable national development is evident, since the Public Administration, due to its large volume of purchases, by including sustainability criteria in the processes of acquiring and contracting goods and services, fosters the creation of public policies and not only encourages the production of sustainable goods and services in the market, but also serves as an example for other organizations, establishing a scenario conducive to the transformation of the market towards sustainability. Among public administration bodies, universities stand out because, through the development of their statutory teaching, research and extension functions, they have the capacity to influence the creation and dissemination of sustainable practices.

Universities stand out as key institutions in promoting sustainable development, and their relevance is highlighted due to their role in training future professionals and decision-makers and in providing information and knowledge, managing to promote awareness-raising actions at different levels, reaching teachers, staff, students, suppliers and the society around them. Realizing the relevance of the university in this scenario, the need arose to study sustainable practices in universities, since understanding them allows a new direction for policies of more sustainable

consumption practices in the Public Administration

This context gave rise to the question that started this research: What are the contributions of public procurement practices at the University for the International Integration of Afro-Brazilian Lusophony (Unilab) to sustainability? The decision was therefore made to carry out a case study at Unilab's Coordination of Bids, Contracts and Assets (CLCP), with a qualitative approach, in which three sources of data were used: documentary analysis of files and other official documents made available relating to Unilab's sustainable procurement process; interviews with managers, auctioneers and civil servants directly involved in one of the stages of the purchasing process, using a semi-structured script of questions; and direct observation, in this case focusing on the actions of those involved in the practice of sustainable procurement.

According to the interviewees, the Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP) carried out at Unilab is designed to comply with what is stipulated in the Brazilian legal system, as well as Brazilian principles and regulations related to sustainability in the procurement of goods and services, including the updates to the New Bidding Law (Law No. 14.133, of April 1, 2021). The Advocacy General of the Union's (AGU) National Guide to Sustainable Bidding is mentioned as an important and frequently used tool. Unilab's 2022 management report confirms the university's commitment to incorporating sustainability criteria into the planning stages of procurement.

One point to note is that during the interviews, civil servants pointed out that although sustainability criteria are included in the bidding processes, the practices are still perceived as superficial and their impact on sustainability is questioned. This perception is probably related to the fact that Unilab does not yet have a strategic sector responsible for planning, coordinating, executing and monitoring initiatives that promote the implementation of strategic management in sustainable public procurement, aligned with the three dimensions of sustainability: economic,

social and environmental. Finally, the absence of a Sustainable Logistics Master Plan (PLS) and the exclusive dependence on the Annual Procurement Plan (PCA) were seen as limitations to the effective promotion of sustainability in the institution's public procurement practices.

In order to overcome the absence of a Sustainable Logistics Master Plan (PLS) at Unilab, it is recommended that a strategic committee be set up to draw up and implement the PLS, aligning it with strategic planning and the Multi-Year Plan, as determined by SEGES/ME Ordinance No. 8.678/2021. In addition, it is necessary to promote regular training to integrate the dimensions of sustainability into contracting and to carry out benchmarking with institutions that have already successfully implemented the PLS, in order to adapt good practices. Finally, it is recommended that technological tools be adopted to monitor procurement and evaluate performance indicators linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The recommended actions would contribute to the consolidation of strategic governance and increase Unilab's relevance as a benchmark in sustainable public procurement.

Despite the efforts made in this research, it is essential to highlight some limitations that may influence the interpretation of the results. The limitation is related to the dependence on the accounts of the participants, who only worked in the sector of the Coordination of Bids, Contracts and Assets (CLCP), and it was not possible to interview the university's upper management (Pro-Rector and Rector). As a result, the information found may be subject to possible biases, especially when it comes to civil servants' perceptions of the effectiveness of sustainable practices and the lack of a strategic sector that plans, coordinates, carries out and monitors projects that enable strategic management in the area of sustainable public procurement.

Considering the limitations identified and the gaps that emerged during the research, some directions for future research are suggested. Firstly, it is recommended that comparative studies be carried out between universities with different

levels of maturity in the implementation of SCP, in order to identify good practices, common challenges and effective strategies that can support the creation of public policies and improve the management of SCP. The second suggestion would be to investigate the perception of others involved in sustainable public procurement practices, such as senior management (Pro-Rector and Rector), employees in the demanding sectors and suppliers, which would provide a more holistic view and could make significant contributions to sustainable public procurement practices. In summary, this study provides a solid basis, but further research is crucial to improve understanding of sustainable public procurement practices in universities, contributing to building a more robust theoretical and practical basis in this evolving field.

Finally, the results of this study and the bibliographies researched make it possible to present some recommendations for all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Firstly, we recommend implementing integrated policies that prioritize Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP), incorporating it as a central element in the institutions' strategic planning, in line with institutional goals and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is also suggested that interdisciplinary committees be set up, which would facilitate coordination between the academic and administrative sectors, promoting the exchange of knowledge and the development of innovative solutions to overcome the challenges of SCP. In addition, the importance of collaborative practices is highlighted, such as the formation of inter-university networks that allow for the sharing of experiences and good practices, as well as the development of methodologies that integrate the dimensions of sustainability into public procurement processes, thus strengthening sustainable management in HEIs.

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