The Access and Cultural Consumption of Students at the State University Vale do Acaraú, Sobral, Ceará, Brazil

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Abstract

This article is the result of the Final Work of the Specialization Course in Cultural Management, the result of an agreement between the Department of Culture of the State of Ceará, the Universidade Estadual Vale do Acaraú— UVA and Quitanda das Artes. The work analyzed indicators of cultural access and consumption among students at the Vale do Acaraú State University, located in the municipality of Sobral, in the state of Ceará, Brazil. To this end, the socioeconomic questionnaires filled out by enrolled students for the 1st semester of 2019 were analyzed. From the socioeconomic questionnaire applied by the University, questions relating to students' socioeconomic and cultural consumption indicators were highlighted. Thus, seven indicators related to student cultural access and consumption were selected: family and student income, reading books, access to means of communication, knowledge of foreign languages, possession of a computer at home, means of accessing the internet and whether you receive any social benefit from the government. From the analysis of the results, it is possible to reflect on the paths in the field of culture and the role of cultural policy in university education. With regard to the development of cultural actions within the scope of UVA, considering access to culture, it is necessary to invest in public policies that promote the guarantee of students' access to culture and its various manifestations. Regarding indicators of students' cultural practices and consumption, it is necessary to review and update these requirements to better support the promotion of cultural policies at the University as a dimension that forms ethical-professional and citizenship values.

Keywords: cultural accessibility, cultural consumption, university, UVA

1. Introduction

The municipality of Sobral is endowed with a rich cultural, artistic, architectural, and urban heritage that is reflected in its various cultural facilities and agents. The origin of the city dates back to the 18th century with the advance of colonial occupation into the interior of the territory, particularly along the banks of the Acaraú River. The milestone that marked the origin of the municipality was the Caiçara and Macacos farms, which grew with the development of cattle ranching, leading to the establishment of a village that was elevated to the status of Distinct and Royal Town of Sobral in 1773, becoming a city in 1841.

The city of Sobral later developed a rich array of townhouses, mansions, and religious temples, also a result of the development of import and export trade, mainly of cotton, the "white gold," which formed a local elite that, by appropriating the hegemonic culture, dictated the lifestyles and customs imported from abroad. Part of these cultural practices were expressed in public and social spaces in the city such as São João Theater Square or the Sobral Recreational Guild (Palace Club), products of a class that sought to distinguish itself from others, who were generally considered "uncultured."

Today, the mid-sized city of Sobral is a regional urban center due to the dynamics of commerce and services, as well as job creation by the footwear industry. The city also boasts several cultural facilities such as libraries, foreign language centers, music schools, museums, galleries and exhibition halls, in addition to São João Theater, Catholic churches, and public spaces that comprise the historic center, which was listed as Cultural Heritage by the National Institute of Historical and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN) in 1999.

Among the cultural facilities, we highlight the Eclipse Museum which, along with the Sobral Planetarium, both located in the square of the Nossa Senhora do Patrocínio Church, reference the eclipse that occurred in 1919, which

helped the scientific commission sent by physicist Albert Einstein to prove the Theory of Relativity. Because of this, we can say that the event that occurred in Sobral positions the city in the geography of Science, just as the projection of the Greenwich Meridian in London, England was for the establishment of 0º longitude, time zones, and the standardization of world time.

Currently, the city of Sobral is home to three public higher education institutions (UVA, UFC, and IFCE) and two private ones (UNINTA and FLF), which give it prominence in university education. It is worth noting that access to higher education was an achievement of the 20th century for Brazilian society and continued into the early 21st century, especially with the increase in the number of higher education institutions and enrollments. This effort achieved in the educational field is also sought in relation to cultural rights.

The Brazilian Constitution of 1988, in Article 215, guarantees everyone "[…] the full exercise of cultural rights and access to the sources of national culture, and shall support and encourage the appreciation and diffusion of cultural expressions" (Brazil, 2019). Aiming to fulfill the constitutional text and as established by the National Culture Plan, which aims to achieve cultural development, public actions should be directed towards:

> […] I—defense and appreciation of Brazilian cultural heritage; II—production, promotion and dissemination of cultural goods; III—training of qualified personnel for the management of culture in its multiple dimensions; IV—democratization of access to cultural goods; V—appreciation of ethnic and regional diversity (Brasil, 2019).

The democratization of the right to cultural citizenship, as pointed out by Chauí (1995), involves actions that can guarantee the right of individuals to participate in public decisions about Culture. In this sense, the present article sought to analyze the indicators of cultural access and consumption of the students at the State University Vale do Acaraú (UVA), located in the mid-sized city of Sobral, Ceará, Brazil. This essay is the result of our Final Paper for the Specialization Course in Cultural Management in 2020, a product of the partnership between the State Department of Culture of Ceará, the State University Vale do Acaraú, and Quitanda das Artes. We opted to present an article whose analysis results could contribute to the development of an Institutional Culture Plan for UVA.

Our article is structured into four sections: the first provides this introduction to the topic for the reader. The second section offers a brief review of the notions of culture and cultural action practices. In the third section, we present some data and elements to reflect on citizenship and cultural consumption through access to consumer goods. In the fourth section, we present the indicators of cultural access and consumption of UVA students, and finally, we offer our concluding remarks. At this initial stage, we will briefly outline the notions of culture and cultural action before moving on to the treatment of data and critical analysis of the institutional indicators of cultural access and consumption.

2. Materials and Methods

This essay is the result of our Capstone Project for the Specialization Course in Cultural Management in 2020, stemming from the agreement between the Secretariat of Culture of the State of Ceará, the State University Vale do Acaraú (UVA), and Quitanda das Artes. We opted for presenting an article whose analytical results could contribute to the development of an Institutional Culture Plan for UVA.

The study analyzed the indicators of cultural access and consumption by students of the State University Vale do Acaraú—UVA, located in the municipality of Sobral, in the state of Ceará, Brazil. For this, we analyzed the socioeconomic questionnaires filled out by enrolled students referring to the 1st semester of 2019. From the socioeconomic questionnaire administered by UVA, we highlighted questions related to the students' socioeconomic and cultural consumption indicators. Seven indicators related to student access and cultural consumption were selected: family and student income, book reading, access to media, knowledge of foreign languages, possession of a computer at home, means of internet access, and whether they receive any social benefits from the government.

It is expected that the data analysis and results will assist in reflecting on and promoting cultural actions within UVA and prompt the planning and development of a cultural policy that considers student access to culture and its various manifestations as a necessary factor in their education.

Our article is outlined in four sections: the first comprises this introduction of the topic to the reader. The second section provides a brief review of the notions of culture and cultural action practices. In the third section, we present some data and elements to reflect on citizenship and cultural consumption through access to consumer goods. In the fourth section, we present the indicators of access and cultural consumption of UVA students, concluding with our final considerations. In this initial phase, we will briefly outline the notions of culture and cultural action before proceeding to the treatment of the data and critical analysis of institutional indicators of

cultural access and consumption.

3. Understanding Culture and Cultural Action Practices

Drawing an understanding of the notion of Culture, that is, the starting point for thinking and reflecting on the cultural practices and consumption of UVA students, was a primary task in advancing the debate and better qualifying our argument on the subject, and if possible, making some final considerations.

In general, we agree with Santos (1987, p. 37) when he states that culture is "[…] a dimension of the social process, of the life of a society. It does not only concern a set of practices and conceptions, such as art, for example. It is not just a part of social life, such as religion, for example." Thus, culture is a "[…] historical construction, whether as a conception or as a dimension of the social process. In other words, culture is not something natural, it is not a consequence of physical or biological laws. On the contrary, culture is a collective product of human life" (Santos, 1987, p. 37).

By stating that not everything is culture, Coelho (2008) reinforces this concept as a human production. He bases his argument on the formulation of British anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor, who highlights the broader ethnological sense, in such a way that culture or civilization is this "[…] complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. In other words, everything. Everything that is human" (Coelho, 2008, p. 17).

The project of cultural modernity promoted a dual cultural space. The first was marked by restricted circulation, directed at an aristocratic minority, which idealized a conception of artistic creation limited to museums and palaces. The other portion was framed in popular culture, craftsmanship, and cultural traditions (Canclini, 2019).

Stuart Hall (1997) argues that the subject, who once had a unified and stable identity, came to participate in a fragmented way in various identities, which consequently began to compose other "needs" with new meanings and values, forming other social landscapes that cause some estrangement. For this author, the postmodern subject can be defined by the "mobile celebration" of encounters and confrontations with cultural systems. Thus, it is not about a fixed, permanent identity, but rather an unstable, mutable, dynamic one.

Canclini (2019, p. 349) points out the chronic difficulty of politically evaluating cultural practices "[…] as actions, that is, as effective interventions in the material structures of society." For this author, cultural practices:

> […] They represent, simulate social actions, but only sometimes operate as an action. This happens not only in cultural activities expressly organized and recognized as such; Ordinary behaviors, whether or not grouped in institutions, employ simulated action, symbolic acting (Canclini, 2019, p. 350).

The author's reflection is important because it contributes to our reflection on cultural actions that are sometimes considered affirmative, formative, and often pretentious in elevating the involved individuals to another cultural level. Dialoguing with Canclini, we hope that the cultural action promoted by the University brings to the public "awareness" and "real changes in their behavior." As the author anticipates, we are almost always frustrated by the ineffectiveness of the intended message. In this sense, there needs to be sensitivity in observing the dialogue between the cultural and political fields, the blend and exchange of what we in a given context call erudite and popular culture, the boundaries we establish between the modern and the traditional, between pure and impure genres, and how all of this can represent a broad desire for cultural democracy.

Teixeira Coelho (2001) questions the type of culture present in the cultural centers distributed throughout the country's cities. For him, when the groups in power "[…] under the guise of the State or private initiative, open their theaters and museums 'to the people,' they almost never think about creating conditions for these people to reach creation, but only to cultivate new spectators and admirers, that is, new audiences, new consumers" (Coelho, 2001, pp. 9–10).

The democratization of culture is a very common expression in the speeches and talks of both notable figures and anonymous ones. Teixeira Coelho was already questioning this in the 1980s. First, when it came to culture, what did it really mean to democratize it, and second, what should be democratized? What is its content? Who would it serve? For this author, a cultural policy or a policy of cultural action presupposes a set of measures that are interrelated and act in part or entirely in the cultural production system, that is, the production of cultural goods, their distribution in places of contact with potential users, the exchange or trade of cultural goods, and their acquisition or effective consumption. For the author, cultural action constitutes a "[…] set of knowledge and techniques with the aim of managing the cultural process—or its absence, as is more common among us…—in order to promote, let's say, a more equitable distribution of culture, of its proclaimed benefits" (Coelho, 2001, pp. 10–11).

But, is there a difference between cultural use and cultural consumption? For Coelho (2008, p. 18), the difference is that "[…] in use, the cultural thing is internalized and transformed into vitalizing substance by virtue of some metabolism of its receiver (which presupposes the existence of an eventual remainder to discard)". Cultural consumption, on the other hand, is marked by:

> […] epidermal contact between receptor and cultural thing, contact through which the cultural thing slides across the surface of the receptor without affecting it internally in any way and is then eliminated, thrown away, without any work having been done (change of state) in the cultural thing on the part of the recipient and in the recipient due to his exposure to the cultural thing (Coelho, 2008, p. 18).

Canclini (2019) raises a relevant question regarding, from the perspective of cultural communication, how to interpret the discrepancy between the action offered by an institution and how it is received and appropriated by various audiences. Thus, would it make sense to talk about cultural disacquisition from the perspective that Coelho (2008) places the debate? Or, furthermore, about the processes of de-collecting and deterritorialization that lead to intercultural hybridization, as Canclini (2019) points out?

For Chauí (1995), cultural democracy points in the opposite direction of the historical and contemporary violence produced in this country. In this sense, the author idealizes culture as a right of citizens and cultural policy as the duty to guarantee the right to culture, specifically the right of access to and enjoyment of cultural goods through public cultural institutions; the right to cultural creation; the right to recognize oneself as a cultural subject; the right to participate in public decisions about culture. Thus, the cultural project should aim at the democratization of culture as "[…] the right to enjoyment, experimentation, information, memory, and participation" (Chauí, 1995, p. 82). In this way, cultural policy, based on the notion of cultural citizenship, should also involve the right to participate in decisions, define guidelines and public budgets, and access to cultural production by citizens (Chauí, 2009). The author, therefore, leads us to capture the dimension and scope of access to culture as an achievement of cultural citizenship. But what indicators could better reflect the extent of access to culture and cultural consumption? We will explore these data in the following section.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Cultural Citizenship and Access to Consumer Goods

According to Santos (2007), citizenship is learned and becomes full when incorporated into culture, becoming a state of mind. For this author, a civic state envisions a civic model essentially formed by two components: culture and territory. For him, the civic component "[…] presupposes the prior definition of a civilization, that is, the civilization that is desired, the way of life desired for all, a common vision of the world and society, of the individual as a social being, and of the rules of coexistence" (Santos, 2007, p. 80).

The territorial component presupposes an "[…] instrumentalization of the territory capable of providing all inhabitants with those indispensable goods and services, no matter where the person is; and on the other hand, an adequate management of the territory, by which the general distribution of public goods and services is ensured" (Santos, 2007, p. 81).

Milton Santos (2002) already pointed out that Brazilian democracy, throughout its history, also produced deficient citizens. The author's reading of the role of the ideological system seems very current to us, as ideology has come to:

> […] show itself as that metaphysics susceptible of appearing as an empiricism. 25 years ago, we were excited about assimilating the difference between the true and the untrue, between appearance and existence, between the ideological and the real. Today ideology has become reality, which complicates our task of analysis, because it imposes itself on the production of the concrete history of men based on a unique, perfectly elaborated discourse, which becomes credible through the bombardment of the media, but also through of the University seal (Santos, 1999, p. 11).

Amidst the fragmentation of reality, Sennet (2006) tells us that culture comes into play to question which values and practices are capable of keeping people united precisely when the institutions they live in fragment. For him, the community "[…] is not the only way to keep a culture cohesive; it seems evident, for example, that strangers from the same city live in the same culture, even if they do not know each other personally. But the problem of a culture that really serves as a basis for us is not limited to a question of size" (Sennet, 2006, p. 13).

According to Santos (2007, p. 150), the geografization of citizenship needs to take into account at least "[…] two types of franchises, to be open to all individuals: territorial rights and cultural rights, among which the right to surroundings." The study conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics—IBGE in partnership with the Ministry of Culture resulted in the Information and Cultural Indicators System, which aimed to "[…]

present results based on data systematization, indicator production, and analysis of sectoral, national, and regional information related to the cultural sector, based on data from surveys conducted by IBGE, generally referring to the years 2007 to 2010" (IBGE, 2013, p. 8).

On the other hand, aiming to apprehend the economy of culture from consumption (Note 1), we highlight consumer goods, or rather, consumption expenses captured in the Family Budget Survey—POF, conducted by IBGE in the year 2008–2009. From this survey, we can analyze the average expenditure and consumption expenses incurred by families in Ceará, including recreation and culture (Figure 1). The average family expenditure recorded by the survey was R$ 1,248.31 distributed across 11 items (Food, Housing, Clothing, Transportation, Hygiene and Personal Care, Health Care, Education, Recreation and Culture, Tobacco, Personal Services, and Miscellaneous Expenses). The 2008-2009 POF also indicated that the consumption expense on recreation and culture averaged R$ 22.63, that is, 1.8% of the family budget of the population of Ceará. Other expenses were considered more priority, such as: housing, food, transportation, clothing, health care, hygiene and personal care, education, and miscellaneous expenses.
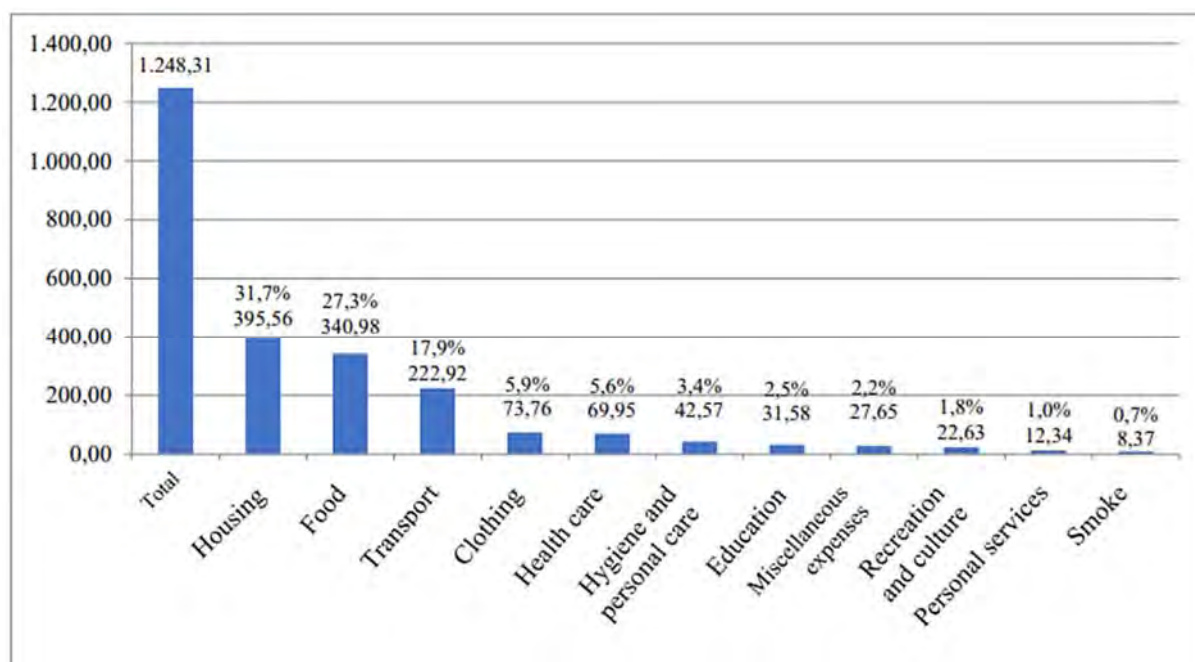

Figure 1. Average monthly family monetary and non-monetary consumption expenditure (in R$) – by types of expense - Ceará - Year 2008–2009

Source: IBGE - Family Budget Survey: 2008‑2009.

In regard to expenses on recreation and culture, it is important to understand how the technical note of the 2017–2018 POF defines this expenditure, which pertains to:

> [...] brinquedos e jogos (bola, boneca, *software*, etc.), celular e acessórios (aparelhos e acessórios de telefonia celular), livros, revistas e periódicos não didáticos (jornais, revistas infantis, etc.). Inclui, ainda, despesas com recreações e esportes (cinema, teatro, futebol, ginástica, artigos de caça, pesca, *camping*, etc.). Na linha 'outras', estão agregadas as despesas com instrumentos musicais, equipamentos esportivos, artigos de acampamento e demais despesas similares (IBGE, 2019, p. 19).

Figure 2 shows the results of the POF conducted by IBGE in the years 2017-2018. In this survey, the average income of residents of Ceará improved, reaching R$ 2,375.65. However, some changes were observed in the priority order of expenses. Housing remains a top priority expenditure in the family budget; however, transportation, healthcare assistance, and hygiene and care have gained greater prominence in family spending. Education has also become a more important expense, unlike clothing, which had a higher representation in family spending in 2008. On the other hand, the consumption expenditure on recreation and culture averaged R$ 54.28, and although it showed a numerical increase compared to the previous survey, it maintained practically the same percentage (1.9%) of expenditure as the 2008-2009 POF. However, this expenditure became more relevant

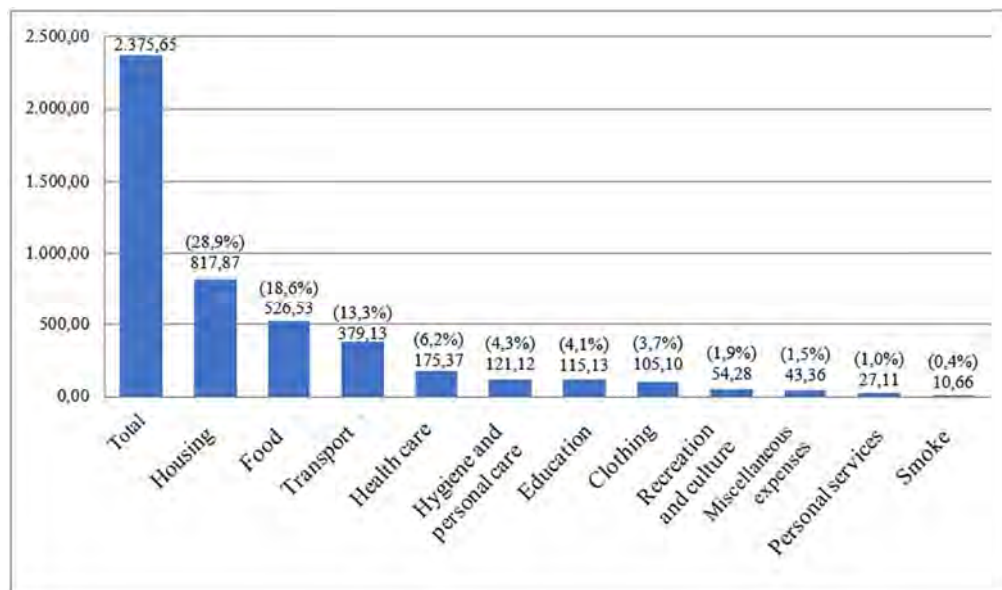compared to others such as miscellaneous expenses and personal services.

Figure 2. Average monthly family monetary and non-monetary expenditure, according to types of expense - Ceará - Year 2017–2018

Source: IBGE - Family Budget Survey: 2017–2018.

The reality of students at the State University of Vale do Acaraú—UVA, whose campuses are located in the city of Sobral, Ceará, is distinct from other state and federal higher education institutions. The students come from more than 54 municipalities in the Northwest region of Ceará, and in many cases, they travel distances of over 100 km to access higher education. Sales (2016), while studying the consumption behavior of cultural goods among students at the Federal University of Ceará—UFC, found that the use of cultural goods provided by the university tends to increase cultural consumption, which also correlates with the years of study of the individuals in undergraduate courses. Lima (2018) will highlight experiences in the field of cultural citizenship with cultural policies in the city of São Paulo, during the administration of Mayor Fernando Haddad. The São Paulo experience was expanded to the national level with the arrival of Marta Suplicy at the Ministry of Culture - MinC, with an affirmative action that was the implementation of the Culture Voucher.

The theoretical reflections and data explanations carried out so far have helped us better understand the role that culture and cultural action play in the production of citizenship through public policies promoting access to cultural goods, given the reality of family budgets and the low percentage dedicated to recreation and culture. In this sense, we understand that cultural policies should also be considered in the university context, and for this, we will seek to further explore the institutional indicators of access to and consumption of culture among UVA students.

4.2 Institutional Indicators of Access and Cultural Consumption of UVA Students

The State University of Vale do Acaraú offers cultural facilities and extension programs that develop cultural activities for both university students and the communities it serves. At this moment, our intention was not to study the extent to which students participate in these projects or access these facilities. Instead, we aimed to analyze the indicators of access to and cultural consumption among students, as contained in the socioeconomic questionnaires filled out by enrolled students taking courses, including those with institutional enrollment for the 2019.1 semester.

From the socioeconomic questionnaire administered by UVA, we selected questions addressing socioeconomic and cultural consumption indicators of students. Therefore, we highlight seven indicators related to access and cultural consumption, namely: family and student income, reading books, access to media, knowledge of foreign languages, ownership of a computer at home, means of internet access, and whether they receive any government social benefits.

Regarding the socioeconomic profile of students enrolled in courses or with institutional enrollment, when we consider monthly family income, we can see from Figure 3 that nearly 80% of students have a family income of

up to two minimum wages. Approximately 14% of families have income in the range of 3 to 4 minimum wages, and less than 6% of students have family income of 5 to 8 minimum wages or more. Only 1.33% of students' families have income above 8 minimum wages.

This information is important when comparing it with family consumption expenses presented in both the POF of 2008–2009 and that of 2017–2018 because it helps us capture and reflect on changes in spending priorities in the family budget.
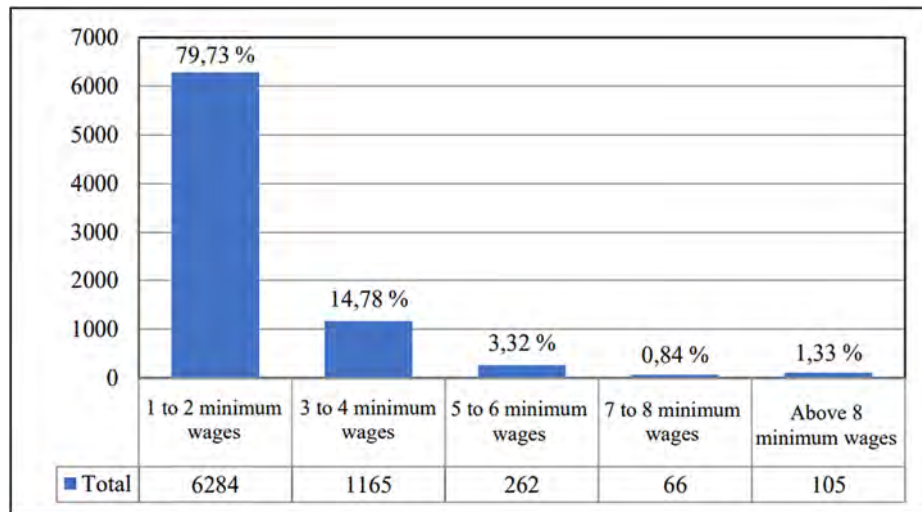

Figure 3. Monthly income range of the student's family

Source: Student Socioeconomic Questionnaire Report 2019.1.

Indeed, the main expense items for families in Ceará in 2008–2009 were food, housing, and transportation, followed by clothing, healthcare, and personal hygiene. Spending on recreation and culture accounted for only 1.8% of family income, approximately R$ 22.63. In the 2017–2018 POF, this expenditure increased numerically to R$ 54.28, but remained at the same percentage of expenditure (1.9%).

When considering the university audience at UVA, we can infer that this expenditure was even lower. Observing Figure 4, which shows the income range of students, more than half declared having no income, representing young people still in formation. However, it is noteworthy that we have a percentage of students with income below one minimum wage exceeding 20%.
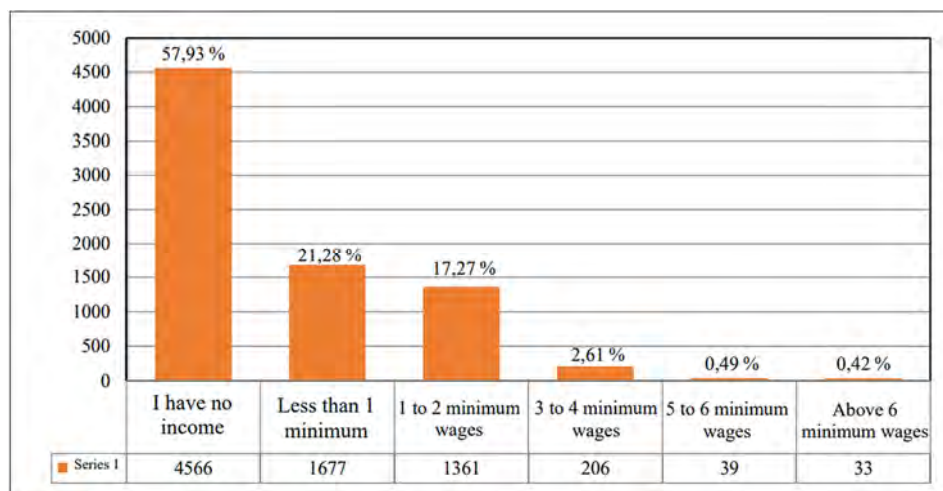

Figure 4. Student's monthly income range

Source: Student Socioeconomic Questionnaire Report 2019.1.

From the percentage of students who have income between 1 to 2 salaries (17.27%), it seems that they already have some ties to commerce, services, or industry. Alternatively, they may be engaged in internships or temporary occupations without formal employment contracts. Only a small portion of students, below 4%, report income of 3 to 6 minimum wages or more.

Considering the low-income profile of the majority of students' families, we can see that families have limited capacity to spend on recreation and culture. In this sense, events such as municipal emancipation celebrations and other popular festivals often have significant appeal as accessible cultural activities.

Regarding the number of books students have read since joining the university, excluding academic books, Figure 5 shows that almost 50% of students have read up to three books. 18% have read four to five books, and 23% have read six or more books. However, a more concerning data point is that 10% of students reported not having read any books. This indicator does not specify whether the books were purchased by the students as a cultural consumption item, or if they were borrowed from the central library of UVA or from a peer. We understand that this quantitative data needs further analysis, as it does not specify the type of work, whether it is literary or not, or if it was accessed from UVA libraries. This information would already help in directing a policy for the acquisition of new works.
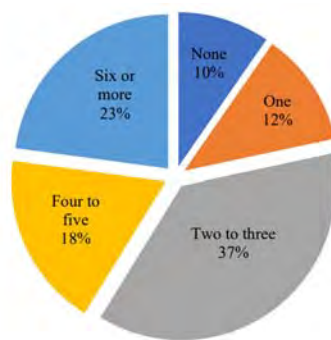

Figure 5. Number of books read when entering university – average per year*

Source: Student Socioeconomic Questionnaire Report 2019.1.

Note. * Except school books.

In the questionnaire, there is also an item where students respond to how they stay updated about world events. Figure 6 shows that among the mediums used, the internet is utilized by 85% of students. TV is the second most used medium, although it is used by only 10% of students. Other communication mediums such as newspapers, radios, and magazines are used by only 1% of students. Social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, among others) and informative blogs with diverse content from the surrounding area of Sobral have been a direct channel of communication and interaction with the student community of UVA. The university provides a Wi-Fi network open to the academic community (WifiUVA), but it has restricted access, meaning it is not accessible to external visitors. Few departments of UVA have channels or social media platforms to better explore institutional communication.
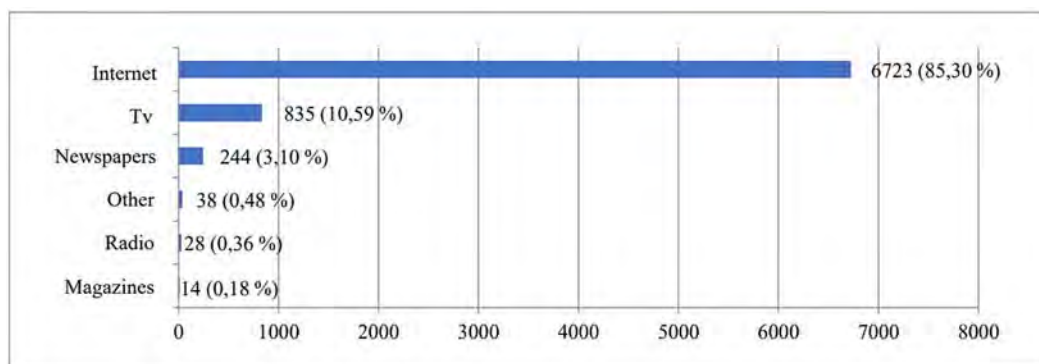

Figure 6. Most used means of keeping up to date with events in the world

Source: Student Socioeconomic Questionnaire Report 2019.1.

We understand that learning a foreign language opens up access to the culture and art produced by other nations, from different cultural systems. Students' access to foreign language courses at UVA occurs through selection and payment of tuition fees. The indicator included in the questionnaire does not allow us to determine if the student is currently enrolled in or has previously taken a foreign language course. Therefore, it is also not possible to ascertain whether students engage in cultural activities related to the language or utilize the UVA Foreign Language Center (NUCLE/UVA), as the questionnaire only requests information about which languages the student is capable of communicating in.
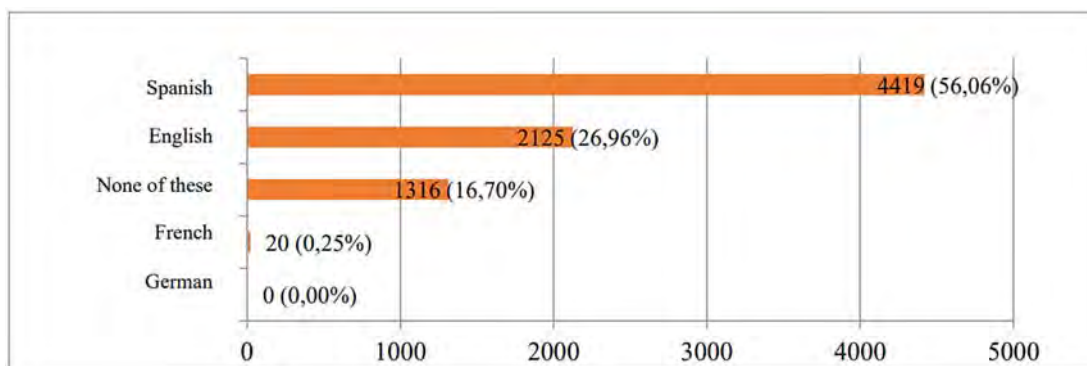

Figure 7. Which foreign language are you able to communicate best in?

Source: Student Socioeconomic Questionnaire Report 2019.1.

From the perspective of the diversity of courses offered and accessed by students, Spanish and English courses appear to be the most accessed, although it cannot be definitively stated whether these students take language courses at NUCLE/UVA. It is worth noting the limited access to French and German, as well as other languages, indicating little institutional encouragement, as nearly 17% of students reported having no knowledge of any of these languages. This suggests limited exposure to other cultures and limited opportunities for academic exchange or intercultural dialogue, appreciation of other cultures, or even short-term visits.

For students, owning a computer or smartphone seems to be the gateway to "other worlds." Thus, Figure 8 presents the necessary expense for purchasing a computer, and if we correlate this with the income status of families and students, the acquisition of a computer was not possible for about a quarter of the students who reported not having a computer at home.
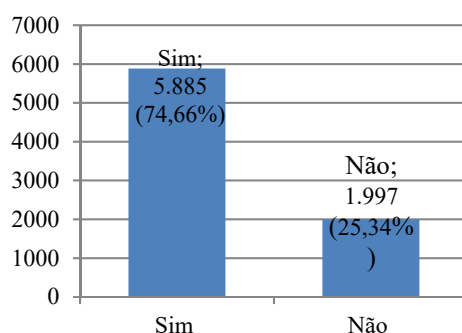

Figure 8. Do you have a computer at home

Source: Student Socioeconomic Questionnaire Report 2019.1,

Accessing the internet via smartphones also seems to be the strategy used by many students to access scientific and informational content. Figure 9 will present the main location where students access the internet. The residence was identified as the primary location for internet access by students, reinforcing the understanding that this service is indispensable for families and part of family budget expenses. However, students still resort to other spaces such as cybercafés, LAN houses, and even work to access the internet. A smaller portion of students indicated not having their own computer or internet service, thus relying on friends' computers to access the internet. Outside

their homes, they use wifiUVA as an option for access, which may also be associated with financial difficulties in acquiring a Personal Computer. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this reality became more evident with restricted movement and social isolation. The government announced the distribution of tablets and SIM cards with data packages for remote classes, but this policy only partially addressed university students and was implemented belatedly.
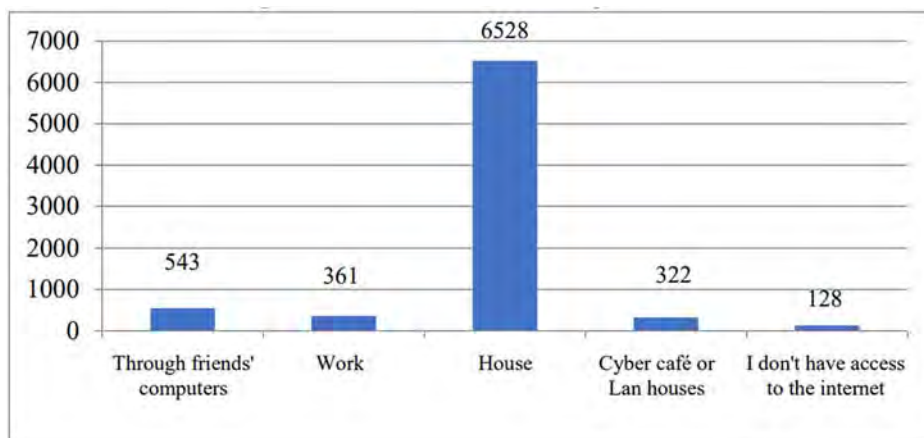

Figure 9. Main means of accessing the internet

Source: Student Socioeconomic Questionnaire Report 2019.1.

Figure 10 revealed a profile of financially needy students, with social welfare programs helping 33% of respondents who reported having received benefits but no longer did. 12.8% were currently receiving some form of social benefit, while 54.2% of students had never received any benefits. This data reveals a contradiction because, as we have seen, income data indicates a student profile that should be targeted by public income transfer policies.
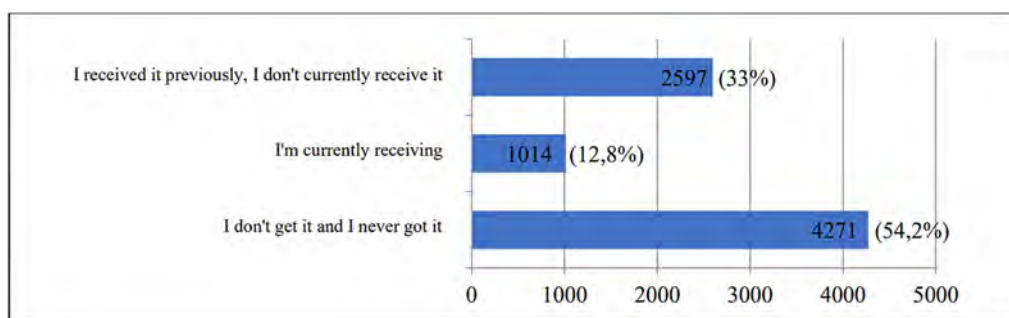

Figure 10. Receives some social benefit

Source: Student Socioeconomic Questionnaire Report 2019.1.

In order to promote a cultural policy aimed at providing access to cultural goods, the experience of distributing a cultural voucher, initially implemented in São Paulo, could be replicated for UVA students through a local cultural voucher program. This could be done in partnership with the Municipal Government of Sobral or with resources from the Government of the State of Ceará, through the State Fund for Poverty Reduction (FECOP). The use of this cultural voucher would grant access to cultural venues in the city such as cinemas, museums, theaters, concert halls, etc., thereby encouraging access to cultural spaces. However, this debate should continue in other forums and also involve the stakeholders, namely the students themselves.

5. Final Considerations

The discussion of this theme could extend through various paths ranging from the field of culture to the social role of the University. In this sense, we understand that promoting access to culture can be an empowering action for formative and ethical-professional values in the university environment.

Among the actions developed by the cultural sector of UVA, since the creation of the Culture Pro-Rectorate in the early 2000s until its merger with the Extension Pro-Rectorate in 2016, many cultural projects were developed. However, the discontinuity of these actions and the few preserved records lead to the loss of collective memory and social representation of UVA. Therefore, cultural actions at UVA should be encouraged with effective cultural policies that do not suffer from discontinuity and/or inconsistencies in their flow and registration. We believe that a priority action involves investing in the construction and restructuring of UVA's cultural facilities, as well as funding cultural projects to be developed by this University. The analysis undertaken allowed us to observe that the low-income profile of most university students' families prevents greater spending of the family budget on recreation and culture. In this sense, it is important for there to be a cultural policy that promotes access to culture for this audience in its various manifestations. The proposal of a local cultural voucher could be an option to promote access and cultural consumption among UVA students.

The socio-economic questionnaire of students presents indicators of access and cultural consumption that are too general to allow for a more detailed analysis and, consequently, to contribute to future planning of the University's cultural policies. In this sense, it is necessary to carefully review the indicators of cultural practices and consumption contained in the instruments for capturing the socio-economic profile of students enrolled at UVA. The need for review and updating of indicators of access and cultural consumption must be aligned with cultural policies at the municipal, state, and national levels, and could lead to an Institutional Cultural Plan for UVA. It is also necessary to involve the stakeholders—the students—in a participatory process to discuss cultural policies within the University.

The data produced and analyzed before the COVID-19 pandemic, which began in 2020 and still imposed restrictions on circulation and social interaction until mid-2023, allowed us to make a cut that should be confronted in the current period with the continuation of the research. Despite all the difficulties generated by the pandemic, this moment also expanded possibilities, especially the use of technological tools and remote environments. However, it is necessary to better understand to what extent individual or remote cultural consumption with greater access to the internet and the development of remote interaction resources, met or promoted the formative dimension of access to and democratization of culture in the university environment.

Regarding the access of UVA students to culture, the issues remain open to debate aiming at formulating public policies that promote the guarantee of minimum conditions of access to cultural goods by students, considering access to culture as a necessary public policy for citizen formation.

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Notes

Note 1. For the Information and Cultural Indicators System of IBGE, consumption expenses are those incurred by the consumer unit through acquisitions of goods and services used to directly meet the personal needs and desires of its components during the survey period (IBGE, 2013, p. 165).

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