

# COMMUNITY COURSE COMUNIDADE FAZARTE: 20 YEARS OF COMMUNITY EXTENSION AT UFG<sup>1</sup>

## *CURSINHO POPULAR COMUNIDADE FAZARTE: 20 ANOS DE EXTENSÃO POPULAR NA UFG*

## *CURSO POPULAR COMUNIDADE FAZARTE: 20 AÑOS DE EXTENSIÓN POPULAR EN LA UFG*



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**ABSTRACT:** The community course “Comunidade FazArte” has existed at the Federal University of Goiás since 2006. At first sight, it is another community pre-university entry course, as it is aimed at teaching and developing Middle and High School low-income students so they can gain entrance into Brazilian public universities. However, FazArte’s history shows that the project goes further by employing different teaching strategies and varied collective methodologies, which contribute to the political awakening, organization, and cultural growth of young workers. This report, retelling a personal experience with the project, introduces a little of the history of this project, with the goal of contributing to the preservation of its legacy and promoting the current debates on Extension programs, as well as promoting the discussion about the importance of critical education to transform the Brazilian university space into a democratic, inclusive and, above all, community-driven space.

**KEYWORDS:** Education. Community Education. Community Extension.

**RESUMO:** O Cursinho Popular Comunidade FazArte existe na Universidade Federal de Goiás desde 2006. À primeira vista, trata-se de mais um pré-vestibular comunitário, uma vez que está voltado aos processos de aprendizagem e desenvolvimento de estudantes da educação básica e de baixa renda, visando seu ingresso em instituições públicas de ensino superior brasileiras. Mas o resgate da história do FazArte mostra que o projeto vai além, ao buscar, por meio de diversas estratégias de ensino e variados processos grupais, contribuir para a conscientização, a organização política e a formação cultural de jovens trabalhadores. O presente relato de experiência busca apresentar um pouco da história desse projeto com o intuito de contribuir para a preservação de sua memória e da Faculdade de Educação da UFG, para os debates atuais sobre extensão e para a discussão sobre a importância da educação crítica para a transformação da universidade brasileira num espaço democrático, inclusivo e, sobretudo, popular.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Educação. Educação Popular. Extensão Popular.

**RESUMEN:** El curso comunitario “Comunidade FazArte” existe en la Universidad Federal de Goiás desde 2006. A primera vista, es otro curso preuniversitario comunitario, ya que está enfocado a los procesos de aprendizaje y desarrollo de los estudiantes de educación básica y social, con el objetivo de ingresar a instituciones públicas de educación superior brasileñas. Pero la recuperación de la historia de FazArte muestra que el proyecto va más allá al buscar, a través de diferentes estrategias didácticas y variados procesos grupales, contribuir a la sensibilización, organización política y formación cultural de los jóvenes trabajadores. Este relato de experiencia busca presentar un poco de la historia de este proyecto con el objetivo de contribuir a la preservación de su memoria y la de la Facultad de Educación de la UFG, a los debates actuales sobre extensión y a la discusión sobre la importancia de las reflexiones críticas y educación clasista, para la transformación de la universidad brasileña en un espacio democrático, inclusivo y, sobre todo, popular.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Educación. Educación Popular. Extensión Popular.

## Introduction

The community course *Comunidade FazArte* is one of the oldest extension projects at the Federal University of Goiás (UFG). It was created in 2005, outside the walls of UFG and it was linked to the University in 2006. Since 2009, the project has been an extension action linked to the Faculty of Education/UFG, currently involving five professors from that unit and a professor from the Institute of Chemistry/UFG, as well as students and former students from several of UFG's Institutes and Academic Units.

Through this initiative, popular educators provide classes for Basic Education students, particularly those from socioeconomically vulnerable segments of society, aiming to support their admission to public Higher Education institutions in Brazil. The project also seeks to contribute to the critical preparation of these students before transitioning to university life and to the formation of a popular educator identity among students from undergraduate teaching programs at the UFG and the Federal Institute of Goiás (IFG), which has hosted the preparatory course for the past two years. These popular educators engage in the program militantly and voluntarily, driven by the belief that they should contribute to the education and awareness of the broader popular masses to promote their emancipation. Currently, the preparatory course takes place on Saturdays, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., at UFG's Faculty of Education.

*FazArte* promotes a series of additional activities that go beyond regular and preparatory classes for the National High School Exam (Enem)<sup>5</sup>, including lectures, film debates, cultural soirees, and discussion circles, all focused on controversial and diverse topics. The purpose of these initiatives is to foster critical thinking among participants and encourage them to engage in group discussions. Moreover, the project invests in the continuous development of popular educators through a study group. This approach aims not only to enhance their knowledge but also to promote leadership and autonomy among these educators. By empowering them, *FazArte* seeks to ensure that they can provide high-quality education and effectively meet the needs of students.

At first glance, *FazArte* may appear to be just another community preparatory school, focused mainly on helping low-income students enter Brazil's public higher education institutions. However, when we take a closer look at its history and evolution, we realize that the project goes far beyond this initial purpose, as the UFG Extension and Research project has

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<sup>5</sup> The similar one in the USA would be: Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT).

been dedicated not only to academic learning processes but also to the holistic development of students. Through various teaching strategies and group processes, the project seeks to raise participants' awareness of their condition as working-class young people, stimulate their political organization, and contribute to their cultural development. In addition, the project invests in the critical and political training of both educators/teachers/graduates and high school students. It recognizes their importance as subjects of social transformation. Through the study group, educators are encouraged to develop their autonomy and constantly seek new ways of engaging students in the social, political and educational process.

Thus, *FazArte* stands out as an example of how a community-based preparatory course can become a space for holistic education, where the academic, social, cultural, and political development of students is valued and encouraged. In this way, rather than merely preparing students for university admission, the project seeks to cultivate critical, conscious, and engaged citizens capable of transforming their reality.

Reflecting on its historical background, the *Comunidade FazArte* popular preparatory course is an extension project linked to UFG that offers the community a free preparatory course for the Enem and other university entrance exams, grounded in a perspective of popular and emancipatory education. It is primarily composed of undergraduate students from UFG's teaching programs but does not exclude participants from outside the university. Following the principles of collegial self-management, the project is organized collectively with the participation of all its members.

In this article, we present a brief history of this project which, over its 20 years of existence, intertwines with the 55-year history of UFG's Faculty of Education. Our aim is to contribute to the preservation of its memory, to current debates on university extension, and to discussions on the importance of critical and class-conscious education in transforming Brazilian universities into democratic, inclusive, and, above all, popular spaces.

### **Who is university for: everyone or just a few?**

When discussing projects like *FazArte*, it is crucial to consider the historical context and structures of exclusion that permeate access to public higher education institutions in Brazil. Historically, these institutions have been marked by elitist and meritocratic criteria that primarily favored the more privileged segments of society. The democratization of access to these institutions, especially for the children of the working class, has been a significant



struggle, although it faces resistance and opposition from sectors that advocate for maintaining the status quo.

The quota system implemented by Brazilian public universities represented progress in this regard, aiming to correct historical inequalities and promote the inclusion of historically marginalized groups. However, since 2003, when the State University of Rio de Janeiro adopted an affirmative action system, there has been strong opposition to the quota law and, consequently, to the inclusion of the children of the Brazilian working class (predominantly Black) in public Higher Education institutions. Even with these measures, challenges, and resistance to the democratization of access to Higher Education in Brazil persist. It is worth recalling statements made in August 2021 during an interview on the program *Sem Censura* on TV Brasil, where the then Minister of Education, Milton Ribeiro, argued that universities should be “for the few,” revealing an elitist and meritocratic mindset still present in some political and social sectors of the country.

In this context, projects like *FazArte* play a fundamental role, not only by preparing students for the challenges of university entrance exams but also by raising awareness of the structures of exclusion and inequality present in the Brazilian educational system. By providing access to quality education and fostering critical thinking and political awareness, *FazArte* contributes to building a more just and inclusive society.

However, it is essential to recognize that the conception of Brazilian universities and public higher education institutions as spaces of excellence reserved only for the elite is not something new. Since the foundation of Brazil's first university in 1920, this elitist and meritocratic mentality has prevailed, despite efforts to democratize access, especially after the promulgation of the 1988 Federal Constitution (Fernandes, 1975).

As we warned in Mozzer, Vieira, and Boechat (2021), this elitism, which manifests itself in different ways depending on the historical and social context, has contributed to maintaining the university and other public higher education institutions as environments that are not very receptive to a democratic, inclusive and, above all, popular culture. This reality has been a significant obstacle to promoting equal opportunities and building a fairer, more egalitarian society. Proof of this is that, in Brazil, access to higher education is still treated as a privilege. After all, although there has been a significant expansion in access, data released by INEP, through the 2021 Higher Education Census, shows that less than 25% of young people aged 18

to 24 have access to higher education in Brazil (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2021).

As Mozzer, Vieira, and Boechat (2021) point out, the entrance exam cannot be considered a natural or inevitable process. In fact, it was historically established when the number of applicants began to exceed the number of places available, which occurred in the 1920s. The advertisements of commercial preparatory schools often highlight the students who have passed the entrance exam and frequently refer to the idea of ranking and meritocracy. On the other hand, students who fail usually blame themselves for not having achieved the same result, feeling themselves inadequate to compete and win.

These contradictions have led various social movements to strongly question the legitimacy of both the selection processes at public universities and the preparatory pre-university/Enem school industry along traditional lines. These movements point out that these selection procedures tend to reproduce and reinforce social, economic, and racial inequalities by privileging those who have had access to higher-quality education and the financial resources to invest in preparing for the entrance exam.

In this regard, Mozzer, Vieira and Boechat (2021) emphasize that it is essential to rethink and transform the selection criteria for higher education in order to ensure greater inclusion and diversity in academic spaces. This may involve the implementation of affirmative action policies, such as racial and social quotas, as well as the adoption of more comprehensive and inclusive assessment methods, which take into account not only performance in standardized tests, but also the potential and skills of candidates in various aspects. In addition, it is essential to invest in initiatives to improve the quality of basic education to reduce inequalities in access to knowledge from the earliest stages of schooling.

Only in this way will it be possible to build a fairer and more equitable education system, capable of promoting the full development of all individuals and contributing to the progress of society as a whole. It is therefore necessary to confront and overcome the elitist mentality that permeates higher education institutions in order to ensure that they truly fulfill their role as spaces for producing knowledge, educating citizens, and promoting the country's social and economic development (Mozzer; Vieira; Boechat, 2021).

## Entrance exams/Enem: inclusion or segregation mechanisms?

The focus on ranking and meritocracy, central features of both the traditional entrance exam and Enem, almost always ignores the socio-economic and educational disparities between candidates. This can result in the exclusion of students who have not had access to adequate preparation resources, such as pre-university preparatory schools, study materials, and a quality basic education. As a result, the selection system for higher education ends up reproducing and perpetuating existing inequalities in society, rather than combating them. In addition, the fierce competition and pressure generated by the exams can have negative effects on students' mental health, contributing to increased anxiety and stress during the period of both preparing for and taking the exams.

Faculty of Education professor and *FazArte* collaborator Marilúcia Lago (2013) highlighted crucial questions about social segregation and its consequences for young people, especially those belonging to the poorest social strata. This segregation not only limits access to essential public goods and services, but also influences the political participation and social inclusion of young people in their communities and in the city as a whole. According to the author, it is worrying to see how young people from less privileged social strata are often relegated to peripheral spaces, far from urban centers, and with limited access to opportunities for personal and professional development. These young people deal with a range of challenges on a daily basis, including commuting difficulties, limited access to quality public spaces, and a lack of opportunities for significant political participation. The lack of infrastructure and investment in these areas contributes to perpetuating the exclusion and marginalization of these adolescents. It hinders their access to quality education, decent employment when they are adults, and civic participation. The lack of representation and political participation of young people in these communities is also alarming, as it leaves them on the margins of decision-making processes that affect their lives and futures. This can lead to a sense of civic disengagement and alienation. It further reinforces their status as social outcasts.

Lago (2013) reminds us that it is essential that public policies and social initiatives focus on tackling these structural inequalities and promoting the inclusion and active participation of young people in the political, social, and economic spheres of society. This requires investments in infrastructure, education, access to decent jobs, capacity-building programs, and psychosocial support, as well as the creation of safe and inclusive spaces in which young people can express themselves, participate, and contribute to the development of their communities.

Only through integrated and inclusive approaches can we effectively combat social segregation and guarantee a fairer and more equitable future for all generations.

The author also warns that the fact that the adolescent population is not recognized as a key player in decision-making processes that shape the future of the city, the labor market, and society as a whole is concerning. This lack of representation and voice in political power structures contributes to the continued marginalization and social segregation of these adolescents, reinforcing their exclusion from the benefits of urban and economic development. As a result, some young people may engage in risky activities, such as informal markets, illegal activities, and crime, as a means of seeking survival opportunities and social inclusion amidst the structural barriers they face.

To address these challenges, Lago (2013) argues that it is necessary to adopt a critical and emancipatory approach that recognizes and tackles the root causes of segregation and social exclusion faced by these youths. This may involve implementing public policies that promote social inclusion, equal access to essential services, the creation of safe and inclusive community spaces, as well as strengthening youth political participation and civic engagement.

Lago (2013) further argues that youth, mainly Black and poor youth living on the outskirts of cities, are almost always directly linked to high rates of violence and crime. These young people are often stigmatized and viewed with suspicion, becoming targets of prejudice and discrimination by agents of the criminal justice system, such as the police. According to the author, it is crucial to recognize that these adolescents and young people, in addition to being frequent victims of the unfavorable socioeconomic circumstances in which they live, are also affected by a lack of opportunities and the absence of adequate public policies for violence prevention and social inclusion.

Thus, Lago (2013) highlights that society often tends to project the blame for the high crime rate onto that population, and it doesn't consider the wider contexts of structural inequality, low access to essential services, and limited development opportunities. This stigma contributes to a disproportionate application of legal punitive mechanisms on these young people. That often results in criminalization and mass incarceration, rather than in a fairer and more effective approach to conflict prevention and resolution. This phenomenon has been referred to by social movements and some intellectuals as the "criminalization of youth" (ONU-Habitat, 2012).



Still, according to Lago (2013), tackling such segregation includes strengthening social inclusion policies, investing in education, health, culture, and leisure for peripheral communities, as well as implementing evidence-based violence prevention actions that take into account the specificities and needs of these young people. Only through an intelligent, integrated, and inclusive approach will it be possible to effectively tackle the cycle of violence and crime that affects these communities.

Thus, Mozzer, Vieira and Boechat (2021) confirm that, by granting access to higher education only to those who undergo a universal and abstract assessment that disregards those particularities and social inequalities, the mechanisms for access to higher education “include segregating”. In this way, they validate exclusion and social inequality. We must remember, as we have already mentioned, that the entrance exam is not a natural process, but the result of a political and economic decision. In Brazil, it is contemporary with the creation of our first university, established in the 1920s. This gives the impression that it is coextensive with the idea of the university and that, therefore, there would be no other way of accessing higher education. However, we know that there are other ways of conceiving access to higher education, as shown, for example, in the case of Argentina (CARMO, 2018).

It is true, however, that we have seen some progress in terms of access to higher education. The implementation of inclusion policies and the expansion of the higher education system in Brazil have played a fundamental role in changing the profile of university students. As mentioned by Silva and Sampaio (2018), these policies have enabled young students from low-income backgrounds and belonging to historically segregated groups to access higher education. Among those groups are *quilombolas*, indigenous people, transgender people and others. This change in the profile of university students is extremely significant, as it represents progress in promoting equity and diversity in the academic environment. These young people previously faced significant barriers to accessing higher education due to factors such as unfavorable socioeconomic conditions and racial, ethnic, or gender discrimination. However, some now have the opportunity to pursue a university education and achieve, at least in part, their educational and professional goals. This diversification of the student and teaching body not only enriches the university environment with different perspectives, experiences, and knowledge but also contributes to building a fairer and more inclusive society by providing opportunities for social ascension for historically marginalized groups.

However, it is essential to emphasize that challenges still remain in ensuring that these students have a complete and successful academic experience. This includes implementing student retention policies, psychosocial and pedagogical support, and academic and career guidance programs, as well as combating discrimination and exclusion in university environments. Silvia and Sampaio (2018, p. 255) present recent studies that have identified the trajectories of young students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, across different higher education programs, as still being marked by “barrier mechanisms” that hinder the access and retention of these groups in educational institutions.

In summary, the changing profile of university students in Brazil reflects the progress made in terms of inclusion and diversity in higher education, but it also highlights the ongoing need to improve and strengthen the policies and practices that promote equity and equal access to education for all segments of society. According to Florestan Fernandes (1975, p. 31, our translation), “[...] the university should not become a gulf that separates young people and isolates them from the flow of social reconstruction. It should serve as the true fulcrum of a state of conscious and responsible social participation”.

However, this is not the reality of our Brazilian public higher education institutions, and precisely because of the persistence of such contradictions, various social movements have strongly questioned the legitimacy of the selection processes.

### **Popular preparatory schools, popular education and the Faculty of Education of UFG**

The history of popular preparatory courses is part of the broader history of popular Education. In turn, the history of popular Education is an integral part of the history of the Brazilian working class and the Faculty of Education at UFG. After all, as noted by Falcão, Boechat, and Pimentel (2020, pp. 73-74):

Popular Education is a historical product of the working class's struggles. Specifically, it is the contradictory result of the class's efforts to produce social wealth to integrate itself into the order, to survive within the order, but also to raise awareness for revolutionary and emancipatory struggle, which is, therefore, part of its fight against the order.

Indeed, throughout its history, *FazArte* has revealed this contradictory nature of popular Education. This is because, within the project, we observe a clash between the desire for

inclusion in a social order that alienates and dehumanizes us and the desire to overcome that very order through critical reflection on reality; a reflection that understands that:

one of the fundamental tasks of education that is political [...] is precisely to enable the exercise of knowing the world, of knowing the real, the concrete, of social life, of unveiling the hidden fragments of the world concealed by the dominant ideology (FREIRE, 2018, p. 99, our translation)

Yes, the idea of “unveiling” the world and promoting a new perception of reality is central to Paulo Freire’s work and thought. Freire advocated for an educational approach that not only transmitted knowledge but also promoted a critical awareness of the world in which students live. However, for Freire (2018, p. 105, our translation), the perception of the world is not individual but “a social apprehension of the real,” “perception is profoundly ideological,” and “for this reason, perception is class-based.”

Therefore, according to his pedagogy:

[...] the first thing that the popular educator must do [...] is to see to what extent it is possible to make perception perceive itself [...], enabling the group of learners to perceive how they perceive. [...] By discovering how they perceive, why they perceive, and that they can perceive differently (Freire, 2018, p. 106, our translation).

Freire’s words link popular Education to emancipatory and liberating processes, achieved through awareness and political struggle. However, popular Education should not be confused with the democratization of Education, because, as Streck *et al.* (2014, p. 33, our translation) remind us, “not all educational access policies aimed at the popular classes necessarily constitute a space of ‘popular education’ in the political sense attributed to emancipatory processes”.

According to Streck *et al.* (2014, p. 49, our translation), processes of institutional strengthening of Popular Education can be observed in Brazil from 2007 onwards, with its incorporation into public policies as “a science open to popular needs and causes”. The authors then define popular education as follows: “a process of knowledge production aimed at freedom and democracy, which rejects authoritarianism, manipulation, and the ideological conditioning reproduced in the logic of market-driven education” (Streck *et al.*, 2014, p. 49, our translation). *FazArte* and the Faculty of Education strive for this type of education.

## Community course *Comunidade FazArte*: a brief history

The emergence and development of the community course *Comunidade FazArte* exemplify the pursuit of an educational practice that goes beyond the traditional walls of the university, aligning with the idea of “unveiling” the world and generating a new perception of reality, as proposed by Paulo Freire (2018). By creating a physical space where the popular majority of Goiás can express and appropriate their own culture, the project not only provides educational opportunities but also strengthens the identity and civic participation of these communities.

As reported by Mozzer, Vieira, and Boechat (2021, p. 16, our translation):

[...] born from the initiative of historian Fernando Viana and cultural producer Patrícia Vieira, the project initially aimed at decentralizing culture, democratizing access to cultural heritage—formal or informal—and creating a physical space where the popular majorities of Goiás could express and appropriate their culture. In its first year of existence, the project was supported by the municipal cultural incentive law of Goiânia.

Thus, as documented by Mozzer, Vieira, and Boechat (2021), the project was inaugurated with artistic exhibitions featuring the participation of the Laheto Circus School (Leles, 2018), the percussion group Coró de Pau, local bands, exhibitions of works by community artists, theater workshops, and other activities.

Between 2005 and 2006, dialogue with the Faculty of Information and Communication at UFG and various organized groups in the city of Goiânia resulted in the creation of a community radio station. Additionally, art-education workshops were held, featuring activities such as capoeira circles, theater, and music (Mozzer; Vieira; Boechat, 2021).

Mozzer, Vieira and Boechat (2021, p. 17, our translation) emphasized that the support of the Laheto Circus School was very important in giving the project visibility and support in its early stages.

After all, the Circus School’s tent housed the project’s activities for a year, during the period when the project was supported by the municipal cultural incentive law. When this support ended, undergraduate teaching students from UFG began discussions about the continuity of the project. In 2006, they proposed the creation of a community preparatory course that could serve as a valuable teaching experience for UFG’s licensure students.

As noted in Mozzer, Vieira, and Boechat (2021), it was in 2006 that the community course *Comunidade FazArte* became integrated into UFG as an extension project. This movement involved students from various teacher education programs (such as History, Mathematics, and Geography), who, through their dedication and militant commitment, structured a decisive project consciously aimed at defending popular education. It is due to the militant strength of UFG and IFG licensure students that the community course *FazArte* remains active to this day.

The project had more than three hundred enrolled students in its early years. With multiple classes running throughout the week in the evenings, the project received support from UFG's infrastructure—not only in terms of physical space but also for the printing of educational materials, as well as scholarships for students participating as educators (MoMozzer; Vieira; Boechat, 2021).

Its self-management model relied on the collaboration of several faculty members, who officially coordinated the project but always worked closely with UFG students. Notably, the vast majority of students who participated in the project's coordination continued their involvement in political life, demonstrating the initiative's formative and organizational role. From 2009 onward, the community course *Comunidade FazArte* became part of UFG's College of Education.

Mozzer, Vieira, and Boechat (2021) report that between 2009 and 2010, conflicts and disagreements about the project's direction began to emerge. According to the authors, the project always aimed to be more than just a preparatory course for university entrance exams. From its inception, it sought to present a powerful critique of a university model that systematically excludes the children of the working class. However, the “voluntarist” and “assembly-based” format of the preparatory course in its early years allowed for the participation of educators with ideological and pedagogical perspectives that were not always aligned with their original intentions. This dynamic fueled disputes over the leadership of the project at a time when it had the greatest community reach, with over a thousand annual enrollments.

Continuing our account,

During this period of internal political disputes, there were essentially three groups. The first consisted of teachers who believed that the project should not carry heavy political content. The priority for them was to prepare students



for university entrance exams and increase the number of successful candidates in these selective processes. Notably, some members of this group eventually became involved with commercial preparatory courses, viewing FazArte as an excellent opportunity to recruit students for their private enterprises. The second group was composed of political activists who saw the project as a significant political platform within the university. The third group consisted of educators involved in the project's creation and who resisted attempts to commercialize or proselytize the preparatory course (Mozzer; Vieira; Boechat, 2021, p. 19, our translation).

Seeking to safeguard the project's popular nature and its original intentions—while also drawing on the lessons learned from the collaborative construction of the preparatory course—this third group organized meetings and assemblies to make the political disputes over the project's direction transparent. This effort resulted, in 2011, in a Charter of Principles, which was approved in an assembly on August 9, 2011, by students, teachers, and the project's coordination team (published in full in Mozzer, Vieira, and Boechat, 2021, p. 20).

As detailed in Mozzer, Vieira, and Boechat (2021), starting in 2016, the project's coordination focused on studying the principles, history, and methods of Popular Education, using the book *Educação Popular em Busca de Alternativas* by Conceição Paludo (2001) as a reference. Combined with the educators' accumulated theoretical and political knowledge regarding the critique of the democratic-popular strategy, this study enabled a re-evaluation of the project's direction.

As stated in Mozzer, Vieira, and Boechat (2021, p. 21, our translation), based on these reflections, it was decided that the educators of *FazArte*:

[...] would be recruited from those most aligned with its political intentions: the cultural formation and emancipation of the popular majorities. The aim was to prevent new political groups from forming within the preparatory course to redirect its original intentions, to ensure the project's quality through the organizational and intellectual competence of its militant educators, and to reorganize education and cultural activists dispersed due to the political fragmentation associated with the crisis of the democratic-popular strategy.

In 2016, a new Charter of Principles was proposed, positioning popular education as the central objective of the Project, in harmony with the goals and initiatives of the Faculty of Education. This charter remains in use to this day, emphasizing the defense of popular education as a social right that should not be treated as a commodity accessible only to those who can

afford it, among other fundamental principles (published in full in Mozzer; Vieira; Boechat, 2021, p. 21-22).

The challenge of maintaining the participation of popular educators throughout the twenty years of existence of the community course *Comunidade FazArte* reflects a common difficulty faced by many university extension initiatives. This challenge is often related to the educators' workload, mainly due to the demands of their undergraduate courses. Although the triad of teaching, research, and extension is one of the pillars of public universities, many programs are still predominantly content-driven, with little emphasis on practical and extension activities that would enable students and faculty to engage with the community and with projects like *FazArte*.

The lack of space and incentives for extracurricular and extension activities, particularly in evening courses, leads popular educators to struggle to balance their academic obligations with their involvement in projects like *FazArte*. This often results in a high turnover of educators and difficulties maintaining the continuity and quality of the project's activities over time. To overcome this challenge, universities must foster an institutional culture that values and encourages the participation of faculty and students in extension activities. This may involve revising course curricula to incorporate more opportunities for extension practices and community activities, as well as recognizing and valuing the work of popular educators through financial incentives, scholarships, academic recognition, and institutional support.

Moreover, it is essential to promote greater integration between teaching, research, and extension, in order to create synergies among these areas and allow students and faculty to significantly contribute to extension projects like *FazArte* while simultaneously developing their academic and professional skills. Only through institutional commitment and a more inclusive and engaged academic culture will it be possible to overcome the challenges faced by university extension and ensure its continuity and positive impact on the community.

Another challenge faced by the community course *Comunidade FazArte* concerns the preparation and distribution of teaching materials, which is not only related to financial constraints but also to the attacks on public universities and budget cuts imposed on public universities in recent years in the country. The limited resources available for purchasing supplies such as pens, folders, cabinets, and photocopying materials can directly impact the quality of education offered by the course. Additionally, financial constraints may hinder the

development of more sophisticated and diverse teaching materials, which are essential for providing an effective learning experience for students.

In light of these challenges, it is important to seek alternatives and resource optimization strategies to ensure the proper functioning of the course. This may involve partnerships with other public entities, fundraising through donations, seeking support from governmental and non-governmental organizations, and mobilizing the academic community and civil society in defense of public, high-quality, and emancipatory education. These difficulties are also reflected in the high dropout rates experienced by the course in recent years, a phenomenon also observed in other popular preparatory courses.

Despite these challenges, the community course *Comunidade FazArte* continues to serve as an alternative pathway to UFG, IFG, and other public higher education institutions in Brazil. The initiative, registered as an Extension Project (Mozzer; Vieira, 2018), is also part of a Research Project (Vieira; Mozzer, 2019) and, through collaborative efforts, has promoted a space for knowledge production and a platform for social inclusion, academic development, and human growth. Additionally, the course has provided an opportunity for students from UFG and IFG teaching programs to gain experience in high school education, as well as fostering greater critical awareness and agency among high school students.

According to Mozzer, Vieira, and Boechat (2021), graduates of the preparatory course, upon entering university, have shown sensitivity to this initiative, returning as volunteers not only to teach classes but also to contribute to its organization. This observation indicates that the work carried out by the community course *Comunidade FazArte* goes beyond the cognitive and intellectual preparation of students, encompassing emotional, social, and political dimensions. It provides students and educators with a learning environment rich in exchanges of experiences, debates, and reflections on social, political, and cultural issues, thereby strengthening their critical awareness, analytical capacity, and active participation in society.

Thus, the community course *Comunidade FazArte* not only stands out as a university extension project but also serves as an inspiring example of an educational practice committed to promoting social justice, inclusion, and the emancipation of the underserved segments of society.

## Final considerations

The objective of the community course *Comunidade FazArte*, to contribute to the construction of a popular university, reflects a deep commitment to democratizing access to higher education and promoting social justice. This vision of the university goes beyond offering quality, free education; it also seeks to ensure that the institution is aligned with the interests and needs of the broad popular majorities, particularly the Brazilian working class.

The university we desire is a popular university that not only opens its doors to students from diverse social, ethnic, and economic backgrounds but also actively commits to promoting inclusion, diversity, and equity in all its activities. This includes adopting affirmative access policies to ensure the representation of historically marginalized groups, as well as developing curricula and research that address issues relevant to society as a whole, especially those related to social and economic inequalities.

Furthermore, a Popular University engages with its local community, seeking to establish partnerships and collaborations that benefit not only students and faculty but also local residents and organizations. This may involve conducting extension projects, continuing education programs, health services, social assistance programs, and other initiatives that contribute to sustainable development and the well-being of the community, rather than benefiting private institutions and corporations.

The project also seeks to broaden the scope of educational processes, which are often merely technical and oriented toward preparation for the “job market,” aiming to overcome the reductionism that equates work with the labor market; it highlights the contradictions, interests, and trends that permeate education in a society marked by class divisions and fragmented knowledge and practices (Lobo, 2009). Therefore, it aims to move beyond the purely technical nature of education and point out critical possibilities in addressing the contents of basic education.

In this way, the community course *Comunidade FazArte* promotes popular education. The self-management work within *FazArte* not only prepares students for higher education but also empowers them to become agents of change and advocates for the interests of the broad popular majorities, promoting an emancipatory education committed to social justice. This is certainly a distinguishing feature of *FazArte* and all popular preparatory courses that aim to break away from mere paternalism (Freire, 1980).

As noted in Mozzer, Vieira, and Boechat (2021), *FazArte's* perspective is grounded in dialogue with authors such as Paulo Freire (1980, 2018), Mauro Iasi (2001), and Demerval Saviani (1987), with regard to their contributions to emancipatory education. This approach values the prior knowledge of the people and their cultural realities in the construction of new knowledge, through the mediation of essential education content, expressed through critical pedagogical dramatizations and concepts from political economy.

In this sense, the extension and research projects of the community course *Comunidade FazArte* represent a differentiated teaching approach, which stands out for valuing dialogue, awareness, and commitment to the comprehensive formation of participants, contributing to the construction of a more just, inclusive, and democratic society. This is the daily struggle of all the actions and projects of the Faculty of Education at UFG throughout its 55 years of history.

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