Brazil and Its Role in Global Environmental Governance

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Abstract

The discussions regarding power in the international system have been heavily influenced by the realist theory for a long time. However, structural changes observed in the last decades and the emergence of the post-positivist theories have proved that state-centered approaches are insufficient and unable to deal with the complex agenda of international politics. Within this context, global governance and international regimes have been subjected to changes due to the broadening of themes and the inclusion of non-state actors as a vital part of this new dynamics. Along with the power shift in a global scale, it is possible to identify the increasing essentiality of local and regional realms to cope with demands from local to international scales. In that sense, cooperation between these levels is a vital instrument in order to deal with the so-called “tragedy of the commons”. The changing world highlights the central function of sub-national arrangements in environmental governance, sustainability and development. Within this context, Brazil integrates the discussions involving the power shift and global environmental governance in a context of emerging economies and political reorientations. Given that, the aim of this paper is to analyze Brazil’s contribution to the construction of the global environmental governance, since the country has one of the richest biodiversity and hydric resources in the planet and has held important international conferences in 1992 and 2012 whose effects have influenced environmental policies in a global scale.

Key words: Global Governance, Environmental Politics, Brazil, Local Development.

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Introduction

Pointed out by scholars of International Relations, Geography, Political Science and Economics, the natural resources are predetermined factors of the geographical space that directly influence the material life of peoples, whether as a resource of survival or as an economic-productive one. The availability of environmental resources such as water and raw materials, can lead to conflicts between States or between populations within the same nation.

Throughout the history of mankind, the endless quest for natural resources and territories caused human migrations, disputes between people in various regions of the world, colonialist projects, and unlimited exploitation for agricultural, mineral and industrial production, which resulted in anthropic actions with strong impacts on the ecological balance of terrestrial and aquatic biomes on the Earth.

The spaces can be modified by local, state and nonstate actors, yet every actor have different levels of power and performance capabilities. Therefore, to promote efficient and sustainable solutions in the use of environmental resources, the convergence of guidelines for all actors is fundamental. In this sense, it is believed that cooperation and the construction of the global environmental governance are the tools/processes that will provide less asymmetrical power relations and mutual benefits.

In this sense, Brazil has played an important role in decision-making processes during international environmental conferences in recent decades compared to countries considered emergent powers, classified in this group because of its territorial extension, natural and human capital and economic and productive capacity.

With regard to biodiversity contained within the Brazilian territory, the performances and the demands of local, sub-national and private actors influence the national environmental agenda, and possibly, the decision-making processes that can be taken to the international level.

Are States able to cope with environmental issues alone?

Local and global environmental issues are interconnected and complementary and demonstrate the interdependence between political, economic and social actors in the generation of problems and in the search for shared solutions. However, from the perspective
of international relations, there are divergences regarding the role of the actors and the importance of environmental issues.

The concerns of the realist theory, whose analytical units are the States, are intimately linked to power relations, material capacities and relative gains. The States’ foreign policy is determined by external factors and not by internal issues. In addition, States are referred as rational actors that analyse the international system and elaborate compatible strategies that involve calculations of relative power.

In this sense, it can be said that international cooperation and the foundations of international regimes are not relevant according to the realist perspective since they involve capability sharing in certain areas, which may contribute to the unequal increase or decrease of power among those involved and, provided that the balance of power is a crucial feature to the survival of States in an anarchic system, cooperation processes are hindered by the presented issues.

Classical realism, essentially Hobbesian, has a pessimistic view regarding human nature (first image), which is determinant to the intentions of States and largely influences their behavior. Thus, creating relationships through cooperative processes is highly dangerous, given the uncertainty of the interests which are primarily motivated by the will to maximize power, and for this reason, may act offensively through its military power.

As international regimes involve the establishment of performance standards in the international system within a certain area, the existence of this control factor that involves sharing or even the partial transference of sovereignty makes this adventure potentially destructive and threatening to the State survival and to the logic of power accumulation.

Despite its predominance in the twentieth century, the realist tradition has worn gradually as it is particularly related to the Great Wars and its consequences. In the 1970s, with the intent to promote a renewal of realism, Kenneth Waltz introduced neorealism or structural realism. For the theorist’s analysis, the level of the international relations should be the third image: the structure of the international system. Thus, his vision was based on the behavior of States that is conditioned by power structures, in other words, the focus is removed from the interactions between States and from the pursue of power maximization, which is largely responsible for the conflicts mentioned above.

Another change is observed in the intention of this "new" theory. Although the reproduction of the state-centered vision, Waltz created that to be a theory of international politics and not a theory of foreign policy, unlike classical realism. Thus, concerns regarding
power would be directed to its maintenance (continuation of the international order) to ensure the States’ survival and not to its maximization.

Another difference lies in the fact that, according to the traditional view, States are engaged in a constant security dilemma. War is something that is always about to happen and survival is constantly threatened. According to Waltz’s view, the circumstances of the structure of the international system dictates the possibilities of conflict, and not the pessimistic view of human nature that favors conflict and almost nullifies the possibilities for international cooperation and participation in international regimes.

Furthermore, neorealism claims that cooperative processes can be achieved by establishing international regimes, but this possibility is conditioned by a low conflict potential, that is, cooperation may exist provided that war is not imminent, since the international system structure constrains offensive behaviors, and, as mentioned previously, the logic of power is no longer related to maximizing it, but its maintenance for survival, and in this context, the need to cooperate with other sovereign States arises.

International regimes are developed in order to establish patterns of behavior, ideas and values in a specific area of activity of international actors, which should be understood as anything other than temporary arrangements influenced by shifts in power and interests. According to Krasner (1983, p. 2) “regimes can be defined as sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors expectations converge in a given area of international relations”. International regimes are mainly related to the role of states, but they are no longer capable of dealing with environmental themes alone because the non-state actors have been more present in the exploitation of natural resources.

In this sense, States were still considered important actors, but the environmental politics literature recognized the growing influence of non-state actors (ANDONOVA, 2010). Besides that, environmental issues are considered low politics but the growth of transnationalism and the interdependence of subjects in a non-hierarchical relationship have demonstrated that more efficient actors in finding and implementing solutions for local/global problems would be recognized as a type of soft power politics.

The fact is that humanity is undergoing profound economic, cultural and political changes related to environmental issues which justify the development of theories, the perception of the actors and practices. With regard to the international environmental policy, some theorists suggest the importance of assessing the forms and functions of local institutions, considering that their effectiveness depends on the compatibility of bottom-up
institutional arrangements and the responsiveness of top-down arrangements. In this sense, the global environmental governance is a possibility of convergence of actors and interconnected themes.

Among the mechanisms of the global environmental governance construction it is considered that the international conferences and the resulting documents\(^4\), reports and programs produced by International Organizations\(^5\), cooperation agreements, epistemic communities, advocacy networks, environmental movements, and public-private regulations are possible ways as they allow the systemic understanding of the global environmental crisis and the involvement of multiple actors in conducting viable, effective and sustainable solutions.

Therefore, the reduction of the democratic deficit in national and international institutions through the inclusion of the private sector and the third sector in the negotiation rounds, along with the exchange of experience, space for dialogue and proposing during decision-making processes foster the reduction of the power asymmetry, and possibly, higher generation and distribution of benefits.

Furthermore, the complexity for integrated and shared management of natural resources demand multilevel and multistakeholder analyzes to understand the interests and capabilities of the influence of actors in national and international environmental policies. In this sense, it is believed that cooperation and sustainability are crucial in global environmental governance.

The purpose of governance is predominantly linked to international politics, transnational public policy networks, performance of institutions, participation and commitment of private transnational and non-governmental actors in global affairs (ROUSENAU, 2000), as advocated by the Commission on Global Governance (1996, P. 2, translated), governance can be understood as "[...] all the various ways in which individuals and public and private institutions manage their common problems. It is an ongoing process by which is possible to accommodate conflicting or different interests and set cooperative actions.”.

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\(^5\) Examples: Brundtland Report/WCED - Our Common Future, 1987; Assessment Reports on Global Climate Change IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change); Human Development Reports of the UNDP-UN; among others.
The proposal of sustainability can be understood as the pursuit of environmental and human alternatives in each locality, region or country, considering its peculiarities, difficulties and potentialities in order to produce enough resources to supply current and future generations, without compromising the dynamic of the nature (BECKER, 2001; SACHS, 2002; CMMAD, 1998). Hence, for the effective construction of global environmental governance it is essential that its bases are supported by the guidelines of sustainability.

If the environmental, social, political and economic problems are more evident when viewed within local realities, one realizes that non-state actors have assumed increasing roles in the search for solutions to the interconnected problems. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that subnational public actors are managers of resources in localities and non-state actors are the direct users (OSTROM, 1990). Therefore, natural resources can be classified as public or common-pool resource (OSTROM, 1990; HARDIN, 1968). Briefly, the public good is the resource that when used will not diminish its availability to others, the air, for example, while the use of common pool resources decreases the availability for other users, such as the biodiversity.

Since the 1970s, the well-known Third World countries, at that time, were pressured to reduce their development, with the justification to stop environmental degradation. However, it is known that each country promoted their social and productive development according to the available environmental, human, political and technological conditions.

In recent decades, the countries considered emerging powers gained prominence in global environmental issues, since its economic growth may threaten the sustainability of the biomass contained in their territories and that do not necessarily result in human development.

In this context, Brazil has improved its social, economic and environmental indicators, linking national and international interests such as the partial achievement of the Millennium Development Goals UN – United Nations Development Program. Concomitantly, in terms of international projection, Brazil has been struggling for the promotion of sustainable development in international negotiations and led the propositions of the emerging powers for the socioenvironmental issues.

The role of Brazil in Global Environmental Governance

Given the international context of each period and the foundations that drive the Brazilian diplomacy, it is known that, in recent decades, multilateralism has been the strategy used by the country to collaborate in the construction of an international environmental order.
In this context, the international system is considered a forum of diverging and converging interests’ concertation, which may influence the domestic policies of States or vice versa.

At the Stockholm Conference in 1972, Brazil was positioned for development at any cost, even if the pollution of ecosystems was necessary to achieve productive growth and income generation. Along with other Third World countries, Brazil has adopted a realistic position to defend the territorial sovereign use of natural resources for the growth of companies through the National Development Plans of the military governments. As a consequence of this posture, Brazil and China were targets of political activism promoted by non-governmental organizations in rich countries.

In the 1980s, this model of development entered was in a crisis marked by a fall in the value of natural resources in international markets, by the low quality of the national labor and the growing national awareness of environmental problems.

In the 1990s, Brazil suggested to host the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro. At this important event due to the amount of participants and documents produced, the concept of sustainable development was introduced in all areas. Brazil adopted a different position from the former and environmental issues were effectively incorporated by the Brazilian foreign policy that would defend the idea of "common, but differentiated responsibilities" (NASCIMENTO, 2011, translated).

According to Lessa (2011), this change in the Brazilian negotiating posture could also be interpreted as a reflection of the need to better adapt to the international constraints arising from the construction of a new international order that would increasingly emphasize the environmental protection. In this sense, the practice of effective international cooperation with regard to environmental issues demand an environmental positioning that would be compatible with the position of environmental hegemony that is pursued by Brazil.

In Kyoto (1997), Brazil presented a nationalist position towards the development of the country, defending differentiated targets for developed and developing countries again. However, unlike Stockholm (1972), this development would be based on the sustainability of natural resources and the country would assume a global leadership position among developing countries in finding solutions to global environmental problems (LE PRESTE, 2000).

The conduction of the Brazilian foreign policy in relation to the environmental issues has undergone significant changes over the past decades. The end of the military governments marked the end of the so-called “autonomy by distancing” that was characterized by the
detachment of large international issues and that began to take a more active role played by “autonomy through participation” observed in the 1990s.

In 2002, the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg - South Africa, resulted in the Johannesburg Declaration that reaffirmed the commitments made ten years before. However, only a few advances were observed. In this event, Brazil emerged as engaged actor because it recognized the possibilities for real gains. The domestic situation was in favor as the country was also experiencing the opening of the Brazilian political system.

During the UN Conference on Climate Change held in Copenhagen (2009), Brazil did not agree with the imposition of targets for reducing emissions of greenhouse gases, but agreed to join the group of developing countries that could voluntarily reduce their emissions, a fact that was considered as a pluralistic position in international relations (VIOLA, 2009).

For a second time, Brazil hosted a conference related to the environment, showing its proactivity and the pursue of leadership. Rio+20 became known as the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012. In this event, Brazil was the main articular of the negotiations and the proposals. In this event, non-state actors such as the private sector and the civil society, international organizations and subnational governments, directly or indirectly, had important performances for the preparation of the final document named "The Future We Want".

After hosting the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992 and the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) in 2012, it was possible to see that there was progress in the Brazilian domestic and foreign politics. In this sense, Hirst and Pinheiro (1995, P. 11, translated) point out that:

> It was during multilateral forums, particularly in the United Nations, it was possible to better realize the international performance of Brazil in order to reverse its passivity and mainly to provide more visibility to the country within the international community. Since then, the efforts were conjugated to the goal of ensuring a voice and a vote in the process of institutional reform of the international order.

It is perceived how the Brazilian diplomacy has been engaged to proactively act in discussions during forums on global environmental issues as this positioning contributes to the consolidation of a most prominent position in this area, providing prestige to the country.

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However, Brazil is far from becoming a global environmental power because there is a profound dysfunction among Brazilian environmental policy within the long-term requirements of sustainable development and this indicates that the country is an underdeveloped environmental power even with its material base (resources) position as a great player. The social dynamic is not fully compromised with the universal common good and this hinders the possibilities to more strongly influence global environmental governance (VIOLA & FRANCHINI, 2012).

Nevertheless, according to Barros-Platiau (2006) the defense of sovereignty over natural resources in Brazil can be considered a victory, given the hierarchy of power in the international order and the pressures exerted by the international community with the discourse of global equity and collective management of natural resources, as observed in the themes involving the Amazon rainforest.

Countries that claim to be environmental powers as Brazil have greater responsibility in protecting their natural resources and thus can avoid the interference of other countries, preserving its sovereignty and promoting the sustainable and efficient management of its territorial resources.

It is worth mentioning that Brazil has also sought regional leadership on other issues, such as energy, health, education and water resources. However, the international context is not the only factor that influences decisions on foreign policy. Domestic groups also shape the behavior of political actors, as described by Putnam’s two-level games (2010), what makes some necessary processes for environmental governance more difficult.

As previously mentioned, Brazil takes multilateralism to be an international strategy to project power, and in order to achieve this, the country has articulated their interests and has sought the formation of alliances, partnerships and cooperation with the aim of minimizing the power asymmetries of the actors involved. In official speeches, the representatives of the country advocate the concepts related to sustainable development, the right of future generations, the transference of clean technologies at low cost, the protection of minorities and traditional societies, more fair and equitable income distribution, among others.

There is a dissonance between the rhetoric of the foreign policy and the practice of the Brazilian national policy related to environmental issues. Domestically, environmental policies are well developed, but are not planned and implemented based on the long-term prospects, as the parameters of sustainability. When those are implemented they tend to suffer from a lack of supervision and compliance of some private actors and the society in general.
Moreover, these domestic policies are influenced and changed to meet urgent and sectored demands, which vary according to the expectations of interest groups and governments.

In order to assume a legitimate leadership in global environmental governance, it is essential that changes in the national territory are established so that the Brazilian government turns its environmental potential into effectiveness. In order to achieve this, minimum conditions are required:

- Not increase the exploitation of natural resources and the territory and, instead, add more aggregate value through conservation initiatives and through the use of technologies that optimize environmental factors with less impact and greater utilization.
- Establish sustainable and structural changes in land occupancy and in the use of urban and rural spaces.
- Promote environmental awareness and citizenship for living in community through educational activities in formal and informal spaces; no for the standardization of rules and behaviors and, yes, for effective education on principles of sustainability and respect for diversity.

**Not to conclude**

The proposals for global environmental governance and sustainability can be considered one of the paradigms of the XXI century. Certainly, the environmental issues have gained more visibility in recent decades due to the worsening of environmental phenomena, of human actions, disasters and scarcity of resources.

State and non-state actors have different motivations and attitudes to deal with environmental issues, for this reason, finding a guiding principle that aggregates them in the search for global/local solutions is an arduous and a necessary task.

The management of strategic resources for the survival of the present and the future societies, as well as meeting the production demands, justify the participation of multiple stakeholders in decision-making and actions at the national and international levels. In these contexts, Brazil stands out for its rich environment, a fact that provides visibility to the country in various conferences.

Currently, the Brazilian foreign policy has been characterized and highlighted due to the multilateralism and engagement in support of environmental issues and other areas in the international system, notably through the so-called diversification diplomacy, as it seeks to strengthen international cooperation in various fields, mainly with the countries of the
southern hemisphere, however, the domestic problems that persist in Brazil hinder the reference position that Brazil would assume otherwise as well as the leadership in the construction of a global environmental governance.

References


