

ARTIGO

MEC'S FEDERATIVE COORDINATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PAR: SIGNS OF ORGANIZATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND DECISION-MAKING RULES FOR EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

EMMANUELLE ARNAUD ALMEIDA¹

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2921-5430>

ANTONIO CABRAL NETO²

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7506-0807>

ABSTRACT: This article seeks an understanding of the dynamics of power sharing and interdependence among federal entities, focusing on analyzing the role of the MEC as coordinator of the educational policy component of the Articulated Actions Plan (Plano de Ações Articuladas – PAR). The research is qualitative in nature, based on documentary sources and content analysis of semi-structured interviews, organized according to thematic categories, resulting in the elaboration of a semantic network. It is argued that the MEC acts to institute a culture of planning, to provide a unified service, and to proactively induce demands. On the other hand, there is a fragmentation of actions as well as deficiencies in MEC's response to municipal (city-level) requests. It is concluded that the MEC must work to raise the level of municipalities' procedural knowledge, solving the shortcomings of its own management processes.

Keywords: Cooperative federalism, Intergovernmental relations, Articulated Actions Plan.

A COORDENAÇÃO FEDERATIVA DO MEC NO ÂMBITO DO PAR: SINAIS DE ARRANJOS E REGRAS DE DECISÃO PARA A GESTÃO EDUCACIONAL

RESUMO: O artigo busca compreender a dinâmica de compartilhamento do poder na interdependência entre os entes federados, com foco na análise do papel do MEC enquanto coordenador da política educacional relativa ao Plano de Ações Articuladas (PAR). A pesquisa é de natureza qualitativa, baseando-se em análise documental e de conteúdo de entrevistas semiestruturadas, organizada por meio de categorias temáticas, com a elaboração de rede semântica. Discute-se que o MEC atua para instituir a cultura de planejamento, prestar um atendimento unificado e induzir demandas. Em contrapartida, releva-se a existência de fragmentação das ações e de deficiências na resposta aos Municípios. Conclui-se que o MEC deve trabalhar para elevar o nível de conhecimento processual dos Municípios e resolver as fragilidades de seus próprios processos gerenciais.

Palavras-chave: Federalismo cooperativo, Relações intergovernamentais, Plano de Ações Articuladas.

¹ Instituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia da Paraíba (IFPB). <emmanuelle.almeida@ifpb.edu.br>

² Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN). <cabraln@ufrnet.br>

INTRODUCTION

In the Federal Constitution of 1988, the federative principle reveals itself as key to the organizational forms of any state. It is based on an indissoluble union between government entities—Union, States, Federal District and Municipalities (BRASIL, 1988). The establishment of social and political arrangements—aimed at the implementation of the premises of cooperative federalism—is carried out on the basis of this principle. This includes arrangements aimed at solving the historical problems of Brazilian educational policy, with its federative dynamics. The underlying idea behind these premises is the simultaneous existence of both a self-rule (concentration) and a shared rule (diffusion). In other words, there must be a central, concentrated pole of power, but the autonomy of the government's members—who have their own competencies—should be well-distributed or diffused (CURY, 2010). In the field of education, this organizational logic has favored the decentralization of public actions. To this end, competencies for the different federated entities have been defined, and new initiatives in the management of intergovernmental relations have been introduced.

At the same time, a strengthening of the federative pact is sought, based on the cooperation between various federated entities, in order to overcome the regional asymmetries seen throughout the Brazilian educational scenario. According to Dourado (2010, p. 678, own translation), “the relationship between state, education, and educational policies is marked by complex processes and dynamics, a translation of the historicity of broader social relations, their priorities and ideological forms.” One should emphasize the connections that structurally and conjuncturally place these social relations within a certain historical and social space. Such historical and social connections underlie the fact that Brazilian federalism directly affects public educational policies, leading to the recognition that the relations between central government and subnational units must be improved. In order to discuss the context of intergovernmental relations in a country marked by heterogeneities, as is the case in Brazil, it is imperative to reflect on the interdependence between federated entities. This reflection should take place on the basis of three categories: decentralization, autonomy and cooperation. Moreover, it should always give proper consideration to the dilemma of federative coordination.

In the educational context, due to the modernization of public administration, implemented policies regard the strategic planning model as a fundamental administrative tool. As a result of the changes that the Brazilian federation has undergone since the country's re-democratization, programs and initiatives have been set up to strengthen federal coordination, including the Articulated Actions Plan (*Plano de Ações Articuladas* – PAR). The PAR includes a diagnosis of the educational situation as well as a strategic planning spanning multiple years and articulating goals related to the sharing of political, technical and financial competencies for the execution of programs aimed at the maintenance and development of basic education. These competencies are divided according to four dimensions: Educational Management; Training of Teachers and Professionals Responsible for School Service and Support; Pedagogical and Evaluative Practices, and Physical Infrastructure and Pedagogical Resources.

The Ministry of Education (MEC) uses a management information system entitled Integrated Monitoring, Execution and Control System (*Sistema Integrado de Monitoramento, Execução e Controle* – SIMEC), which stores the data corresponding to the multiple stages of the PAR: diagnosis of each municipality's concrete reality, elaboration of action plans, and monitoring of the planned actions. However, a model elaborated by the MEC itself was incorporated into this information system, forming a standard structure to be followed by all Brazilian municipalities. This model does not allow for local realities to be properly taken into account. More specifically, the system does not provide local administrators with editing options such as “insert new actions,” “edit action description,” or “delete action.” In face of this issue, it is important to remember that “contemporary political regimes face the challenge of providing conditions for public policies not to ignore regional and local particularities, while promoting territorial equity and universality of treatment among citizens” (PALOTTI; MACHADO, 2014, p. 399, own translation). As a proactive policy by the Federal Government, the PAR intends to provide municipalities with equal opportunities; however, it does so at the expense of any consideration for local particularities.

According to information from the MEC,

The Educational Development Plan (PDE), launched in 2007, has been fulfilling the important

role of seeking greater internal organization and better articulation of the Federal Government's actions, programs and policies, especially in respect to the link between the Union and other federated entities, by means of the Articulated Actions Plans (BRASIL, 2010, p. 768, own translation).

The debate on autonomy and interdependence in intergovernmental relations refers to initiatives for the strengthening of subnational entities, so they can be provided with greater capacity for the formulation and implementation of public policies; meanwhile, the role of the central government is to create mechanisms for the promotion of territorial equality between federated entities. In this sense, with the foundations of educational policies clearly defined, the challenge is to comply with legal provisions that ensure an educational service whose administration is based on the notions of interdependence and cooperation.

Federal coordination remains necessary, since there are several variables that compromise the dynamics of federative arrangements. As pointed out by Rocha (2013), in a federative context, the coordination capacity of a country's power center is essential for the production of efficient public policies. This research's guiding question was: how does the MEC behave in its coordination of the Articulated Actions Plan? Our goal, therefore, was to approach the main characteristics of the relations between Municipality, State and Union in their management and implementation of the PAR. We characterize intergovernmental relations within the context of the PAR's implementation, evidencing the role of the MEC as a federative coordinator.

In the same vein, since joint decision-making appears as an important dilemma for the decentralization of educational policies, the Federative Coordination of the MEC within the scope of the PAR was defined as an analytical category of research. This research was qualitative in nature, with data collection strategies based on the following data collection techniques: documentary analysis (normative documents and documents from the PAR of the state of Campina Grande, PB); semi-structured interviews with key process actors, involving the three levels of government: Union, State and Municipality. Participants from the Union were two representatives from the MEC and the FNDE (National Fund for Educational Development), responsible for monitoring the PAR at the municipal level, as well as carrying out the internal articulation between the executive secretariat and other secretariats of the MEC, in respect to PAR activities. In Paraíba, interviews were held with two representatives of the State Secretariat of Education. Researches alongside the municipal entity were carried out with representatives of the Municipal Department of Education of Campina Grande, PB. This included all the secretaries who acted as PAR administrators, participating in elaboration and monitoring during 2007–2010 and 2011–2014 (three representatives, as well as five members of the local staff).

Data treatment was qualitative, employing content analysis in the modality of thematic categories, according to the procedures established by Bardin (2011). Per the author, the development of a thematic analysis consists in the definition of a theme, which acts as a recording unit. As such, one is able to discover the nuclei of meaning that make up the studied form of communication, and the presence of these nuclei may have some meaning in respect to the chosen analytical objective—since what the researcher has in mind are the relations such elements maintain among themselves. Operationally speaking, the coding of the interviews was done using *ATLAS.ti* software (version 7.5). This tool makes it possible to establish relationships between codes, so as to draw semantic networks³. Network views are important to facilitate the construction of links between concepts and also to interpret research findings, communicating them in an effective manner. In contrast to linear models and sequential representations, network-like representations of knowledge are closer to the way human thought is structured (*ATLAS.ti*, 2013). After the identification of research subjects' discourses, each interview was attributed a number, followed by the type of federated entity the participant represented. For example: P1-UNION identifies the first interviewee, a representative of the UNION federated entity; P3-STATE, refers to the third respondent, a representative of Paraíba's State Secretariat of Education.

³ A network is defined as a set of *nodes* and *links*. In order to build semantic networks, one must define links expressing the nature of relationships between concepts, linking sets of similar elements in a network diagram of nodes (*ATLAS.ti*, 2013). In this research, for the construction of networks and, consequently, network views, we employed specific node functions of the *code families* type (categories), as well as links of the *code-code-relations* type.

COOPERATIVE FEDERALISM AS THE FOUNDATION OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

The theme of cooperative federalism and its nuances encompasses a considerable diversity of studies and interrelated variables; thus, there is a multiplicity of meanings attached to the concept. There is also a large number of comparative studies on the subject carried out in many countries. These studies investigate how countries behave in the provision of social policies based on elements of cooperative federalism.

For Elazar (2011), federalism is a form of political organization that unites the different forms of government into a general political system, so that every party is able to preserve its essential political integrity. It is based on the combination of self-rule and shared rule. Within a political-administrative organization that stands for unity in diversity, it seeks to reconcile self-rule and local autonomy with interdependence. This happens by means of a contract (or pact) embodied in the Constitution and other institutional mechanisms.

Federalism is intimately linked to democracy. In this sense, a government's greatest challenge is to preserve territorial integrity in a nation marked by heterogeneity. In addition to achieving unity and diversity simultaneously, federalism has to accommodate, preserve and promote distinct territorial identities within a broader political union (WATTS, 2006). In Elazar's view (2011), it is important for any government, at any level, to maintain its own decision-making capacity, so cooperation does not become a mask for coercion by the central government.

The federative pact establishes a shared sovereignty that must confer government entities with a combination of autonomy and interdependence. In order to be compatible with these premises, a country must have "at least two levels of autonomous government, [while sustaining] intergovernmental cooperation and actions aimed at national integration" (ABRUCIO, 2010, p. 42, own translation). Thus, the central government assumes the role of a policy coordinator, regulating the actions of other entities. This relationship requires special attention, so that the autonomy conferred upon subnational units is not harmed, maintaining federalism's original ideal of interdependence. In a federalist context, public policies should be organized in order to ensure optimal coordination between territorial actors, considering that basic policies have to be developed and implemented by means of negotiation, so that everyone can participate in decision-making and implementation processes (ELAZAR, 1994).

Thus, coordination of actions presupposes joint and national articulation, with the Union assuming an important role as a policy coordinator, with no harm to the autonomy of subnational governments. Watts (2006) argues that, in order to have effective cooperation in most federations, it is necessary to consider two important approaches: one is the creation of intergovernmental structures and processes, facilitating consultation, coordination and joint decision-making between governments; and the other is the development, within each government, of intragovernmental structures and processes, allowing for the coordination of a government's relations with other entities, so all can participate effectively.

Finding a point of symmetry between diffusion and concentration of political power is the most complex dilemma of cooperative federalism. This becomes especially true when considering that the variety of general and local preferences of citizens is nothing but a portrayal of the myriad social heterogeneities underlying federalist governments. The Constitution alone is unable to account for all the issues pertaining the relations between federated entities. In this sense, governments must establish internal mechanisms for the successful conduct of public policies. Balance is a key goal here, and it arises from a movement of bringing together specific local circumstances with central policy coordination. In this effort to incorporate elements such as autonomy and interdependence in the management of relations between national and local governments, these governments will eventually make use, to a greater or lesser extent, of the best instruments available to them, i.e., those that are able to fulfill the priority demands of the population.

In Brazil, the division of competencies indicated by the 1988 Federal Constitution pursues the implementation of the federative pact, expressing the principle of integrated action by federative units, so as to ensure the universal right to education without seeking the prevalence of one entity over the other. In the scope of federalism, education is a guaranteed priority in the practice of each level of government. This is ensured by a political-administrative organization establishing responsibilities shared

among all entities. Coordination of actions, however, presupposes the existence of competency areas. Although these areas are defined in the 1988 Constitution (private, common, and competing), this definition does not clarify their implementation, leaving entities to decide this—and also how to deal with the lack of regulation of the collaborative regime—on their own. This issue reveals how intergovernmental relationships involve more than zero-sum conflict⁴: rather than a simple tug-of-war game for the control of social programs, the interaction between government entities implies a complex system of competition, cooperation, and accommodation (PIERSON, 1995).

It should be noted that, in Brazil, the progress of re-democratization and its consolidation throughout the 1980s led political actors to mobilize in favor of decentralized management practices, regarded as one of the essential prerequisites for deepening and improving democracy, including the advancement of social rights (CASTRO, J., DUARTE, 2008). According to the aforementioned authors, non-coincidentally, the 1980s witness the municipalization of educational policies appearing with greater vigor. This was the path for the maintenance of power chosen by representatives of government administrations themselves; they opted to prioritize direct negotiation with municipalities, working around the authority of state administrators.

For federal coordination to become an actual expression of interdependence among entities, one must remember that, especially in respect to education, the structuring of federalism intermingles with Brazil's very historical formation. This means federal coordination has to face a scenario marked by severe regional inequalities, fragmentation of the political system, and difficulties in establishing the respective attributions of the three levels of government. A national administrative structure should not exist in detriment to the capacity of each federated entity to manage its educational complex. In order to achieve cooperative federalism under effective national coordination, political and managerial actors have to grasp the historical roots responsible for the 'natural' tension permeating federal arrangements, namely: tensions between unity and diversity, unity and autonomy, cooperation and competition, centralization and decentralization. Next, one must try to understand the type of heterogeneity present in specific situations, in order to design alternative, feasible arrangements to solve these tensions, undermining diversities so as to maintain the unity of the national state.

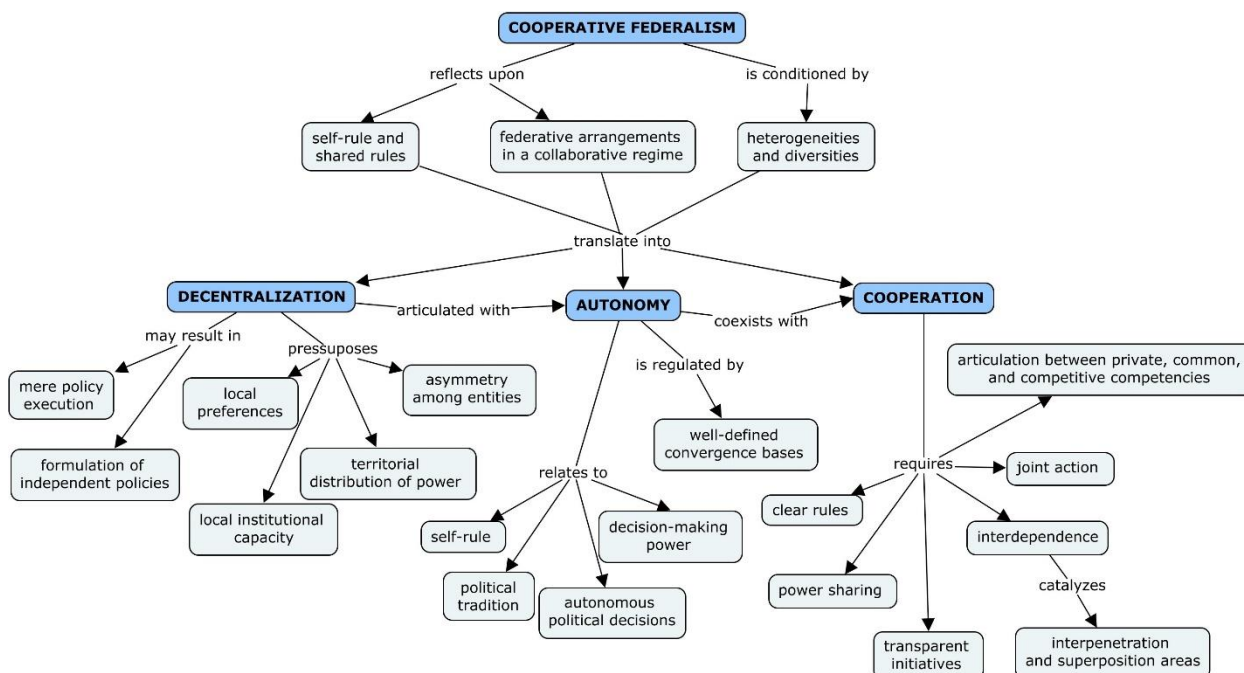
Reducing the effects of Brazilian heterogeneities is a pressing task for current governments. This can only take place on the basis of state policies to gradually overcome regional inequalities. Federal coordination in Brazil must bring together social policies to attack these inequalities, considering, on the one hand, the political-administrative capacity of each state and municipality to provide assistance to those who need it, and, on the other hand, the diversity of society's interests. Finding an interface between the conceptual bases of federalism and education is essential to understanding how cooperation has been carried out via the federative pact, and how this cooperation is articulated within a regime of collaboration. Araújo (2013) argues that if education (together with other social rights) is the responsibility of the state, the latter's action must be considered according to four aspects: political-administrative organization, territorial distribution of power, relationships with subnational units, and distribution of powers and financial resources among these units.

To better elucidate this subject, Figure 1 shows a conceptual map based on the triad often present in studies on cooperative federalism (both those that refer to a broader context and those that specifically investigate the Brazilian federalist pact): autonomy, cooperation, and decentralization.

Within the map, it is worth highlighting some of the main elements, which present a significant contribution to the theme, observing their interconnection with the relevant concepts. These elements form a fabric that shapes the environment of cooperative federalism.

⁴ The author uses the terms "zero-sum" and "positive-sum" to indicate that intergovernmental relations require more than the simple neutrality of "zero-sum" conflicts, with efforts by all parties to generate "positive-sum" initiatives being necessary (PIERSON, 1995, p. 458).

Figure 1 – Conceptual Map of Cooperative Federalism in Education



Source: prepared by the authors (2018) with the aid of CmapTools software (version 4.18).

Cooperative federalism is surrounded by its more abstract traits, which characterize it, but is also a representation of the Brazilian educational context, established by means of public policies implemented in a collaborative way. From this interrelationship, the categories of Decentralization, Autonomy and Cooperation are produced. In addition to being articulated among themselves, such categories give rise to a network of concepts symbolizing the possibilities of the federative context in its complexity. They have a direct or indirect bearing on the construction of meanings, as expressed in the conceptual map. That is why numerous subsidiary elements emerge, representing concerns about the educational scenario in which the PAR was conceived.

IN SEARCH OF DECISION-MAKING RULES FOR THE MEC'S FEDERATIVE COORDINATION: A SEMANTIC NETWORK WITH SIGNS OF ARRANGEMENTS AND CONTRADICTIONS IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE PAR

The effectiveness of public policies in Brazil is intrinsically related to the definition, at each level of government, of federative mechanisms to guide the practice of actors, aiming at the management of the relations of interdependence between them. Assessing limits and progress in the management of the PAR requires considering, among other factors, “whether centralized policies are appropriate; yet this [consideration] hardly closes the question, which mainly concerns the debate on the fundamentals and characteristics of the Brazilian state as a nucleus of power and responsibility” (ARAÚJO, 2013, p. 32, own translation). Studying the problems related to federal coordination—intergovernmental relations’ forms of integration, power sharing and joint decision-making—can provide means to make the principle of unity in diversity feasible.

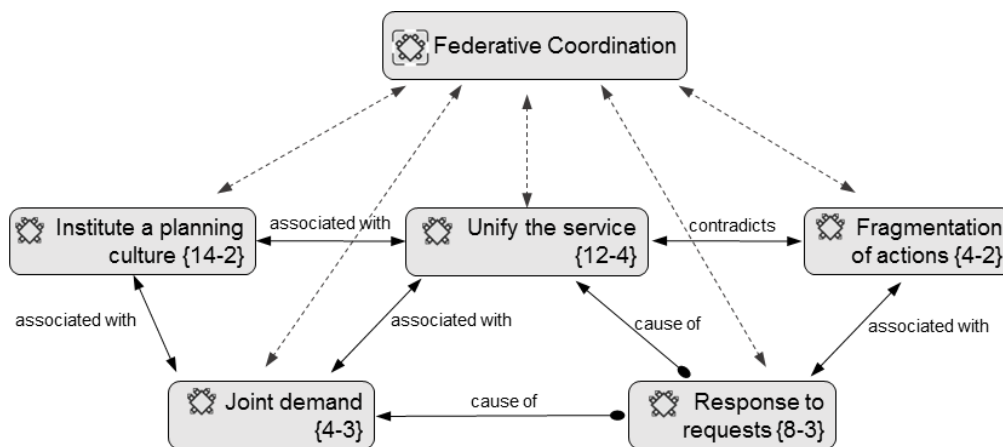
In this sense, the research explored elements of subjects’ understanding of the PAR, in order to discuss how these elements are represented within the context of Brazilian federalism. Based on this notion, we were able to observe that, among the codes associated with content analysis categories, interview discourses showed how the research subjects understood the role of the MEC as a coordinator of the PAR’s educational policy.

Considering that more than one level of government operates on the same territory, federal coordination is related to the understanding of the articulation between entities, as well as aspects

associated with participation instruments, norms, policy design, and attribution of responsibilities. Thus, Figure 2 shows the semantic network elaborated to represent the relationships between the Federative Coordination category and its five associated codes, arranged as follows: the codes “Institute a planning culture,” “Unify the service,” and “Joint demand” congregate all the excerpts that indicate reasons why the MEC decided to design and coordinate the PAR; the codes “Response to requests” and “Fragmentation of actions” congregate excerpts that show the performance of the MEC in fulfilling and giving feedback to the requests made by the municipality.

Given these explanations and in order to analyze the role of the MEC as the coordinator of PAR’s educational policy, the semantic network shows that, to effectively carry out this role, the MEC makes certain decisions related to the implementation of a planning culture and the unification of the service, and also to the specification or typification of municipalities’ demands. For the latter, it deliberates over the response to be given to municipal requests. However, such deliberations are associated with a fragmentation of MEC’s actions, a contradiction threatening the very attempt to unify the service.

Figure 2 – Semantic network of the Federative Coordination category



Source: Research data (2018).

Note: elaborated by the authors with the aid of *ATLAS.ti* software (version 7.5).

The interviewees’ speech at all three levels of government is uniform in confidently stating that one of the main objectives of the MEC in designing the PAR was to institute a culture of planning. This is the main takeaway among all of this code’s citations. Among the interviewees, there were fourteen citations stating that the PAR stimulated a culture of planning, as shown in the following excerpts: from the MEC official, when he declares that “[The MEC] has a dialogue with autonomy because [it] foments a planning culture ... constantly reinforcing the importance of a planning culture” (P2-UNION, 2018); from one of the SME technicians, who states that “the PAR, as a strategic planning for improving education ... had this as one of its objectives, [and] this is a positive aspect: to plan actions, to define a timeline [for these actions], even though some [goals] end up not being met ... (P8-SME_TEAM, 2018); and from one of the Secretaries of Education:

Municipalities were not encouraged to come up with a systemic and organic medium- and long-term planning policy; this was precisely the PAR’s great innovation ... Why? Because state departments had no such culture of medium and long-term planning. When you took over as secretary of education, your main responsibility involved putting out fires, so to speak. You became this kind of fireman who took care of everyday problems, but had no capacity for stopping and thinking about the [development of the] secretariat over the next two years, [i.e., the capacity for asking:] what’s the priority for the next year? What’s the priority for the next two years? What’s the priority for the next three years? (P7-SME, 2018).

Thus, according to P7 (Secretary of Education), the municipality had no culture of planning. Another common tendency in interviewees’ discourse was the recognition, by all the respondents, that this change of behavior was not without its pains, and that this work methodology was still being slowly absorbed. As one of the Union interviewees states, “the culture of planning does not have roots here”

(P2-UNION, 2018). In addition to the aforementioned examples, there are others that can be highlighted as demonstrative of this transition the municipalities are currently going through:

We have ... due to our culture, the country's culture, [a lack of] long-term planning, which I think is something that we, both ourselves and the municipalities themselves, are learning as we go ... there are difficulties ... I find this management logic to be well-suited, viable, and objective because it allows for a faster, more open dialogue between federated entities. This cultural difference is somewhat of a thorn in our side, but we are getting there (P1-UNION, 2018).

I think the PAR is helping to ... I'm not sure [if] consolidate [is the right word], but at least implement this culture. I think the planning culture is not really firmly implemented yet, but the PAR can instigate it, it is really leading the municipalities to create, or at least to start, this culture (P3-STATE, 2018).

As can be seen, the interviewees express that fomenting the culture of educational planning is a high priority for the MEC, but they understand that this process has its particularities, its consolidation requiring some time. For Ferreira (2014, p. 604, own translation), the PAR is an innovative mechanism, since “this model of educational planning was absent from the policies of democratic governments established after the promulgation of the 1988 Federal Constitution.” The discourse by P1-UNION goes on to praise managerial logic, making it clear that there is an intention of reinforcing the systemic perspective of education. From this observation by the interviewee, one can also perceive that all entities face difficulties in disseminating, and at the same time absorbing, the managerial logic. The diagnosis of the Paraíba State Education Plan, approved in 2006, reached this same conclusion when stating that Brazil lacks an educational planning and evaluation culture. According to the text, “actions are being developed according to priorities defined in each managerial instance of the Executive power, as well as the opportunities and limits of each historical period; this prevents [clearly] targeted advances to fulfill societal demands” (PEE-PB, 2006, p. 115, own translation).

But the federal public power has been acting to build a notion of strategic planning common to all federative entities. In fact, strategic planning is increasingly present in the activities of the FNDE, which sees it as a mechanism for strengthening the managerial capacity of public organizations:

The FNDE has sought to innovate and modernize its administration to efficiently meet society's desires and expectations. This becomes a challenge in view of the increasing amount of resources to be put into use and the arduous task of providing the means for a quality education, in line with public policy. To meet these challenges and fulfill their institutional mission, public organizations must strengthen themselves, and one of the possible paths [for this strengthening] is the definition of a strategic plan, which provides institutional objectives with a cardinal point of reference (FNDE, 2015, p. 9, own translation).

Since the PAR was strategically devised to strengthen managerialism in education, it is based on new dynamics and a new culture, which are in line with administrative modernization, transferring the focus from structural changes to cultural changes and thus favoring the qualification of administrative processes (LOPES, CASTRO, A., 2012). While managerial reforms instill the idea of a model based on the productivity of the system, the PAR has been made available to the municipalities as a planning tool, but is yet to become fully managed. It is also yet to be included in the broader context of other managerial instruments, such as the PPA and the Municipal Education Plan. In other words, the PAR is still not synchronized with managerial logic as a whole. The discourse by interviewee P5 establishes a clear dialogue with this observation. The respondent reports on the reality of Campina Grande:

When I arrived at the Education Secretariat, there was already a staff with full-time municipality technicians, as well as temporary collaborators. The team was relatively large, but it was a surprise to find that very few of these technicians had a good grasp of what the Articulated Actions Plan really was. The plan was there. It was available in print, but it was really nothing but a set of paper sheets stapled together. A rather significant set of paper sheets, in a drawer status, forgotten about. This was reality at the Campina Grande municipality (P5-SME, 2018).

In this sense, Cardoso Jr. (2011, p. 12, own translation) argues that if planning is “detached from management, it runs the risk of becoming a set of studies, diagnoses, and proposed objectives lacking instrumental effectiveness, [an] activity incapable of mobilizing the necessary resources in a rational way, in the direction intended by the plan.” In order to ensure an organization of the municipality and the SME in an effective sense, the PAR would have to establish an effective connection with local staff and with the staff of other municipal secretariats. The plan's “drawer status,” as phrased by the

respondent, is explained by the lack of a closer dialogue between administrators and the structuring of the administrative apparatus. This contradicts the very principle of accountability that, permeating the concepts of decentralization, emphasizes social control as a prerogative for efficient public administration. While we do not disregard the existence of local committees and councils (councils only act to control the transfer and application of financial resources – see article 10 of Law 12.695/2012 – BRAZIL, 2012a), what we propose here is the establishment of closer ties with the SME technical team, in parallel to the definition of better-organized management structures, so as to ensure not only a participatory construction of the planning stage, but also of the execution stage. The MEC must pay attention to this gap between planning and execution, and correct it.

The interviews also point to a latent need for the MEC to typify demands, in order to realize the initiatives that the Federal Government defines as service priorities. This code, “Joint demand”—which congregates quotes from the two Union interviewees, P1 and P2, as well as from Municipal Secretaries P5 and P7—demonstrates that the MEC has started to push for the recognition of certain demands by the municipality: for instance, if a secretary was not aware of the need for training school counselors, the PAR would require this secretary to specify, in the SIMEC, a certain number of people to participate in such training. In the interviewees’ reports, one can take note of a more favorable stance on this issue on the part of Union interviewees, and also on the part of one of Campina Grande’s Secretaries of Education:

You try to focus more on actions that are more tangible at the moment and also on the quality of service, i.e., on a previously established demand, to help the MEC verify what is currently needed, how to meet this need, and what priorities the MEC can assume. [This way] you can get a ... clearer and more objective map of the service, and this gets you moving faster (P1-UNION, 2018).

Demands stopped being spontaneous demands and became induced demands. So, for instance, in order to get day care, right, it was tremendously difficult ... So the PAR tool shows it [day care] as an open demand, right? (P7-SME, 2018).

At the same time, the stance taken by the P5 Municipal Secretary of Education also merits attention: “PAR has typified demand, but even though it performed this categorization of demand, whoever was on the other side of the counter was not invited to dance. [It’s as if] you had these couples who were dancing to different songs, but had to stand in front of one another” (P5-SME, 2018). The different perceptions regarding demand typification clearly show that some municipalities may not have welcomed this action in a positive way, as in the case of Campina Grande. We are left to ponder that the MEC probably did not pursue a deeper knowledge of what the municipality actually needed, but rather decided to use the instrument to unilaterally determine what necessities the municipality should “fulfill.” For example, the PAR software has a dialog box for the SME to register how many blenders it necessitates in order to properly equip the school kitchens; however, if the SME decides that it needs a mixer, and that option is not available, it simply cannot be purchased, since purchases are national. Were such an otherwise spontaneous demand to become induced, this would mean that such demand would now answer to so-called convocational instruments, following deadlines defined in the SIMEC.

The MEC’s goal in instituting a culture of planning and specifying joint demands is also strongly related to the ideas underlying the “Unify the service” code. According to the reports, the Federal Government intended to establish a criteria for systematizing the service and thus it found, in the PAR, a mechanism for integrating programs to improve the service provided to municipal entities. The central tendency within respondents’ discourse is related to the change that the conception of the PAR brought about by ending traditional, previously existing practices of elective submission of projects by the municipalities in order to request federal assistance. This code congregates excerpts from seven interviewees, comprising a total of twelve citations. The following stand out as the most representative of the set, at each level of government:

The Ministry wanted a systemic and integrated service for all entities. The idea was to make the MEC’s initiatives and its communication channels alongside the federated entities more unified, to bring about an equality of opportunity. The idea of the PAR was to integrate the service and, especially, to provide opportunities for those municipalities that had the greatest difficulties, with

less technical capacity to access technical and financial assistance for education (P1-UNION, 2018).

The PAR modified, changed these relations, right? [It changed] the modes of relationship between the federative entities ... it also managed to provide us with a more integrated vision of the programs. It provided for better organization, better integration: I think that's another important aspect (P3-STATE, 2018).

The MEC was "capillarized," that is, the capillarity of the MEC's actions within municipalities increased. It made no difference if you were dealing with a capital city or a distant municipality in the country's interior, all were now able, had the opportunity to become aware of MEC's actions. So, in my opinion, this was a big departure, wasn't it? ... the PAR's major goal was to be able to say: "no, really, in order to have access to this or that resource, you have to use the tool" (P7-SME, 2018).

As such, the PAR endorsed procedures that brought a certain degree of impersonal rationality to the provision of initiatives and resources in the area of basic education. This is one of the instrument's main strengths, deserving of attention. Before the PAR, the MEC's service was performed without clear criteria, frequently seeking the support of the municipalities that had a greater technical capacity to develop its projects. In this regard, the PAR was able to provide a greater visibility to the Federal Government's programs, making its service more comprehensive, altering intergovernmental relations that up to that point were mostly directed by the inertial force of political tradition. Such a perspective is akin to the objectives of the PDE (National Program for the Development of Education). The fundamental ideas of the PDE go hand-in-hand with the vision of the MEC to use the PAR to seek more organicity in its programs (BRAZIL, 2010), strengthening its role as a coordinating body of educational policies.

Since the MEC had, as its intentions, to "Institute a culture of planning", to "Unify the service" and to typify a "Joint demand" (all demonstrated in the semantic network), it was only natural that it would establish certain criteria to define what demands were to be met, in an attempt to make the service more unified and specific. Thus, a set of eight discourses, related to the response to requests made via the PAR, revealed that the code "Response to requests" had its roots in the code "Unify the service," as shown in Figure 2.

The analysis of excerpts of this code allows us to distinguish two positions: a more impartial assessment, evidenced in the interviewees P1-UNION and P3-STATE, who attempt to form an unbiased description of how requests are analyzed; and another position, more pronounced, which emphasizes that, while the MEC decides in favor of certain actions and against others, when the latter happens no formal answers are given to the municipal team. The first position is well-represented in the discourse of a MEC official who only states that "the demands expressed by the federated entities in the PAR are analyzed and monitored by the secretariats of the MEC or by partner institutions responsible for implementing the program to which the subprogram is linked" (P1-UNION, 2018), this being the criterion for requests to be fulfilled. It is also present in P3-STATE (2018), who states that "the analysis was performed and a response was given either at the time of the analysis itself or when the request for a certain sub-action was met; there was no answer or communication regarding the fulfillment or non-fulfillment of the plan as a whole." In fact, the normative PAR resolutions No. 29/2007 (BRAZIL, 2007) and No. 14/2012 (BRAZIL, 2012a), together with their subsequent amendments, determined that technical and financial assistance in the period from 2007 to 2014 would be in the hands of each main-activity Secretariat⁵ (*Secretaria-Fim*) and/or the FNDE. However, this information is not enough for an assessment of whether the provided assistance was satisfactory.

In this sense, during the interviews we sought to deepen the debate around this subject. From this debate we were able to distinguish a second tendency, involving statements to the effect that the municipality is only warned about what will be done at the precise moment of the action's implementation, with no previous communication on whether requests are going to be fulfilled. When

⁵ Examples of Ministry of Education (MEC) Secretariats are: Secretariat for Basic Education (*Secretaria de Educação Básica – SEB*), Secretariat for Continuing Education, Literacy, Diversity and Inclusion (*Secretaria de Educação Continuada, Alfabetização, Diversidade e Inclusão – SECADI*), Secretariat for Special Education (*Secretaria de Educação Especial – SEESP*). Additionally, various actions are coordinated by indirect management bodies, such as the FNDE and the CAPES/UAB.

asked about when an effective response to municipal requests was provided, the other Union interviewee replied: “This didn’t happen ... what you would do was wait and then wait more, there was no such thing [as a direct answer]” (P2-UNION, 2018). Statements by interviewees from the state and municipal entities also confirm the existence of this gap:

Not all sub-actions were analyzed, so there was no municipality per municipality, action per action response. ... What the MEC will always say is: we are planning. After all, the MEC has a budget and cannot meet the demands of all municipalities, right? So, based on their budget, they provide a more equitable assistance to all municipalities; in this sense, some actions are met while others are not ... but they also do not communicate that an action is not going to be met. When the municipality asks about it—and, nowadays, they monitor this stuff more closely, right, so sometimes even the mayor will attempt some kind of negotiation—then the MEC usually answers with another question: “is this in your municipality’s PAR?”. So, there is ... this demand, yeah, but there’s no dynamic of providing feedback to the municipalities, I mean, from their end to ours (P3-STATE, 2018).

You had this formal feedback that seemed almost pre-scheduled, like scheduled responses, always via email. For us to really get what we wanted—especially if it was an action contemplated, within the PAR, for the municipality, or at least placed within a program considered by the Federal Government as a priority—then we would have to insist on the telephone until we got somebody’s name, but this person was interchangeable too, so it could be person A at one time, and then B or C at another. So, to get access to what we needed, we had to insist (P5-SME, 2018).

This scenario shows how the MEC has indeed been equipped to offer programs in a more unified way, using the PAR; however, due to how the system is implemented, this unification is somewhat limited to the scope of demand registration: that is, there was indeed a unification of the methods used by the Federal Government to collect requests related to demands induced by the SIMEC system, and yet responses to these registered requests were not coupled with a systematic capable of giving proper attention to each municipality. According to P3-STATE (2018), federative coordination was carried out mainly at the planning level, with apparently no equally effective concern for the other stages of government management, namely, execution, monitoring and evaluation of results—contrary to the provisions of article 7th of Resolution 14/2012, which confers the MEC with a responsibility for “technically monitoring and evaluating the execution of the PAR” (BRAZIL, 2012a). This situation also runs contrary to the very concept of governmental planning, since “a plan only completes itself in the action, and this action implies a permanent evaluation and revision of what had been planned” (DAGNINO, 2009, p. 140, own translation).

The issue gains mounting severity in interviewees’ statements confirming the topicality of the code “Fragmentation of actions,” related to the “Response to requests” code. Such a fragmentation, however, is certainly contradictory to the federative coordination principle expressed in “Unify the service.” One cannot diminish the importance of the interviewees’ opinion that the current coordination of the programs is unable to rally all the MEC’s actions around the unified service proposal. This understanding is exemplified in the following statements:

The technical assistance actions lie within the scope of the MEC’s various secretariats. I don’t know whether there was a consensus on this, but the fact is that it’s very fragmented ... qualification actions, for example, are in the hands of the University, the Freire platform module, the PARFOR module. So there are technical assistance actions that are still very fragmented (P3-STATE, 2018).

Since SIMEC has several modules and the PAR is spread throughout these many modules, the entire thing has become this huge organism, full of fragments. Its very denomination, ‘Integrated System,’ [has to be called into question:] perhaps the system is integrated, but the teams are not, and if this is true for state governments, never mind municipal ones (P5-SME, 2018).

It’s as if the PAR is a tree, right, [a complex pathway] that you’re walking along, and when a program like this enters the scene, a tab comes up in the Secretary of Education’s part of the tool, so we can adhere. Regarding the councils, for instance: in 2014 a tab appeared where we had to register a person from the secretariat of education, and this person would be responsible for the councils, see? (P12-SME_TEAM, 2018).

This scenario seems to be more closely associated with technical assistance actions, since these actions are monitored by the various MEC Secretariats. However, it is known that such a failure to meet financial assistance requests is still present. A response is only provided when the MEC or the FNDE approves sub-actions linked to a particular resource, and only then is the availability of a financial resource communicated. When the request is denied, there is no submission of a justification or opinion report. The municipality has to go without a clear explanation. The interviewee P12-SME_TEAM states that, when requests are not approved, the SIMEC field for the insertion of an opinion simply remains blank, with no information whatsoever.

Such scenario aggravates the preexisting fragmentation of actions. The fact that there are several MEC Secretariats involved with the PAR makes common occurrences of these no-feedback situations. Meanwhile, the fragmentation of the programs offered by the MEC appears as a contradictory element within the overall attempt to establish institutional arrangements that somehow lend support the central government's decision-making rules. This is also a recurring issue for educational administrators. In fact, the very reason for the creation of the PDE was resolving these shortcomings (CAMINI, 2013). It is worth noting, however, that this situation is persistent and deep-rooted, requiring further initiatives to minimize its effects over time.

The federal coordination of the MEC is therefore intended to institute a planning culture, to specify joint demands and to unify the service. Such initiatives are seen as a clear advancement in the sphere of intergovernmental relations. However, this coordination presents limitations, seen in the MEC's response (or lack thereof) to requests, and in its deep-seated fragmentation of actions. Coordinated by the central government, the PAR is configured in the federative pact as a policy that establishes ground rules for intergovernmental relations, even when these cannot be considered "shared rules." This means that there are rules, strictly speaking, but these do not materialize effectively as *shared rules*, to speak in Elazar's terms (2011). This happens because the country's subnational units were not effectively consulted on their implementation. As Garcia and Cardoso Jr. (2015, p. 84–85, own translation) put it,

There is a well-recognized and ancient weakness in the planning and coordination of actions involving the other Federated Entities. The unjust demands placed on the federal government for projects and activities that are actually under the responsibility of other levels of government can be seen as evidence of the varied difficulties, seemingly insurmountable, faced by the Union in this sphere.

The hierarchical strategies employed by the central government were the establishment of rules, norms, and institutional design to ensure cooperation and to coordinate decisions, considered necessary to achieve public goals (CLARKE, 2007).

It is our assessment that the interviewees provide some signs indicating that the central government made use of institutional arrangements and decision-making rules to coordinate the activities of educational entities under the umbrella of the PAR. However, as argued by Obinger, Castles and Leibfried (2005), such arrangements should incorporate territorially based interests. At the same time, in defining arrangements and rules, it is not assumed that the MEC should be responsible for understanding local preferences: this would hurt the ideals of cooperation between constituent units when it comes to the attribution of respective responsibilities (in this case, within educational management).

Furthermore, the PAR and the federative coordination of the MEC should be analyzed in light of the theoretical input provided by the management of intergovernmental relations theory. According to Radin (2010), as a result of the growing interdependence between levels of government, instruments for the management of intergovernmental relations are increasingly necessary. In this sense, there are four sets of instruments available (RADIN, 2010, p. 603–611):

- a) **Structural**: those related to formal roles and interactions, standardized or established by organizations who create mechanisms of regulation and supervision. Among structural instruments are coordination strategies (aimed at the integration of units), decentralization (delegation of powers to local units of government), and regulation (the national government exercises a supervision of the state government and its local beneficiaries);

- b) Programatic: employed to manage the application of resources and the redesign of programs. Such instruments can be established by means of partnerships, with the sharing of information, ideas and other resources, or collaborations, in which resources are shared in favor of group processes, resource combination and joint planning;
- c) Research and capacity building: measures to build greater managerial capacity at multiple governmental levels. Research contributes to a deeper understanding of problems, alternatives and consequences, and helps cross-coordinate different organisms, increasing bargaining power. Capacity building involves efforts by the federated entities to strengthen the training and qualification of employees, as well as the provision of technical assistance from the central government in the areas of program design, planning and evaluation of public policies, among others;
- d) Behavioral: aspects of the interaction between governmental actors, demanding attention to individual and group communication processes and to conflict management processes. Conflicts must be prevented and managed, building consensus among actors, particularly in the programmatic and policy areas. Rules and regulations can be jointly negotiated, and communication strategies such as public consultations and hearings can also be mobilized.

Among these four sets of instruments, the PAR fits well within the categories of structural and programmatic instruments. It is a structural instrument because it is comprised of a set of rules, considering that the MEC formulated guidance manuals to be followed by the municipalities and established formal spaces for interaction, via the SIMEC as well as e-mail and telephone. The MEC also defined standardized regulatory and supervisory mechanisms when regulating the PAR by means of Laws and Decrees that delimited the activities of entities and each party's accountability for employed resources. It is a programmatic instrument because the MEC's own administrative body organized itself to focus on the design of administrative tools within the sphere of government programs (under the PAR, in this case, confirming the redesign of the implementation of programs offered by the MEC's secretariats, configured as technical assistance). Another factor regards its means for mobilizing financial resources, since, based on the PAR, the definition of common objectives and financial incentives was systematized, with joint work from federated entities.

On the other hand, the other two sets of instruments for the management of intergovernmental relations (research and capacity building; behavioral instruments) were not formally established by the MEC. Based on reports about difficulties in understanding the importance of the PAR and incorporating a planning culture, we consider that, in the case of research and capacity building instruments, strategies must be defined for the construction of managerial capacities at the subnational levels of government, enabling the adequate development of the skills necessary to fulfill the agreed upon responsibilities.

In order to further overcome certain municipalities' lack of technical capacity, the MEC must invest in training municipal administrators. The PAR alone will not be able to solve the management difficulties historically rooted in Brazil's paternalistic administrative culture. Thus, training and qualification tools should be used as a means of strengthening the implementation of the PAR. Concerning the behavioral instrument set, it is our assessment that a virtuous interaction between federal and local agents failed to materialize because the need for the joint negotiation of federal norms and regulations was woefully disregarded. For this reason, instead of creating regulations acceptable to all, the federal government created, so to speak, 'definitions established by one, but executed by all.'

CONCLUSION

The Articulated Actions Plan (PAR) has established itself as a proactive policy, elaborated by the Federal Government in order to strengthen the collaboration between entities, in favor of the municipalization of education. Considering that the relations established for the management of the PAR operate fully on the basis of technological platforms, the clarity of information on operations to be carried out via the SIMEC is fundamental, since these operations are not communicated to municipal actors in

person. Even so, it is our evaluation that the PAR is arranged according to structural and programmatic instruments, whose goal is to support its operationalization, minimizing any doubts that may arise.

The municipal PAR was launched to promote strategic planning in the area of education, while also providing a more uniform service to all municipalities, and not only those with greater technical capacity. In making use of these strategically developed tools, the reach obtained by the PAR—in its ability to contemplate those who were previously unable to get access to MEC assistance—represents a major step forward.

However, the PAR stumbled upon precisely what it intended to minimize and, in some cases, overcoming the preexisting asymmetries was not possible. That is, when faced with local technical limitations, the PAR was not able to establish itself as an instrument for raising the existing level of procedural knowledge. This issue was aggravated by the fact that there was no prior training of local actors by those responsible for the elaboration of the strategic plan. Strategic planning requires “thinking strategically,” otherwise, plans and regulations tend to have a peripheral meaning in the eyes of administrators. These are shortcomings of this policy, related to its lack of behavioral and research-and-capacity-building instruments.

In terms of management processes, the PAR represents a notable advance when it comes to the time-efficiency of the transfer of financial resources to federated entities. It also allows control bodies to monitor the financial execution of the agreements in a more agile way. On the other hand, there is no dialogue with municipalities on the MEC’s stance regarding requests. Deficiencies were also detected in the monitoring of PAR actions unrelated to financial execution. Therefore, it should be said that, although much is discussed about the plan as a regulatory instrument for municipal education administration, a closer examination of its operational aspects shows that such regulation is greatly concentrated within the planning stage. When it comes to controlling the implementation of the PAR, the MEC is currently unable to execute the proper monitoring required by federative coordination.

The PAR is characterized more as a federative coordination instrument than as a policy for ensuring local autonomy. Its implementation certainly presents limits and contradictions; however, it stands tall as a progressive advancement against Brazil’s outmoded political traditions.

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