

BRAZILIAN CITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND THE NEED TO OVERCOME THE NEOLIBERAL LOGIC BY POLYCENTRIC GOVERNANCE

CIDADES BRASILEIRAS NO CONTEXTO DA EMERGÊNCIA CLIMÁTICA E A NECESSIDADE DE SUPERAR A LÓGICA DO NEOLIBERALISMO PELA GOVERNANÇA POLICÊNTRICA

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Abstract

The article addresses climate governance in the context of Brazilian cities, through public adaptation policies. The justification for the research is the fact that cities are home to the urban population, which, in addition to being the largest part of the world population, will be more directly impacted by climate change. The research problem is to analyze how cities should

Resumo

O artigo aborda a governança climática no contexto das cidades brasileiras, por meio das políticas públicas de adaptação. A justificativa da pesquisa é o fato de as cidades abrigarem a população urbana, que, além de ser a maior parte da população mundial, será mais diretamente impactada pelas mudanças climáticas. O problema da pesquisa é analisar como as cidades devem agir e o custo de agir



act and the cost of acting in the face of the need for adaptive policies in the context of the climate emergency. The general objective is to analyze the impasse in local climate governance for cities. In this vein, the article presents three specific objectives: a) to highlight that cities are obliged to act within the climate agenda; b) reveal the neoliberal logic as responsible for the current failure of climate governance in cities and c) present an alternative for cities based on the polycentric approach to climate governance. The method adopted is based on the polycentric approach to climate governance, which advocates collaborative action between state and non-state entities, and in the sphere of public power, the interaction between federative entities is highlighted. It is considered as the most adequate methodological way to understand how Brazilian cities try to face local climate governance problems.

Keywords: Brazilian cities; climate emergency; climate governance; neoliberalism; polycentric approach.

diante da necessidade de políticas adaptativas no contexto da emergência climática. O objetivo geral é analisar o impasse na governança climática local para as cidades. Nessa esteira, o artigo apresenta três objetivos específicos: (a) destacar que as cidades são obrigadas a agir dentro da agenda climática; (b) revelar a lógica neoliberal como responsável pelo fracasso atual da governança climática nas cidades; e (c) apresentar uma alternativa para as cidades com fundamento na abordagem policêntrica da governança climática. O método adotado toma como base a abordagem policêntrica da governança climática, que defende uma atuação colaborativa entre entes estatais e não estatais, sendo que, na esfera do poder público, ganha destaque a interação entre os entes federativos. Considera-se como a forma metodológica mais adequada para se compreender como as cidades brasileiras tentam enfrentar problemas de governança climática local.

Palavras-chave: abordagem policêntrica; cidades brasileiras; emergência climática; governança climática; neoliberalismo.

Introduction

Our object of study is climate change in cities. The research is justified because it is in cities where most of the 21st century population lives and increasingly concentrates, so adaptive climate policies need to see the population as a priority. From a scientific point of view, the article covers the current need for more academic research on polycentric governance, especially relating it to the Brazilian federal system.

Here is the question-problem of this article: how can Brazilian cities overcome the paradox between *acting* and the *cost of acting* when faced with the need for adaptive policies in the context of climate emergency? The overall objective is to address the paradox between acting and the cost of acting in an emergency context stemming from the impacts of climate change on cities. The specific objectives are: (a) to highlight that cities are obliged to act within the climate agenda; (b)

reveal the neoliberal logic as responsible for the current failure of climate governance in cities; and (c) present an alternative for cities based on the polycentric approach to climate governance.

To present answers to the research problem, the role of neoliberalism behind the climate governance being developed at the city level will be revealed. The method adopted is based on the polycentric approach to climate governance, which advocates collaborative action between state and non-state entities, where the interaction between the federative entities in the sphere of public power is highlighted. Thus, with support from the theoretical framework of polycentric governance, the article will present a brief overview of how Brazilian cities can organize themselves around the cooperative federal model in order to adapt to the climate crisis scenario.

The paper will be limited to the legal implications of the Paris Agreement for cities. Obviously, this is a document that presents great expectations for the energy transition and carbon economy. At least that is what the national and international media say. The hidden controversial side of this narrative will not be critically examined, which has already been done in other works. These are but expectations, since the limits of the ultraliberal model in responding to the environmental crisis, due to the imposition of a new configuration of the process of accumulation and circulation of wealth by private multinationals supported by their states, transforms the Paris Agreement and all its discourse on social and environmental inclusion and renewable energy into another form of reinvention of world capitalism in the face of financial and environmental crises.

The first section of the article seeks to present the obligation of cities in acting in the context of climate emergency. In this way, we will highlight the still predominant trend that considers the actions of the cities merely an option. Thus, in counterpoint to this view, the section will present that, as of the Paris Agreement, state and non-state entities are obliged to contribute to the climate targets established at the international level.

The second section looks at adaptation policy as the focus for cities. In this context, it presents arguments that prove the inefficiency of cities in the development of adaptive policies, since the mitigation of greenhouse gases is prioritized. Based on this reality, it is possible to see that the most vulnerable populations are the most neglected, since the way cities develop their policies takes little account of the population. Thus, the adaptation policy will be advocated as a priority, even though reality indicates the complete opposite path.

In turn, the third section highlights the logic behind the current climate

governance in cities, which is precisely the neoliberal ideology. In practice, the prevailing view is that cities have the power to act in favor of the climate agenda, which naturally generates competition among cities, from which the most developed ones always emerge as victors. The neoliberal logic sees cities as merchandise, so the climate variable ends up being introduced – in big cities – only to serve the ends of the market itself.

The fourth and final section rethinks the current logic behind cities' actions on the climate agenda through the perspective of the polycentric approach. The State is elevated to a prominent role, having as its essential task the articulation between state and non-state actors. In the context of Brazilian federalism, then, the performance of cities must be structured based on a coordinated action between the Union, states, Federal District, and municipalities. In addition, non-state actors must also have their actions coordinated by the state. Thus, polycentric governance will be advocated as an effective response for cities to overcome the paradox between acting and the cost of acting in the face of climate emergency.

1 Mandatory action by cities in the context of climate emergency

The participation of cities in the context of climate emergency is still a subject permeated by doubts. Whether cities should create climate public policies or merely act when it is opportune and convenient, is still unknown. To overcome this twilight zone, marked by indecision, it is necessary to understand the historical legal context of climate governance and the narratives surrounding the relationship of cities and climate change.

The political action directed towards combating climate change had its initial milestone with the approval of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, approved in 1992 (BRASIL, 1998). Since then, several international regulations have been approved with the aim of combating climate change, including the Kyoto Protocol of 1998 and the Paris Agreement of 2015.

The Kyoto Protocol represented a centralizing approach in the context of climate change and is currently considered unsuccessful because it failed to provide effective answers (JOHNSON, 2018). The Kyoto Protocol placed the entire obligation of the climate emergency on the international arena. Added to this, it mostly presented strict rules, with little room for flexibility (BRASIL, 2005).

It is precisely in this scenario that some cities around the world have begun to develop public policies to combat climate change (OSTROM, 2010). It is also in this reality that the first city networks emerged, created with the aim of

articulating cities in favor of the climate agenda (JOHNSON, 2018)

It is worth noting that both cities and city networks largely justified their activities precisely on the failure of the Kyoto Protocol (JOHNSON, 2018). The climate governance context of the Kyoto Protocol then opened space for two premises in the actions of cities in the face of the climate emergency context: (i) the actions of cities were optional; and (ii) the emergence of city networks.

Voluntary action and networking mark the first phase of climate governance in cities, and these two premises are still very influential. Better-structured cities have managed to stand out on the climate agenda, and city networks have become increasingly influential. However, post-Paris Agreement climate governance marks a reformulation of these assumptions.

The Paris Agreement presents a real legal paradigm shift in climate governance. If, with the Kyoto Protocol, governance was centralized, it is now decentralized. In addition, governance is no longer strict, but flexible. These changes were introduced from the policy of *pledge and review*, in which the international space is responsible for the review, and the national space, for the pledge (KEOHANE; OPPENHEIMER, 2016). This policy was instrumentalized through the *Nationally Determined Contributions* (NDC), and, thus, each country presents its goals, and the international space is responsible for the review and the requirements of procedural rules, such as the need to update, every five years, the goals and the increase in ambition (BRAZIL, 2017).

As mentioned in the Introduction, the hidden controversial side of the narratives presented here will not be critically examined, which has already been done in other works (MAIA, 2021; MAIA; FARIAS, 2022; MAIA, ARRAYS; BATISTA, 2022), but only the legal implications for cities.

The Paris Agreement established the provision for polycentric governance, which was already widely advocated in the literature and already had practical cases, with the very example of cities and articulation networks (OSTROM, 2010). It made it mandatory to act at the national and subnational levels, thus removing any vestige of optionality. From the instrumentalization of polycentric governance, it is possible to state that all national actors, state and non-state, have responsibility in meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement.

In the Brazilian context, it can be noted that not only all the federative entities must act in favor of the climate agenda, but also that there must be coordination among these entities. The Brazilian state has an obligation to come up with responses in the context of the federal state to combat climate change. In other words, the Union, states, Federal District, and municipalities have a joint obligation to fulfill the goals of the Paris Agreement.

Therefore, the Paris Agreement promotes a change in the premises established by the Kyoto Protocol at the city level. First, the action of the cities is no longer optional, but compulsory. Second, the articulation of city networks must open space for new articulations, especially in the federative context, whether by means of financial transfers, cooperation in public policies, or competing legislative competence.

Despite these new premises of the Paris Agreement, the ones created at the time of the Kyoto Protocol remain alive, which only increases the twilight zone in the relationship of cities to the climate emergency. However, this zone is not limited to whether the cities are obliged to act or not, nor is it limited to the form of articulations. Cities still suffer from narratives disconnected from reality. Thus, it is necessary to confront narratives that seek only to take the focus off the real role of cities in the face of climate emergency.

One of the strongest narratives around cities' actions on the climate agenda is one that seeks to present cities themselves as primarily responsible for climate change (JOHNSON, 2018). This narrative argues that cities are primarily responsible for greenhouse gas emissions and should therefore create climate policies. The justification for this argument is that cities concentrate population and economic activities. This narrative, then, in addition to holding cities mostly responsible, focuses only on the mitigation of greenhouse gases.

To overcome this narrative, it is first necessary to clarify that the city is a non-state entity, without political organization of its own. Not even in Brazil, where the federation is decentralized, cities have such political power. The political organization of Brazilian cities is marked by the predominant influence of municipalities, but not only, since the states and the Union itself have an important influence.

Thus, to hold cities primarily responsible for the climate emergency is actually an attempt to blame a ghost. This narrative obscures the role of those truly responsible for the climate agenda. Therefore, cities are not primarily responsible for the climate emergency; in fact, the city brings together the actors responsible for the climate agenda (JOHNSON, 2018).

In the same vein, cities are not the main emitters of greenhouse gases. In the Brazilian context, in particular, this statement seems completely wrong, since greenhouse gas emissions in Brazil are mostly driven by land use, mainly illegal deforestation of the Amazon (ALBUQUERQUE *et al.*, 2020).

Therefore, we need to overcome this dilemma of major responsibility of cities in the context of the climate emergency and, at the same time, overcome this debate

focused on the mitigation of greenhouse gases. The wisest narrative is to consider that cities should focus their efforts on adapting to climate change, because they represent where the population lives. In simple terms, the city is the main home of the 21st century population. Before they suffer wrongful accountability, cities must articulate their efforts on behalf of the population.

The narrative that cities are the main emitters of greenhouse gases mostly obscures the role of the population. On the other hand, highlighting the role of adaptive policies brings the population into focus. This urban population, of course, cannot be seen as homogeneous, but rather as truly heterogeneous, marked by low-income people, people living in marginalized locations, people who are already at risk of climate damage, and those who are already victims of urban policies. These situations clearly represent cases of climate injustice.

Hence, cities' actions for the climate agenda are mandatory, since the Paris Agreement established polycentric governance as the appropriate form of governance to combat climate emergency. Moreover, cities cannot be blamed for something they did not do; quite the contrary, the role of cities should be focused mostly on adaptive policy, in order to avoid injustice to the urban population.

2 Adaptation as a priority for cities and the inefficiency of city networks

Adaptive policies should be the main focus of Brazilian cities. One can understand climate adaptive policy in cities “[...] as an adjustment process (of a city, for example), aiming to anticipate the possible and potential impacts of climate change at the local level, in order to reduce multiple vulnerabilities to situations of socio-environmental risks” (TEIXEIRA; PESSOA, 2021, p. 6). As Martins and Ferreira (2011) explain, adaptive measures face the problem of climate change as a whole, so vulnerabilities and extreme weather events, such as heat waves, storms, floods, and tropical cyclones, are also considered.

However, reality is very different, in that little of the cities' actions have been directed precisely to mitigation policies. To understand this reality, it is necessary to go back again to the twilight zone that marks the performance of cities in the climate agenda. Despite the Paris Agreement presupposing the mandatory action of state and non-state entities, of the national and sub-national entities, the actions of cities have been seen as optional and highly dependent on the actions of city networks. The logic, then, continues to be the one developed at the time of the Kyoto Protocol, which only increases the vulnerability of the urban population.

City networks play a key role in linking cities in favor of climate emergency. These networks are considered orchestrating, organizing themselves through soft governance, i.e., they are not part of the political hierarchy and act from certain counterbalances (ABBOTT *et al.*, 2015). However, networks only act prominently in mitigation policies, and not in adaptation (HEIKKINEN *et al.*, 2020). As an example of these city networks, we can mention two global networks, C40 and ICLEI, and one national network, CB27.

It is not possible to understand the distancing of adaptive policies in cities without the current relationship between cities and city networks, still marked by the idea that acting is merely an option. It is undeniable that there are cities central to the climate agenda, and also that city networks play an important role. As Macedo and Jacobi (2019) explain, city networks have done and are doing a very important job in engaging Brazilian cities on climate change.

However, the big dilemma of city network is that, of course, their action does not cover all cities. Networks, for the most part, choose developed cities or cities with ample development potential. Not surprisingly, city networks started in Brazil by cities like São Paulo, Belo Horizonte, and Rio de Janeiro (MACEDO; JACOBI, 2019). There are networks that even seek to serve a broader set of cities, such as ICLEI, which, however, runs into systemic funding problems, so that even if it presents, at first glance, the will to serve various types of cities, in the end, it continues to have a rather reduced performance (JOHNSON, 2018).

The logic behind the action of city and city networks makes it so that only certain cities are prioritized and at the same time the focus is directed to mitigation policies. Therefore, Shi *et al.* (2016) argue that city networks can increase inequalities among cities, given that they prioritize only a select group of collaborating cities.

Here, then, is an important point for the debate: what is the focus of cities' actions on the climate agenda? Analyzing the actions of cities from city networks, one can understand that this focus is not to develop adaptation policies, but only to pursue mitigation efforts. It is worth mentioning that adaptation policies do exist in cities, however, these policies are funded by the cities themselves, all of which are highly developed (SHI *et al.*, 2016). Thus, it should be clear that city networks alone cannot develop large adaptation projects, which forces the cities to act solely on the basis of their political and economic efforts.

Despite this reality, adaptation policy must be the focus of cities. The urban population will be deeply impacted by climate effects, such as heat waves, coastal flooding, soil collapse, food insecurity, and air pollution, among many other

consequences. Thus, in the current logic of how cities act in the climate agenda, the population is left aside. In this sense, the population of underdeveloped cities and even the marginalized portion of the population in large centers will suffer from the absence of any adaptation policy.

3 The neoliberal logic behind the failure of adaptive policies in cities

The twilight zone and lack of adaptive policies highlight the neoliberal logic behind climate governance in cities. Anthropogenic climate change is caused by human actions, through economic activities developed in a capitalist world. The great inconsistency, then, is to seek a solution originating from this very logic, from the capitalist economic rationality (LEFF, 2009). In this sense, it becomes essential to unveil the neoliberal logic behind the performance of cities in the climate agenda, which, far from seeking solutions, only presents new attempts at structuring through the climate crisis.

As Harvey (2008) explains, neoliberalism can be interpreted both as a utopian project to reorganize international capitalism and as a political project to restore the conditions of capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites. Also according to the author, the theoretical utopianism of neoliberal thought has functioned as a system of justification and legitimization of whatever it has been necessary to do to preserve the powers of an economic elite.

In the view of Harvey (2008), neoliberalism makes extensive use of mechanisms of accumulation by dispossession, which are forms characterized by theft, rapine, and even violence. In this line, four methods stand out:

- a) privatization and commodification: the transfer of assets from the public and popular domain to the private and class privilege domains, opening up for capitalist accumulation;
- b) financialization: the adoption of a speculative and predatory style, through fraudulent operations and the dilapidation and transfer of resources via financial operations;
- c) crisis management and manipulation: crisis orchestration by financial actors;
- d) redistribution via the state: the neoliberal state uses its power to increase the income concentration of economic elites (HARVEY, 2008).

Neoliberalism, in order to gain ground, needs to incorporate numerous inconsistencies. One of the first is the fact that it is a critic of the role of the state and, at the same time, strengthens itself from state action (ANDRADE, 2019). Along these lines, Peck (2010) states that neoliberalism is a contradictory process

of market government, which operates within the limits of the state, but occupies an ideological space defined by a sympathetic critique to the 19th century *laissez-faire* and an antipathetic critique of collectivist, planning, and socializing modes of government, such as Keynesianism and developmentalism.

Moreover, neoliberalism knows how to coexist with crises. For Peck, Theodore and Brenner (2012), neoliberalism is a form of crisis theory. According to the authors, crises can be a primary engine of transformation of the neoliberal ideology as a regulatory project, since specific crises of Keynesian welfare and developmentalism call into question the ideal conditions for new cumulative rounds in the hands of economic elites. This is not to mention the crises created by neoliberal policies themselves, which only reinforce the system of accumulation.

Illustratively, Andrade (2019) explains that after the 2008 financial crisis, caused by neoliberal logic itself, neoliberalism came out stronger, with new forms of regulation and interference in the role of the state. The author also explains that, during the aforementioned crisis, part of the literature even announced the death of neoliberalism, but this was nothing but mistaken. As Harvey (1992) points out, unlike the crisis provoked by Fordist capitalism in the late 1960s, which resulted in the implosion of the institutional arrangement between unions, cooperatives and the force of the state, putting the regime in check and leading to the search for new forms of management, the same has not happened in the latest crises, provoked directly by neoliberalism or overcome through neoliberal logic.

Part of the literature also shows hope for the end of neoliberalism because of the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate emergency, heralding what they have come to call the *Green New Deal* (CHOMSKY; POLLIN; POLYCHRONIOU, 2020). What the *Green New Deal* presents is a set of economic and political changes for humanity to overcome the ecological crises announced in the 21st century (CHOMSKY; POLLIN; POLYCHRONIOU, 2020). Despite this effort on the part of some scholars, a consistent break with neoliberalism still seems very distant, since the confrontation of the climate emergency has been done mainly based on the logic of the capitalist market. Strong proof of this is the result of the COP-26, held in Glasgow, sold as the most important after the COP-21, in Paris. However, one of the few results presented was a beginning of regulation of the global carbon market, which represents only a typically economic instrument.

It is in this context of strengthening neoliberalism, which is still alive even in the face of ecological crises, that the reality of cities can be presented. Cities, in fact, find themselves in the middle of the trenches, between the need to combat

the climate emergency and, at the same time, the relentless quest to continue the neoliberal ideology. For Harvey (2009), cities are seen by neoliberalism as the solution to solve the problem of surplus capital. In the author's words, "Urbanization provides a way to solve the problem of surplus capital" (HARVEY, 2009, p. 10).

Thus, it is necessary to understand how the neoliberal logic is impacting the climate agenda of cities. First of all, it should be noted that neoliberalism prioritizes the actions of economic actors to the detriment of state actors. In this vein, the protagonism of city networks in the climate agenda clearly demonstrates the practical application of a neoliberal ideology. City networks are, thus, in a privileged position, because, on the one hand, cities need their articulation and, on the other hand, networks feel free to choose the cities that are most profitable for economic purposes.

Neoliberalism thus increases competition among cities, but those that are more developed will always be the winners; on the other hand, cities that are left aside will have to become more flexible in order to seek attention from city networks. Competition is part of the logic of neoliberalism, because, as Andrade (2019, p. 124) explains well:

[...] the crisis reinforces the disciplinary and imaginary character of market logic, making each institution or individual adapt to its normative principle, becoming even more competitive and accepting precarious situations that force others to act in the same direction [...].

Neoliberalism, then, feeds an illusory competitiveness, because in the end the developed cities will be stronger, and the less developed cities will be weaker.

For neoliberalism, cities are nothing but merchandise (CARLOS, 2020). Thus, it should be noted that neoliberalism seeks to bring the climate agenda to the cities only for the purpose of not damaging its merchandise or, also, even to enhance the value of this merchandise. Neoliberalism is not necessarily negationist, because the market is not unaware of anthropogenic climate change, nor of the costs of climate risks. Thus, the incorporation of the climate agenda in cities, by means of the neoliberal logic, has been seen only as a commodity differential.

4 The right to change: from neoliberal logic to polycentric governance

In the current climate governance scenario in cities, adaptive policies are planned not to work. Adaptation policies are seen as costly, so that they only hurt the market. Thus, it is more advantageous to invest in selected cities, thus ensuring

that they become more attractive and safer for economic activities in an undeniable context of climate crisis. At the same time, an environment of competition between cities is created, which is beneficial for generating political flexibilities. To overcome this logic, one must pin one's hopes on polycentric governance, which primarily uses state power to reduce vulnerabilities in the face of climate emergency. Polycentric governance is structured through the articulation between state and non-state actors and national and sub-national actors (OSTROM, 2010).

In the context of Brazilian federalism, this indicates that the climate emergency must be faced through cooperation among the federative entities (BRASIL, 1988). Brazil is a Federative Republic whose political organization is composed of the Union, the states, the Federal District, and the municipalities, as set forth in articles 1 and 18 of the Federal Constitution of 1988 (BRASIL, 1988). This means that there are several integrated and mostly overlapping legal-political orders in the country.

The division of competencies is the way in which the Constitution seeks to promote harmony among these federative entities, in order to identify the role that each one should play. Therefore, by delimiting the attributions and the limits of action of the public spheres, the discussion about competence concerns the essence of the Brazilian federative state itself, protected by the hard core of the Constitution. The greatest novelty brought by the new constitutional order was the inclusion of local entities as members of the federation, which now enjoy due autonomy. Hence the evident decentralizing intention of the Fundamental Law, which entrusted the municipalities with a significant number of attributions¹.

Thus, instead of an exclusive action of the networks of cities, the path is precisely to invest in cooperative practices between the Union, States, Federal District, and Municipalities. In addition, non-state actors, who influence cities, such as business, academia, civil society, need to be articulated in a joint adaptive policy process.

1 Art. 30. Municipalities are in charge of: I – to legislate on matters of local interest; II – to supplement federal and state legislation where applicable; III – to institute and collect taxes of their competence, as well as apply their income, without prejudice to the obligation to render accounts and publish balance sheets within the time limits established by law; V – to organize and provide, directly or under concession or permission, public services of local interest, including collective transportation, which is of essential nature; VI – to provide, with the technical and financial cooperation of the Union and the State, programs for infant and elementary school education; VII – to provide, with the technical and financial cooperation of the Union and the State, services to attend to the health of the population; VIII – to promote, where necessary, adequate territorial order, through planning and use control, partitioning and occupation of urban land; IX – to promote the protection of the local historical and cultural heritage, with due regard for the legislation and for federal and state inspection actions (BRASIL, 1988).

Polycentric governance, besides being provided for in the Paris Agreement, is supported by the National Policy on Climate Change, which establishes that climate policies must be developed through joint action among the federative entities (BRASIL, 2009). The National Climate Change Adaptation Plan also reinforces polycentric governance in addressing the climate emergency (BRAZIL, 2016). Thus, one can see that the Brazilian legal system already consecrates the polycentric approach to climate governance.

Thus, although the reality of climate governance in cities is still marked by a neoliberal logic, the Brazilian State cannot omit itself; on the contrary, it must articulate itself based on the collaborative performance of state entities. As Giddens (2010) explains, the state presents itself as an important actor in combating climate change. Thus, the logic of the market cannot override state actions, because neoliberalism treats cities as a commodity, and not as a vulnerable space in the face of climate emergency.

The main incoherence of neoliberal logic in the context of climate governance in cities is to disregard that cities themselves are inhabited by people. To the extent that cities are treated as commodities, it matters little who lives in them. This logic creates even more injustice in an already unequal urban context. The state, then, should seek to strengthen climate change adaptation policies, because these policies will have a positive impact on the population.

In the words of Harvey (2009, p. 9),

The right to the city is [...] beyond a right to access what already exists: it is a right to change the city more accordingly to our innermost desire. The freedom to make and remake ourselves and our cities is one of the most precious, yet most neglected, of our human rights.

Therefore, in the face of the complex climate emergency, more than ever it will be important to put into action this right to change the city, a change that primarily meets the demands of the urban population, and not the market.

Final considerations

To overcome the paradox between *acting* and the *cost of acting*, in the face of the need for adaptive policies in the context of climate emergency, cities must move closer to polycentric governance and substantially away from neoliberal logic. To do so, it is necessary, first of all, to understand that the action of cities on the climate agenda is both mandatory and, at the same time, collaborative. Thus, although the action of a group of Brazilian cities in favor of climate is

praiseworthy, the best thing is that it should be an action that encompasses all cities, and not just a small fraction of them.

Climate change adaptation policy must be the main focus of cities, and therefore governance cannot be left solely to city networks acting through soft governance. The performance of city networks, even with good intentions, works based on the logic of the market and, thus, counts on financial support only because it is important to develop climate policies in strategic cities that house capital.

The current scenario of climate governance in cities means a bill that does not add up, because on one side there are cities that are proactive in fighting climate change and on the other side there are cities that cannot articulate any policy. This scenario calls into question the neoliberal logic, since neoliberalism encourages competition between cities, so that in the end the developed cities will be the victors, while the less developed cities will come out weaker and with the need to make their politics more flexible. The neoliberal logic sees cities as merchandise and, therefore, the urban population has no voice.

Therefore, cities need to exercise their right to change, but a change that does not only serve the market, but the population. For this, it is necessary that the Brazilian State takes the lead and develops climate policies based on polycentric governance, that is, with collaboration between state and non-state actors and national and sub-national entities. In the Brazilian federal model, cities must count on the participation of the Union, the states, the Federal District, and the municipalities. Thus, it is with state climate policies that aim to serve the urban population, and not only the market, that cities will truly be able to face climate emergency.

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Authors' participation

Talden Farias was responsible for the design, data collection, supervision and discussion of the results. Marcelo Bedoni was responsible for the conception, elaboration and writing of the manuscript and for the discussion of the results. Fernando Joaquim Ferreira Maia was responsible for the conception, elaboration and writing of the manuscript, for the discussion of the results and for the review.

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