

ARTICLES

DOSSIER PUBLIC POLICIES AND STATALITY

**PUBLIC POLICIES, STATEHOODS AND  
NEOLIBERALIZING EXPERIMENTATIONS:  
THE STATE OF RIO DE JANEIRO AS A SITUATED CASE**

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Abstract

*The article aims to situate public policies, and the challenges of establishing statecraft and statehoods and state actions of another nature within the context of recent, ongoing neoliberalization processes in Latin America. It seeks to identify the structural determinants of this situation and investigates how such processes have impacted government capacities. Using the State of Rio de Janeiro as a situated case study, it examines the socio-economic and institutional implications of the neoliberalization process in the structural and conjunctural circumstances of the deep, multidimensional crisis which the society of Rio de Janeiro is currently experiencing. The article reveals the various restrictions involved in effecting an inclusive, durable development agenda within the state territory, which has increasingly been subjected to pro-market logic. Thus, it discusses the need to reconstitute the statecraft and statehoods, formed on a new basis, in order to undertake actions that carry emancipatory values.*

Keywords

*Public Policies; State; Statehoods; Government Capacities; the State of Rio de Janeiro.*

## **POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS, ESTATALIDADES E EXPERIMENTAÇÕES NEOLIBERALIZANTES: O ESTADO DO RIO DE JANEIRO COMO UM CASO SITUADO**

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### Resumo

*O artigo busca situar as políticas públicas e os desafios de constituir ações estatais e estatalidades de outra natureza no contexto dos processos de neoliberalização recentes e/ou em curso na América Latina. Procura identificar os determinantes estruturais e averiguar os modos pelos quais tais processos impactam as capacidades governativas. Utilizando o estado do Rio de Janeiro como um estudo de caso situado, realiza-se um exame das implicações socioeconômicas e institucionais do processo de neoliberalização, nas circunstâncias estruturais e conjunturais da crise profunda e multidimensional pela qual passa a sociedade fluminense. São apontadas diversas restrições à execução de uma agenda inclusiva e durável de desenvolvimento no território estadual, que tem sido cada vez mais submetido às lógicas pró-mercado. Por isso, é discutida a necessidade de reconstituir, em novas bases, estatalidades portadoras de valores emancipatórios.*

### Palavras-chave

*Políticas Públicas; Estatalidades; Capacidades Governativas; Estado do Rio de Janeiro.*

# PUBLIC POLICIES, STATEHOODS AND NEOLIBERALIZING EXPERIMENTATIONS: THE STATE OF RIO DE JANEIRO AS A SITUATED CASE<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

The debate on public policies, statecraft and statehoods and government capacities in Latin America presents an accumulated wealth of knowledge and critical reflections. Much progress has been made in analyzing public actions that have sought to promote development across the continent. However, there is still a need for renewed research, which is able to discuss and suggest State action in a different sense, as an agent of social change that effectively contests neoliberal devices and that produces another socio-political and spatial reality.

In the non-conservative tradition of Latin American social thought, the history and the specific times and spaces of the subalternized peripheral insertion into the context of world capitalism have not been neglected. Thus, from this critical perspective, the geographic, institutional, cultural and socioeconomic specificities that characterize the multidimensional and multi-scale nature of the *style of regional development* in Latin America are essential (CENDES, 1969; VUSKOVIC, 1970; ROLLINS; LA FUENTE, 1973; VARSAVSKY, 1975); PINTO, 1976; GRACIARENA, 1976).

During the first decades of the twenty-first century, several Latin American countries presented a certain impetus towards promoting public policies, managing to achieve concrete results in reducing their socioeconomic inequalities (SÁNCHEZ-ANCOCHEA, 2021; CLIFTON, 2020). Over recent years, however, another logic has been imposed, reminding us that the capitalist State is a contradictory,

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1. We wish to express our sincerest thanks to Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (FAPERJ) for the support it has provided for this research.

relational condensation in dispute from forces and that, in most cases, has asserted itself as an instrument of class domination. Is it possible, therefore, to envision it as a crucial agent of change? Is it feasible, through distinct, multi-scale counter-hegemonic processes, to forge subjects, repoliticize processes, transform reality and institute other statehoods?

These questions, focused on the capitalist nature of the State from a peripheral perspective, guide this article, the aim of which is to address the case of the State of Rio de Janeiro (referred to throughout as SRJ) and, with that, to contribute to the theoretical-methodological reflections on public policies and statecraft and statehoods in Latin America. The choice of this procedure has been justified by the potential that investigations into multiple views of solid historical-spatial processes, extracted from situated cases, may provide. By shedding light onto specific, contextual conditions, revealing similarities and differences, both the “importance of the case itself” and the possibility of obtaining a more far-reaching comparative perspective are presented (RIDDER, 2017; MITCHELL, 1983). Thus, rather than being a “test of theory”, the case of the SRJ is configured as what Lipietz (1988) called a “field or test bench”.<sup>2</sup>

To this end, Section 1 presents issues related to public policies, statehoods and statecraft and government capacities. Section 2 then discusses the recent neoliberalizing experimentations conducted in the SRJ, marked by fiscal-financial restrictions that were, contradictorily, imposed as a solution to the multidimensional crisis that afflicts it, ultimately reinforcing its subjugation to pro-market pedagogies. A reading of the insufficiencies of the SRJ social economy, viewed in multi-scale terms, clarifies this finding. In view of the governmental fragility with regard to the current setting, Section 3 indicates a bold but necessary promotion of public policies of a somewhat different nature, challenging and engendering (other) statehoods and statecraft, through which, it may be imagined, it would be possible to restore the reality of the SRJ - and, by extension, that of Brazil – back onto the path of a socio-political experience based on new collective, democratic values.

1. The State, public policies, statehoods and government capacities within a context of the diffusion of neoliberal mechanisms

In the discussion on public policies and statehoods, it is essential to analyze *whether* – and *how* – the State structures and disposes of government capacities, i.e., the skills and conditions to exercise a cohesive, strategic action by the bureaucratic apparatus and its instances, in terms of its constitutional and/or strategic objectives,

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2. This and all non-English citations hereafter have been translated by the authors.

together with the subnational scale. In these terms, public action should be expressed in a territorialization of the supply of goods and services, the purpose of which would be to recognize, reach and transform the daily lives of people (SOUZA, 2017).

This approach is supported by Mann's conception of infrastructural capacities (1984; 2008), a notion perfected by Chibber (2002), Fernández and Puente (2013) and Puente (2020) to refer to the State as the *nodal agency* of a systemic political-economic strategy. Along these lines, once it has been assumed that the overlapping and fragmentation bias of government intervention has been surmounted, this would engender the coordination, interdependence and direction of socially legitimized public actions, the results of which would demonstrate the coherence and cohesion of the decision-making arenas of statehoods.

An examination of the mechanisms with which the State is accredited in order to confront social problems is a requirement for any analysis regarding the State's capacity to promote and coordinate renewed development actions and strategies (AGUIAR; LIMA, 2019). Such an investigation is expressed within an interpretative framework based on a multi-scale balance of power and space, in which commitments, competences and coalitions, conflicts and negotiations must be discussed (GARCÍA, 2014; 2020).

Probably the greatest antagonists of a State, which is capable of becoming an effective agent of social change in Latin America – alongside the retrograde political forces, always recombined within the “more modern” imperializing forces – lie in the process of neoliberalization. For more than four decades, devices, mechanisms and instruments that promote market values have been embedded in various domains and instances of social life, with repercussions that are adaptable to each conjuncture and place (HALL; MASSEY, 2010). Under this periodization, public policies, statecraft and statehood are subject to the discourse of austerity (BLYTH, 2017) and to the dictates of neoliberal rationale (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016), despite the economic, political, moral, institutional (INNERARITY, 2017) and currently, health, crises (MÉNDEZ, 2020) which most countries in the world have experienced.

It is therefore appropriate to qualify the experiments of a neoliberalization (BRENNER; PECK; THEODORE, 2012) that, on a global scale, have sought nothing less than subjection, to the pedagogy of the market (WERNER; ROCHA, 2020), of everything that is externalized in relation to the impositions of mercantile prefiguration. When successful, this trend results in a rarely reversible subordination of increasingly large locations and arenas to the precepts of the markets. However, there is no fatalism or inexorability: neoliberalization is a process which is incomplete, contradictory, contested and complex. It has a fungible nature that depends on the trajectory of the *place* in which it will materialize. Open to the future, it hybridizes in environments whose institutional contours are under permanent mutation.

By denying an acceptance that is general (“neoliberalism”) or abstract (“neoliberal ideology”), this pro-market regulatory restructuring process engenders socio-spatial transformations that seek concomitantly, to invade scales, spaces and agents with different endowments of political-economic power.

Neoliberalization becomes legitimized through cycles and agencies whose nexus is action, which is favorable to the private world. First, it confronts and seeks to disorganize the capacity for public action: the State, destructured, finds itself incapable of acting as a redistributive and development-promoting instance. Then, an adaptable, scalable governing regime is established (BRENNER, 2004), through regulatory (re)arrangements that further the institutional dismantling and establish a specific private-public collusion (BLYTH, 2017; PECK, 2012).

Analyzing neoliberalization makes it possible to chart the different effects and mosaics of the radical *marketization of everything*. In Latin America, it condenses and renews the historical status of dependence and subalternity typified in social, political, economic and ideological contradictions (FIORI, 2018), particularizing plundering, truncated and rentier-patrimonial instruments, which are at odds with an emancipatory sense of development. Facing up to the complex, proactive, multidimensional, multiscale, hybrid and adaptive process of neoliberalization, seeking to build another public, collective and state logic, involves nourishing and legitimizing a broad conception and citizen development.

Thus, Furtado (2013) was attentive to the ruptures and continuations of *true development*, while Paula (2016) explained that historically, they have been redefined. It is, therefore, a process with concrete, contingent peculiarities, qualified by the interaction between subjects, structures and institutions that aim at a certain purpose. Thus, the construction of development must be permanent and may not be confused with either a doctrine or a finished result (an ideal type), or a natural condition. In terms of expansion, the scope of development is as broad as the social capacity of identifying current collective needs in the face of an antagonistic, contradictory expansion of the material base that sustains it: capitalism. This has been demonstrated by the renewed dimensions – environmental, social justice, racial equality, gender equality, among others – which, over the years, have embodied development and caused it to flourish beyond economic modernization.

In the wake of this porosity, development strategies and policies were undertaken (PAULA, 2016). Many of them provided society – via *emancipatory leaps* – with the enjoyment of greater margins of freedom and creativity, while past conquests were preserved. It should be noted, however, that this is a slow process, not predetermined, non-linear, and, above all, is active and subject to continuous clashes, since it condenses and reflects conflicting, divergent and diverse interests

and positions. Thus, this theoretical-conceptual-methodological orientation, by revealing the social compositions, the political agreements that guide the strategies of agents with unequal decision-making powers, can only lead to specific studies of concrete realities, i.e., situated in time and space. Hence, it is important to seek the geographical-historical positionality of the investigation of situated, relational cases, as the present article intends to do within the structural-conjunctural framework of the state of Rio de Janeiro.

## 2. Recent neoliberalizing experimentations in the state of Rio de Janeiro

The state of Rio de Janeiro is a paradigmatic case for the territorialized understanding of the restrictions that neoliberalization places over government capacity. It is a heterogeneous, unequal, complex space (DAVIDOVICH, 2000), subject to cyclical spurts of growth that soon expire and explicate the historical trace of the incompleteness of its socio-spatial formation. Within it, little progress has been made towards new material, symbolic and institutional horizons.

A reading of the recent trajectory of the SRJ, constrained by three decades of neoliberalization, exposes the geometries of power that condition, and sometimes prohibit, the exercise of public actions that trigger the usufruct of citizen conquests with socio-spatial justice. Such strategies could be guided by a bold “provision of goods, infrastructure and public, collective services” (BRANDÃO, 2015). The reading also reveals, with a tremendous sense of urgency, a systematic economic, political, institutional and moral decay of one of the main federal states of Brazil, which was further aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Indeed, between the 1990s and the beginning of the twenty-first century, the specialized, regressive trait of the economic structure of the SRJ was deepened (HASENCLEVER; PARANHOS; TORRES, 2012). Intersectoral links were lost, and the state dynamics were guided by static competitive advantages, especially within the group involved in the continuous processing of oil. Thus, the economy of the SRJ was subordinated to the realization of state investments – given the size and complexity of the oil projects – and to the dictates of the external conjuncture, with emphasis on the speculative variations in the international prices of oil.

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, the impending implementation of large public and private investment projects created an expectation that structuring, disruptive transformations were to be brought about, which would trigger a dynamic radiation out across the territory of the SRJ. The frontiers of industrial expansion and physical infrastructure would be renewed, thereby reducing socio-spatial inequalities (AJARA, 2006). To the existing urban-metropolitan space, extensive displacement would take place towards the hinterland and out onto the borders of the SRJ.



These expectations were not fulfilled, given the interruption or specific accomplishment of what had been planned (LUMBRERAS; PIQUET, 2020). With the scenario of growth, based on the production of new wealth, now frustrated, a situation of multidimensional crisis became installed, along with renewed challenges to state public management. Everything turned towards rentism as a strategy of accumulation, thereby raising finance to a hegemonic position, even in government affairs, which made advances in government capacity unfeasible. Structured confrontations were almost non-existent.

The case of Rio de Janeiro equates,<sup>3</sup> far more dramatically, to the paths and detours that Brazil has taken over the past thirty years (DAIN, 1990; LESSA, 2000; OLIVEIRA, 2019b). On this scale or state level, precipitating or anticipating what would happen on a national scale, an accommodative, itinerant combination took place of interests sheltered under privatist public regulations and with regressive economic and socio-environmental impacts. This parity or spurious “vanguard” in the SRJ placed powerful constraints onto its specific economy and society, summarized in serious state-owned macro-decision-making difficulties, blocking any prospects for a more sustained, durable development.

Over the last decades, in the SRJ, the opportunities that have emerged, in addition to soon becoming reversed, enabled no precepts of social justice to be adopted nor the implementation of *another* political-institutional construction oriented towards the emancipatory affirmation of collectivity.

Although the intense, multifaceted state crisis, in each particular circumstance, had specific natures, depths and nuances, it alluded to the restricted, structural productive specialization, which delimited and constrained incipient intersectoral chains in a tiny territorial fraction (NATAL; CRUZ, 2021). Such a framework, through fiscal means, compromised the government capacity and reiterated the idea of the “Rio of all crises” (DAIN, 1990), clouded by the rhetoric of insolvency and the agenda of austerity that intended to restore the conditions in order to balance public accounts, which had been compromised, with regard to revenue, after changes were made to the regime for sharing oil royalties, which occurred during the early years of the 2010s.

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3. Here, we would like to express our thanks for the thought-provoking comments and suggestions from one of the reviewers, who formulated this important disjunction, drawing attention to the fact that RJ is a kind of “antechamber” in relation to what would later come to be processed in Brazil. The reviewer stated: “Perhaps we should reflect on whether Rio de Janeiro, with its historical decadence, does not anticipate what happened to Brazil: the inability to maintain its industry and, consequently, diversify its productive base ostensibly due to the lack of interest by a parasitic elite that has always preferred to apply its resources outside the productive orbit”.



Along these lines, State Law No. 7,629, from June 9, 2017, may be added, which authorized the head of the state executive to adhere to the regime of fiscal recovery from the states and the Federal District, established by the Federal Government through Complementary Law No. 195, on May 19, 2017. The program expressed a sense of obligation, self-discipline and penance, against the frequent threats, retaliation and restrictions caused by a hypothetical non-adherence, in addition to the possibility of privatization and substantial cuts in (allegedly excessive) state spending.

Austerity was sanctioned due to the fear – or certainty – if managerial misuse of resources. This rhetoric of crisis (JESSOP; KNIO, 2019) interposed a stranglehold, the temporality of which was threefold: it punished the excesses of a past of irresponsible spending, since there were no corresponding deliveries of goods and services; it removed any room for maneuvering in shifts, given the cutbacks in an opaque, inefficient state machine; and, in the future, it called for sacrifice, imposing upon public administrators the unavoidable, essential responsibility of fiscal-financial balance.

Neoliberalization, metamorphosing and continually adapting to each concrete time and space,<sup>4</sup> introjects new-normalized post-autocratic and post-democratic truths into everyday life (SARDAR, 2010). While the economist mantra that there is no money for social policies is repeated over and over again, priority is given to attracting private investment through tax exemptions, low-cost credit and “innovative” regulatory designs, such as concessions and public-private partnerships. Under the fetish of the Market’s managerial efficiency, the core of State intervention, instead of being reduced, is reallocated, which therefore gives financial and normative backing to the privatization of formerly public/collective goods.

Given this situation, is it therefore possible to identify fissures and cracks through which emancipatory opportunities could be taken advantage of in order to guide public action in RJ and engender other conditions of social existence?

In order to find answers, it is appropriate to consider that neoliberalizing marketization may not be viewed in opposition to the State, nor restricted to the destruction or alienation of the redistributive mechanisms of the government machine. The abandonment of public-private Manichaeism demonstrates that

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4. The characteristics of plasticity and hybridity of the evolutionary-adaptive process of neoliberalization are fundamental for dialogue with the important considerations made by a reviewer. We understand that the *process of neoliberalization* in Rio de Janeiro (like all *active-evolutionary pro-market logic*) is “customized”, plastic and adapted to the place. Therefore, it is not a passive, unilateral, homogeneous or “closed” “package” of measures or practices. Thus, the Rio de Janeiro variant may be (and indeed is, from our point of view) much more acute, complex, and profound than in its state counterparts, in other Brazilian regional scales or even in the national scale.

this instance is a relational condensation of forces, an arena of conflicts in which contradictory logics are being organized and disputed (OFFE; RONGE, 1984). Statehood is shaped by the prevailing interests and structural transformations derived from the business environment, mirroring the plastic-adaptive and multi-scale character of transformations anchored by the governance of neoliberalization, materialized by the sequencing of rollback and rollout (PECK; TICKELL, 2002) in various worlds (urban, work, regulation, etc.).

First, offensive attacks are embodied, disorganizing the centers of power and the previously constituted bureaucratic spaces. Various methods of disciplining are developed and then, in line with the prevailing coalition of interests, the regulatory redesign that reconfigures modes of governance is enlivened. The use of this framework to examine the reality of the SRJ reveals a continuous institutional dismantling since the mid-1990s. Although with different nuances posed by the political-partisan profile of the leaders of the shift (OSÓRIO; REGO; VERSIANI, 2017), three decades has passed of the uninterrupted impregnation of agencies conforming to the guiding pre-establishments of the market logics.

Apprehending and seizing the various manifestations of the state capacity is an intention that benefits greatly from the theoretical-methodological confluence between critical geography and political economy. The spatial circuits (GARCÍA; ROFMAN, 2020), through which the economic surplus flows, reveal the multifaceted composition of forces that have engendered socioeconomic transformations in the SRJ. This transdisciplinary conjunction has enabled an investigation into the *economic-sectoral inter-ramifications, inter-regionalities, inter-urbanities and inter-statehoods* that have been woven into the space of the SRJ, prefacing the challenges posed to statecraft and statehood within the context of neoliberalization.

The *economic-sectoral inter-ramifications* translate the constitution of the socio-productive apparatus within a given spatial frame. This is to say, they expose the concrete, territorial manifestations of the processes of production, consumption, distribution and appropriation of the surplus. Furthermore, they demonstrate the spatial-decision-making coherence of circulation and the reproduction of capital, indicating greater/lesser density and intersectoral complexity so as to constitute more permanent, deep-rooted interactions.

In the SRJ, these complementarities are limited and denote the primacy of specialization in the extraction and processing of oil (PIQUET, 2003). The state lacks greater propulsive power to amplify the chaining effects of the social system of production. This presupposes identifying the constitutive and missing links in the state economy, as well as the segments that are capable of performing the role of dynamic radiation nuclei, among which are those of the petrochemical, steel and naval chains (SILVA, 2012).

The strong participation of the state-owned services and companies in the social product, as well as the importance of basic/intermediate industries and activities involving mineral extraction are still tempered by intense intersectoral heterogeneities. The economy of the SRJ continues with insufficient competitiveness in foreign trade and a restricted incorporation of cutting-edge sectors in durable and capital goods, resulting in the low promotion of technological innovations and social inclusion (SOBRAL, 2017).

The *inter-regionalities* represent the analytical plan centered on the cohesion and integrity of the processes that take place in a given space and on the possibilities of their insertion into other areas. This concept captures the formal plurality of economic integration through material and symbolic elements gathered and combined according to a coherence structured or imposed by the multi-scale articulations of accumulation.

In the SRJ, the conjuncture of the crisis of the 2010s has reiterated the structural difficulty of implementing the spatial anchoring of economic and social processes whose decision-making determinations escape state agents. Sparse inter-regional relations have been maintained in the territory (MOREIRA, 2003). Interactions, when they exist, reaffirm the metropolitan hierarchy, in addition to private prominence, which ultimately weakens state action. The incipient articulation of subspaces makes the already restricted projection of productive dynamism even more truncated, reiterating the low capacity for sprawl and links on the regional scale (OLIVEIRA; OLIVEIRA, 2020).

The *inter-urbanities* express the social organization that material and collective reproduction projects onto the network of cities. This view also reveals practices and plans disputed by different subjects and social agents around the production of space, whether it is aimed at the modernization of regional productive structures or at sociability.

In the SRJ, the urban network has suffered a peremptory influence from the city of São Paulo (which has begun to spread towards the north of Rio de Janeiro) and, to a large extent, embraces and is embraced by the productive polygon toward whose interior, since the 1990s, the industry has moved in search of locational advantages (DINIZ, 1993). It still retains the centripetal character provided by the specialization of oil, but is increasingly porous to exogenous commands, determined by sectoral regulatory changes (ZANOTELLI et al., 2019).

Added to this are the spatially concentrated impacts of large projects with enclave characteristics – i.e., which do not dynamize even their most immediate surroundings – preventing the SRJ from breaking the hermetic logic of investments in its hinterland (CASTRO; PIQUET, 2019; TORRES; CAVALIERI; HASENCLEVER, 2013). The non-irradiation across a wider territory makes it difficult to structure

virtuous, dynamic chains and intersectoral ramifications in the interior. Much of this is due to the fact that the logistical infrastructures have accentuated the loose entanglements between the polarized nucleus of occupation of a capital tensioned by the dialectic of legality/illegality and the rest of the territory.

The *inter-statehoods* express actions that, in the context of broader, multi-scale social relations, are incorporated into the governmental apparatus and materialized institutionally. A primary advantage of this perspective is that it overcomes the externalized, binary and segmented character of the State in relation to social interests. Furthermore, it better territorializes the scope of statecraft and statehood, particularizing effects and consequences not necessarily delimited to the place.

In the SRJ, it is possible to detect how the historic political-institutional centrality, the so-called capital, has been emptied, an important point in the debate regarding the crises that have occurred there. Once the country's capital, the city of Rio de Janeiro, ever since Brasília was inaugurated, has seen a decrease in the political influence it exercised over the territorial organization of Brazil (OSÓRIO, 2005). In addition to the loss of the federative yoke, challenges mounted in the face of an uneasy economic decline.

There already exists a consistent literature that has explored the specificities of the social economics of Rio de Janeiro.<sup>5</sup> Analyzes of the deep-rooted, long-lasting social, political and economic downturns and impasses have presented a variety of approaches, methodological prisms and dimensions. The SRJ has been a particular space: a privileged locus of mercantile-speculative “oblique accumulation of capital” (LESSA; DAIN, 1982); a “sounding board of national problems” (MOTTA, 2000); presenting a “hollow productive structure” (SOBRAL, 2017); with potent historical-structural legacies (NATAL; CRUZ, 2021); and singularities of its “power framework” (OSÓRIO; VERSIANI, 2013).

It is our understanding that all these different nuances, perspectives and emphases within different dimensions are crucial for an overall interpretation of the situation in the SRJ. They are able to converge and contribute to the study of processes that undermine economic recovery and diversification, as well as sustaining expansive economic cycles. All these approaches help to understand

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5. A dialogue is held here with one of the reviewers who correctly stated that “it was not the prerogative of the SRJ to have plunged into a critical situation and become aggravated by neoliberalization from the 1990s onwards. Other states are as specialized or even more specialized than Rio de Janeiro, and do not have the same fiscal problems and, consequently, the same difficulty in financing public policies, although all have adhered to neoliberalism. Why, then, would “extractivism” be worse for Rio de Janeiro than for other states?”. These are crucial questions that should guide studies (if possible, collective) based on a relational, comparative methodology of situated Brazilian cases. Given the scope and specific objectives of this article, we may, at most, indicate some hypotheses for future work.

why the crisis, in this particular federal state, presents the characteristic of being more structural, systemic, multidimensional and long-term than that of other Brazilian states.

Other factors that feed back to one another may also be highlighted. These are not only the structural constraints of a markedly “oil dependent” economy, but also a dubious articulation of support activities and an insufficient infrastructure, i.e., a weak rear-guard of supply activities of goods and services in its immediate and distant hinterlands. These deficiencies make up an economy that has enormous difficulties in spreading, transmitting intra-regionally and internalizing its dynamisms.

In short, there is a recombination of the “backward” (retrograde) and the “modern” (contemporary) with the deficiencies and fragilities of the various structures (economic-productive; occupational, especially the formal labor market; income and wealth distribution; bureaucratic-state etc.). Thus, attempts to explain the set of difficulties for overcoming the multifaceted crisis in Rio de Janeiro may not be restricted to just one dimension or factor. It is insufficient to identify simple, linear cause-effect relationships, but rather to seek to unravel a combination of multiple interdependencies of economic, social and political phenomena, in a process of cumulative circular causation (MYRDAL, 1957): an entanglement equivalent to the complex condensation, in time and in space, of historical-structural contradictions.

Additionally, the problematic fragility of the state and municipal machines, including capital, inhibits the concertation of interests that could reveal an articulated horizon of long-term actions across the territory of Rio de Janeiro (SANTOS, 2017; OSÓRIO; VERSIANI, 2013).

This takes on particular relevance in view of the difficulties faced by metropolitan governance in the SRJ. There are notable legal and normative obstacles and setbacks to participatory management and the instrumentation of the administrative apparatus that support effective cohesion on this scale, even more so in view of the propositions of the Proposal for Constitutional Amendment No. 188/2019. This proposal provided for the merging of municipalities and, as a result, a restructuring of the supply of public services. Confrontations are faced that weaken, even more, the joint fulfilment of the demands of citizenship.

Reinforcing neoliberalization, the SRJ fiscal recovery regime faced the “imperative” need of privatizing the State Water and Sewerage Company of Rio de Janeiro (Cedae), seen as a requirement in order to rebalance the state’s finances. The denationalization of Eletrobras (provisional measure No. 1.031/2021),

headquartered in Rio de Janeiro, demonstrates how the legislative and regulatory rearrangements, at a federal scale, have revealed inter-statehood repercussions in the space of the SRJ.

Instead of instigating the formation of political elements that reduce uncertainties and neutralize instability and opportunism, a passive adjustment has prevailed in RJ between the mini-political cycles and the impositions of neoliberalizing pedagogy. The public agenda has been diverted from a desirable debate on strengthening public planning structures, and pushed policies into the background that, in addition to fiscal recovery, would be based on a consistent development process of a more durable nature and with socio-spatial justice.

### 3. Reformatting public policies: engendering (other) statehoods across the territory of the state of Rio de Janeiro

In addition to the same or similar ills and multidimensional inequalities that Brazil presents, other very specific deprivations have been recombined into the SRJ. Even with the existence of economic growth, there were no sustained improvements in living conditions. Few advances have been made in the state government capacities to address structural problems and/or coordinate bolder, multiple and more consistent development actions and strategies.

The contradictions of the SRJ's regionality have slipped into institutional, administrative, social and economic dimensions. This has facilitated the opening of pro-market fronts and prompted profound proscriptions in statehood, with the consequent deprivation of most of the population with regard to enjoying the rights of citizenship. Reversing this situation is a major challenge.

Therefore, it is essential to reinforce the understanding of how a series of reconfigurations in the regulatory apparatus of the State has materialized and secured the privatization of public goods and services, a necessary but insufficient condition to delimit the incidence of market designs on such goods and services. Necessary, since the bias of capitalism is to commodify everything (POLANYI, 2000). Insufficient, because the relational pattern of market exchanges, once established, is unable to go without adjustments to the multi-scale, dynamic precepts and commands of the capital regime (BERNDT et al., 2020).

This is to say: in contemporaneity, more than converting public goods and services into *merchandise*, it is necessary to transform them into *financial assets*, profiled to an accumulation hegemonized by the appropriation of expectational income in the face of profit. To this end, in addition to technically and operationally adapting them to the current corporate standard, it is necessary to perform private-public governance structures adjusted to the hodiernal conditions of competition, appreciation and capitalization (BIRCH; MUNIESA, 2020).



Alleviating the uncertainties that surround these transfigurations leads to a compatibility that, in terms of statecraft and statehood, takes place through regulatory, tax and financial-credit changes, which institute a *governmentality* based on debt – both public and private (LAZZARATO, 2017). With regard to the management of goods and assets, property rights transactions are multiplying, materialized in a frenetic frequency of contributions (cash in) and withdrawals (cash out) of resources in the new business. This speculative practice lays bare the short-term temporality that now governs the supply of formerly public goods and services (MUNIESA, 2016).

Therefore, the pro-market orientation is not limited to a sense of market exchanges that underlie the search for post-privatization, quasi-monopoly operating profits. By encompassing the configuration/reconfiguration of legal-normative, political, credit and institutional conditions, this process, beyond the dimension of entrepreneurship, institutes a composite ecosystem within which commodified goods and services are endowed with the attributes that make it possible to *capitalize on them*.

Thus, the *use value* or the immanent characteristics (fixity, maturity period) of the good or service that will become an asset or commodity are of little importance – although, in general, the qualitative-quantitative insufficiency of its offer is always highlighted to denounce the inability of the state to provide for them. Logistical networks (roads, railways, waterways, ports, airports), telecommunications systems, energy generation/transmission, education and health services, water supply, sewage treatment, housing: all this is subject to *marketization* guided by financialized parameters.

Asset-commodity management, perpetrated by institutional investors, private fund managers, venture capital fractions, international consultancies, law firms, etc., adjusts capitalism's commodifying bias towards global financialization. In Latin America, the mechanisms they operate merge with the endogenous interdependencies that define the specificity of underdevelopment (BRANDÃO, 2022; OLIVEIRA, 2021). This mix leads to the mercantile-rentist accommodation of interests that, when colluding, deepen the selectivity, fragmentation and exclusion typical of peripheral spatiality (OLIVEIRA, 2019).

Given this situation, and in view of the amplification of social contradictions and the vulnerabilities of underdeveloped South Atlantic capitalism within the reality of the SRJ, is it possible to envision a statehood that enables emancipation?

Beforehand, what is required is a bold, comprehensive development agenda, which, on a subnational scale, manages to permeate through the specific federalism of Brazil. The socio-political convention that amalgamates the non-economically or



politically equipotent entities is, in the first instance, the means by which articulated public action is forged, also capable of legitimizing regional policies. Federative statehood cannot be – as it has been – reduced to a mere harmonizing instrument, a facilitator and transmitter of private intentions, many of which benefit from the unsurpassed fiscal war.

In addition to promoting the macroeconomic environment for micro-initiatives, the State must assume tensions intrinsic to development. The federal renegotiation would, according to various logics and scales, weave strategies aimed at expanding the horizon of possibilities for the citizens of Brazil and Rio de Janeiro. Endowed with a dialogical nature, it would establish the habit of continually re-elaborating and *co-producing* social choices when faced with the challenges of a reality – national and state – with heterogeneities, asymmetries and abysmal injustices.

Through sophisticated upscaling-downscaling instrumentation, the federative requalification of statehood would replace fragmented, partial and topical actions, making public action more latent, especially in territorial areas with socioeconomic weaknesses. Consortia could be implemented to address government advances implementing structuring policies.<sup>6</sup>

It is urgent to *profoundly transform the pattern of supply and management of goods and services and the provision of public utility social infrastructure*, placing the territory at the heart of this change, in order to take better advantage of the dynamic, synergistic effects that are bunched together with it (WERNER; OLIVEIRA, 2022).

In order to reposition the strategic horizon of state action and face the recalcitrant logic of destitution, exploitation and marginalization of neoliberal reason, one premise is to place citizen emancipation as a founding principle. Public intervention, through abandoning fragmentation and mercantile-rentist selectivity and promoting the articulation of the territorial socio-productive fabric in a redistributive sense, will provide the emancipatory leaps typical of *true development*.<sup>7</sup>

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6. One important contemporary example – currently in progress and which has not yet deployed its full potential – would be the experiments carried out by public policy strategies horizontally agreed in the nine states that make up the Interstate Consortium for the Sustainable Development of the Northeast (SIQUEIRA; BRANDÃO, 2022).

7. One question raised by a reviewer was that, under capitalism, this utopia may never be realized. Nevertheless, in this article, we wish to reaffirm the importance of taking forward insurgencies and socio-political disputes and democratic-popular legitimation in order to open gaps for development as a continuous and conflicting process, resulting from collective desires and arrangements of subjects in action. In our opinion, development trajectories must revolve around “broadening the horizons of civilizational possibilities”, a constant struggle for *true development*, in the sense lent by Celso Furtado (2013).

With this, the means of reproduction and collective consumption, rather than being reduced to goods and assets, would work as auxiliary instruments for the expanded formation of human capacities. Thus, statecraft and statehood, through social and institutional innovations, would better attack social vulnerabilities, thereby legitimizing, through public policies, the rupture of the impasses posed by neoliberalization. This distribution of basic social capital and public utility equipment would consolidate a society of mass rights, the urgency of which is reiterated by the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Conclusions

We live in a very complex and challenging conjuncture, in which contradictions are condensed and made explicit within the current time and space. The struggle for democracy is the top priority; within this context, it would be crucial, along with society, to broaden the necessary debate on public policies, statecraft and statehood and government capacities. Although Latin America has accumulated a huge amount of knowledge and critical reflections on such issues, it is important to revise and broaden, in situated case studies, in this third decade of the twenty-first century, marked by the context of pandemic, the complex and contradictory processes of state action, creating tensions so that it may be turned into social change.

Many countries and international organizations have taken advantage of the pandemic to agree on new collective behaviors, combined with a more sustainable and inclusive perspective on development. In Brazil, the opposite route has been followed: financial parameterization has been elevated to priority status and the indelible discourse of austerity that subjects public actions to pro-market logics has been reaffirmed. Unhesitatingly, in the face of hundreds of thousands of deaths caused by the new coronavirus, retrograde forces have further circumscribed pro-people initiatives, taking advantage of the state to privatize and capitalize on gains.

There are, therefore, in the governmental agenda, immeasurable challenges to restore the premise of a multidimensional development plan. It has been observed, with particular emphasis in the case of the SRJ, the way in which the subjection of statehood to neoliberalizing experimentations has vilified the affirmation of an emancipatory meaning to public policies. With no equitable solutions, the most likely scenario to come is one of increasing injustices, vulnerabilities, exclusions and socio-spatial inequalities.

Under neoliberalization, the historical characteristics in the SRJ have been deepened, which, on a subnational scale, has projected the style of development in Brazil. By having a specialized economic structure, regressive and subject

to conjunctural variations, important productive links have been lost and a socioeconomic framework of glaring multidimensional inequalities has increased across the territory of the SRJ. Dependent on revenues from the extraction of oil and gas, part of which was allocated to sterile expenditures, state government managers saw limited possibilities for designing and executing future-borne public policies.

If, for a brief moment, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the contribution of public and private investments delayed the worsening of the socio-economic contrasts in RJ, as from 2016, a crisis scenario was irrevocably opened wide. To make matters worse, since 2020, there has been an unprecedented condensation of contradictions: to the historical and structural insufficiencies, those related to health have been added, with dramatic and deadly consequences for the population.

If the current hegemonic correlation of forces is maintained (both in RJ and Brazil), eventual creative actions will be interdicted by neoliberal-financialized capitalism. Governmentality anchored in debt will predominate, the assumption of which is to support austerity measures that mainly focus on redistributive mechanisms of the State.

To elude this tendency, one must avoid the false binarism that segregates the public from the private, a clivage much to the liking of the ideology and pedagogy of neoliberalization. The obstacles imposed on public action, in fact, are inoculated in statehood, because it cannot be dispensed with to sanction the regulatory dimension required by capitalist valorization. So much so that, despite the constraints placed on the public management of the SRJ by the economic crisis and the fiscal recovery regime, the government role has been preserved intact, in terms of converting the means of collective reproduction into assets and commodities, subjecting the short-term governance of rentism.

Mobilizing citizenship to dispute a territorially distributed statehood is an alternative to this situational framework. It is indispensable to begin from an understanding of the federative pact as a multi-scale mediator of power. Limits of competence and autonomy of resources, existing in a considerable part of Brazilian and the SRJ subnational entities, hinder normative advances and relevant institutional innovations.

Building strategies that ensure the effective penetration of collective wills in matters and deliberations of a public nature would lead to greater relational subsidiarity between State and Society. More comprehensive and better goods, services and essential infrastructure for social use would strengthen the productive apparatus, generating renewed economic-sectoral inter-ramifications, inter-regionalities, inter-urbanities and inter-statehoods.

Connecting the channels of interaction between economic growth, territorial integration, citizenship, science, technology and innovation will enable emancipatory capacities to face social ills. The affirmation of a new statehood also results from adapting to a perspective capable of involving, at least, socio-spatial justice and sustainability.

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed additional challenges. On the one hand, the relevance of the State was demonstrated, both for facing the economic and health crises and for guaranteeing the minimum conditions necessary for citizen conviviality. On the other hand, the blatant inconsistency between the government's neoliberalizing orientation and the emergency aspirations of the Brazilian population remained. Despite the preponderance of the mercantile-rentist rationale, the pact of federative actions - imposed by the chaotic situation experienced in the triennium 2020/2022 - at least made the tragic pandemic context an occasion to force the debate of societal values based on cooperation, on the substantivity of life, on empathy and solidarity.

The future maintenance of these principles will be facilitated if the crucial, fundamental intervention of the State is aimed at the total transformation of the pattern of supply of goods and services and the provision of social infrastructure for public utility. There is no way out other than designing projects that prioritize people's lives, allowing them to enjoy the right to live in a more inclusive and democratic society.

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