

Governance and New International Actors: The Fundamental Role of Networks in the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to emphasize the contributions of environmental governance, based on mutual respect, cooperation, and reliability, for an exchange of strategies aiming to address common problems as an effective instrument for the implementation of International Agendas. In this regard, it is highlighted that the current scenario of International Relations presents challenges for International Environmental Law and for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which requires complex global governance initiatives and the involvement/recognition of new actors. This research aims to analyze the fundamental role of networks in the implementation of sustainable development goals. The study was conducted through research classified based on its nature as qualitative theoretical and based on its objective as exploratory with a bibliographical character. It involved a review of international agreements and national legislation, domestic and foreign literature on the subject, and document analysis. Lastly, a comparison was made between the progress of Environmental Governance, the roles of subnational governments, and the implementation of the Agenda 2030 for sustainable development.

Keywords

Environmental Governance, New Actors, Agenda 2030, Networks, Sustainable Development

1. Global Governance as an Effective Instrument for the Implementation of International Agendas

Governance does not mean the same thing as governing. Although both have

common etymological origins, governance and governing have different meanings. Both concepts involve power and authority, ranging from the national level (as well as local and regional) to the international level. However, government is linked to state activity, associated with the executive branch. According to [Nogueira \(2001: p. 99\)](#):

To govern is to hold a position of strength from which it is possible to fulfill a role immediately associated with the power to make decisions and implement them or even to oversee and command individuals. On the other hand, the concept of governance is much broader, not limited solely to institutional arrangements, and despite involving various actors, states, and individuals, contributing to the achievement of common interests, it also does not limit itself to performing this role.

Governance produces effective results, serving as both a means and a process in conflict resolution from the local to the global level. Positive outcomes stem from consensus, dialogue, and negotiations aimed at solving common conflicts, free from the sanctions or power obligations inherent in government-based relations. [Habermas \(1984\)](#) discusses the importance of communicative action and rational discourse in achieving mutual understanding and resolving conflicts. He argues that dialogue and consensus-building are essential for democratic legitimacy and social integration.

As previously asserted, global governance involves the participation of states, international organizations, transnational corporations, the scientific community, non-governmental organizations, and subnational governments.

To fulfill its role, governance needs not only the participation of various actors but also institutional effects. According to [Young \(1994: p. 15\)](#), it must be capable of establishing agent interaction, facilitating cooperation, and reducing common problems in an increasingly interdependent world.

Conflicts are becoming more complex and interconnected daily, as globalization has disseminated information and broadened awareness of governmental demands with the emergence of common global problems, such as environmental, socio-environmental, and developmental issues. National legislation or classical international law alone becomes insufficient for resolving these controversies, as these are not merely national or continental problems but ones that sometimes involve all of humanity.

Thus, a new paradigm of global society emerges, extending beyond the model of sovereign states, pointing to the existence of two additional levels of power beyond the national and international: transnational and supranational. In this society, states limit or transfer part of their power to other actors or institutions, profoundly altering the sovereign state model ([Matias, 2005](#)).

In this context, sovereign states are competent under international and national legislation to choose which treaties to sign or which agendas to adopt, a model adopted by Brazil in the 1988 Federal Constitution, which decentralizes power through autonomous federative entities while maintaining the nation-state as sovereign. However, when demands become complex and encom-

pass a range of distinct and interdisciplinary interests, sovereignty or classical legislation cannot meet the demand, and governance emerges as a dynamic capable of advancing without imposition, an ineffective stance in international relations.

This scenario restructures established concepts and fixes a new perspective on the strategic and effective resolution of conflicts through governance. This represents a concrete activity, but not entirely free, as it demands rules for its operation. It is practical and proactive, acting on issues that transcend national borders without sovereign authority, focusing not only on decisions but also on the consequences of programs or implementations, such as domestic acceptance and implementation beyond efficacy (Finkelstein, 1995: p. 369).

Thus, global governance alters the forms of political and legal action. According to Pierik (2003), three changes are highlighted:

- 1) The shift in prominence from actors in the political process (especially national governments) to processes on specific issues;
- 2) The change in the mode of action to activities involving negotiation;
- 3) The shift in academic perspective, recognizing the position and power of actors: governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and transnational corporations, with variations in each context.

From the term Governance arises Global Environmental Governance, defined as “the sum of organizations, policy instruments, financing mechanisms, rules, procedures, and norms that regulate global environmental protection processes” (Najam, Papa, & Tayab, 2006: p. 3), or the intersection of global governance with environmental issues (Speth & Haas, 2006: p. 3).

However, the definition is not so simple, and in recent years there have been many discussions about the concept of global environmental governance. Even without a definitive definition of global governance, three broad uses of the term can be identified: some use it to illustrate current sociopolitical transformation, others see it as a political program aimed at reclaiming directive capacity for problem-solving. Finally, others refer to it critically, focusing on threats to national sovereignty. In this work, governance is used as sociopolitical transformation.

In this sense, in the same line, global environmental governance extends beyond traditional actors (such as states and international organizations) and includes non-governmental organizations, particularly networks of scientists, business associations, and policy research institutions. While nation-states are still the main actors in this structure, at least formally, a growing number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), social movements, and other private actors are transforming the character of the entire system. It emerges to address environmental problems and encompasses institutions, principles, rules, procedures, and instruments that regulate, manage, and implement environmental protection processes. The role of environmental governance is to provide a comprehensive, coherent, effective, and efficient approach to the protection and sustainable use of natural resources.

It is not difficult to conceive that when talking about global governance and mitigating the classical model, even without coercive power, effectiveness can be achieved through regulation, even if by private standards. An example is California, which, even without penalties for non-renewable energy producers, articulates partnerships with certifiers, industries, and civil society to stimulate the use of private standards, achieving the result of having cleaner energy.

New actors become diplomatic agents who cooperate, often supporting national interests or going beyond to ensure local or regional interests (Farias & Rei, 2016). In the traditional international scenario, enforcement and penalty mechanisms are rare as there is no centralized police power and states are sovereign.

Global environmental governance plays the role of solving common interest problems, including environmental protection, requiring cooperative action, common rules, norms and standards, and continuous decision-making among relevant actors. Under the influence of the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, state consent loses its power as the sole legitimizer of rules and standards resulting from the normative development process and its application in individual situations. As a result, other sources of legitimacy are identified.

Indeed, it is important to highlight that the state's role in governance does not cease to exist. There is merely a change in its format, as new subjects are included, establishing different dialogues, where subnational states stand out, gaining space with decentralized governance (Reed & Bruyneel, 2010). Therefore, it recognizes other subjects since, to participate in the process, international legal capacity is not required, but rather common goals and interests to foster cooperation. This is done through dialogue and consensus.

Global-scale technology and communication, as well as the consequences of human actions on the environment, establish demands that must be addressed through cooperation, such as climate change, requiring countries to coordinate, interdepend, and relativize their sovereignty. In recent decades, conventional state structures have been challenged by the transboundary nature of global problems (Andonova & Mitchell, 2010). These problems have "multiple interdependent causes and need coordinated forms of social organization and institutions for their effective resolution" (Andonova & Mitchell, 2010: p. 526).

In this context, state solutions are not the only way to address global environmental problems (Bulkeley & Newell, 2010), and the role of defining actions is no longer exclusively the state's (Acuto, 2013). Instead, various non-state actors now come together, influence, and transform national and international policy. Thus, classical international law as it stands becomes inefficient in this scenario, as we are dealing with sovereign countries that are unlikely to accept being coerced into acting one way or another. Therefore, coercive power in these cases is not as effective as international negotiation.

According to Ulrich and Marauhn (2011), global governance is also characterized by new forms of cooperation beyond traditional intergovernmental ne-

gotiation of international law as non-state actors increasingly become part of the establishment and implementation of norms, institutions, and mechanisms. Thus, governance is a broad concept encompassing decisions and policymaking processes.

International law expands its concepts to admit non-state subjects. Through global-scale communication, the impacts of human actions become known and shared, creating issues that can be addressed cooperatively.

Increasingly, the concept of international law subject needs to be expanded (Dixon, 2013: p. 121) to include individual, collective, governmental, or private entities, legally recognized or pragmatically accepted as capable of assuming rights and obligations in the international sphere. In this new context of interdependence, as explained above, states share power with other institutions, such as corporations, local governments, civil society organizations, and individuals.

The demands are complex, and developing countries, in addition to technical cooperation, need investment from developed countries to fulfill and advance transboundary environmental issues, such as climate change. The heterogeneous dialogue of these new actors: corporations, companies, civil society, and local governments, makes power distribution polyarchical, making everyone's opinion matter (Sabel & Zeitlin, 2010: p. 15). Issues that transcend borders lead to the need for collective thinking, fostering cooperation and addressing common objectives.

In response, governance encompasses the entirety of ways in which common problems can be addressed. Governance “represents the ways in which the world is articulated through cooperation, with the participation and influence of society, in processes that create and manage regulations” (Pinho, 2017: p. 101). From the perspective of both international law and other branches of domestic law, there is an increasing emphasis on dialogic practices in conflict resolution, such as mediation. Internally, significant numbers of cases are resolved through dialogue, while internationally, it is the most favorable scenario, especially if there is an opportunity for hearing and participation of new actors, who are undoubtedly crucial in advancing global agendas.

In this context of cooperation and interdependence, states share actions with other institutions and subnational governments. Additionally, on a large scale, they need financial support from other sectors. Thus, science plays an important role in pointing out paths and mechanisms that can assist legal systems in advancing global society when laws alone are no longer capable of resolving transboundary conflicts, which demand and bring different participants to the table, who undoubtedly play a crucial role.

Identifying the key challenges facing global governance involves examining a range of complex and interconnected issues that impact the effectiveness and legitimacy of global institutions and processes. Here are some of the key challenges: Fragmentation and Lack of Coordination: The global governance landscape is often fragmented, with numerous overlapping institutions and mechanisms that can lead to inefficiencies and lack of coherent responses to global issues. Power

Imbalances: Disparities in power among states and between state and non-state actors can lead to dominance by more powerful entities, marginalizing weaker states and undermining equitable decision-making processes. Legitimacy and Accountability: Ensuring that global governance institutions are perceived as legitimate and accountable to the global populace is a significant challenge, particularly given their often bureaucratic and distant nature. Compliance and Enforcement: Achieving compliance with global norms and agreements is difficult, especially when enforcement mechanisms are weak or when there is a lack of political will among states to adhere to or enforce agreements. Transnational Problems and Sovereignty: Global issues such as climate change, terrorism, and pandemics require collective action, but national sovereignty often complicates international cooperation and the implementation of global policies. Global Inequality: Economic and social inequalities between and within countries pose significant challenges to global governance, as they can lead to uneven development and hinder collective action on global issues. Cultural and Ideological Differences: Diverse cultural and ideological perspectives can lead to conflicts and hinder consensus-building in global governance, making it difficult to create universally accepted norms and policies. Technological Changes and Cybersecurity: Rapid technological advancements and the rise of cybersecurity threats pose new challenges for global governance, requiring innovative and adaptive responses (Zürn, 2012).

2. Emergence of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals

Society has not always been aligned in the pursuit of environmental preservation. On the contrary, humanity initially destroyed a significant portion of natural resources before becoming concerned with their conservation. It is certain that, throughout human history, there has been an interaction with the environment in the quest for subsistence and development. According to Veiga (2010), “it is from the combination of nature’s gifts with human labor that the initial resource of any community’s economy arises” (Veiga, 2010: p. 59).

Humanity’s expansion disregarded environmental concerns, treating the environment as an infinite and inexhaustible resource. According to Porto-Gonçalves (2013), the belief was that nature is an inexhaustible source of resources and that its exploitation would not generate harmful effects. With the publication of the report “The Limits to Growth” by the Club of Rome in 1972, such effects became a topic of global debate. The culmination of these discussions was the main focus of the United Nations Conference in Stockholm, transforming the environment into an issue of international relevance.

The environmental movement began as a response to the negative environmental impacts of industrialization and major oil spills. In 1972, the UN convened the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, Sweden. During the 1970s, issues related to nature preservation began to

be effectively discussed, including in the legal realm, as the accelerated industrialization of the second half of the 20th century led to unlimited natural resource use, which began to reveal itself as unsustainable. This reaffirmed the discussion of environmental degradation as a global problem. The population, affected by these problems, began to organize protests demanding pollution control and nature protection.

Environmental movements established themselves, pressuring world leaders about the consequences of the prevailing economic model, questioning consumption and production patterns that directly impacted the environment. In this context, in 1983, the UN Secretary-General invited the former Prime Minister of Norway to establish and chair the World Commission on Environment and Development. The Brundtland Commission or World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) contributed to a new interpretation of development, contained in the report “Our Common Future,” also known as the Brundtland Report (Goodland & Daly, 1996). This report established a new orientation for development based on three fundamental dimensions: economic, environmental, and social equity. The expression sustainable development became universal with the publication of “Our Common Future.” Thus, sustainable development is that which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The discussions and guidelines addressed by the Brundtland Commission led to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, placing the issue on the public agenda. The Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, adopted, among many documents, Agenda 21, a comprehensive action plan and an exemplar of soft law, aiming for the protection of our planet and its sustainable development. Agenda 21 is a comprehensive action plan to be implemented globally, nationally, and locally by organizations of the United Nations System, governments, and other groups in all areas where humans impact the environment.

In Agenda 21, governments outlined ways to change the economic growth model at the expense of the environment, pointing to activities that protect environmental resources. Thus, sustainable development gained importance in International Environmental Law, having been explicitly adopted in international texts such as the Rio Declaration (UNCED, 1992) and Agenda 21, based on the duty of solidarity with future generations.

At the Earth Summit, three normative soft law documents were signed: the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the aforementioned Agenda 21, which includes forty chapters for achieving sustainable development, and the Statement of Principles on Forests. On that occasion, the Commission on Sustainable Development, a high-level UN body subordinate to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), was also created. According to Rei (2006: p. 8):

It can be said that the great contribution of the Earth Summit was to revive the worn-out and controversial issues of economic development, adding the

concept of sustainability, giving it a new guise, with new characteristics, finally universalizing and humanizing the concept. By introducing the concept of sustainable development and the strategy of establishing a global policy, as no state is not a partner in these ideas, one can verify and understand the emergence of a novelty, a new moment in the dynamics of International Law and International Relations.

Therefore, from the Stockholm Conference onward, the environment became part of the feasibility studies of ventures causing pollution or environmental degradation, as required by multilateral financing organizations such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. Recommendations from Stockholm led to Law No. 6.931 of 1981, establishing the National Environmental Policy and, from it, Article 225 of the Federal Constitution, addressing environmental protection.

Among the many interpretations that sustainable development can present, four postulates are elementary: intergenerational and intragenerational equity, sustainable use of natural resources, and the idea of integration. According to [Oliveira & Alverne \(2015\)](#), equity is axiomatic in the concept of development in the Brundtland Report, the United Nations Final Declaration on the Environment, and the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, as they demonstrate the need to think about the well-being of the current generation without compromising the quality of life of future generations. Principle No. 3 of the Rio Declaration explicitly states:

The right to development must be exercised to allow the equitable fulfillment of the development and environmental needs of present and future generations ([UNCED, 1992: pp. 153-159](#)).

Therefore, it is necessary to ensure that the exploitation for the development of the current generation does not compromise resources for a future generation. This concern has been highlighted by the author Edith Brown. According to [Brown \(1991\)](#), the Stockholm Conference, which culminated in the creation of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), brought a strong concern for future generations and environmental improvement, contributing to the development of international law in this area. The theory of intergenerational equity finds strong support in legal science, being implemented through international and national legal instruments, enshrining the protection of environmental resources for future generations.

In this context, the legal consecration of the notion of sustainable development, along with the creation of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), which are active in monitoring sustainable development programs, stands out.

In 1997, the international community convened the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), known as Rio+5, to review and assess the commitments undertaken in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. During the meeting held in New York, there was concern about the slow implementation of

Agenda 21. The general conclusion was that, although some progress had been made regarding sustainable development, many of the goals of Agenda 21 were still far from being realized.

Understanding that the environmental issue alone should not be debated, the UN established an agenda in 2000 to address significant social problems faced by different countries around the world. Known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the agenda created the slogan “Eight Ways to Change the World,” referring to eight crucial goals, described as follows: Eradicate extreme hunger and poverty; Achieve universal primary education; Promote gender equality and empower women; Reduce child mortality; Improve maternal health; Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; Ensure environmental sustainability; and Develop a global partnership for development.

Ten years after the Rio Earth Summit, which had the participation of 193 countries, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (<https://www.un.org/en/conferences/environment/johannesburg2002>) was held in Johannesburg. It was an attempt by the UN to reassess and implement the conclusions and guidelines obtained in Rio-92, especially to advance discussions and achieve more ambitious, specific, and well-defined targets for some of the main global environmental issues. However, the attacks on the Twin Towers in 2001 had deflated the political aspirations for significant progress, as the fight against terrorism became a priority on the global agenda.

According to the Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2002), the conference officially approved two documents: the Adoption of the Political Declaration and the Adoption of the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

These documents reflect the need for consensus among nations, as the results represent the lowest common denominator among the positions of all nations present at the conference but do not correspond to the urgent actions for inter-generational equity on the planet, which require more drastic and effective measures. The documents address soft laws approved without mandatory force, meaning without coercive binding or sanctioning application at the international level for non-compliance by signatory countries. Thus, they represent a set of principles and guidelines for nations, which, through their powers, can transform them into national laws to advance the objectives.

The Political Declaration (2002) titled “The Johannesburg Commitment on Sustainable Development (<https://www.cepal.org/en/topics/sustainable-development/about-sustainable-development>),” contains 69 paragraphs divided into six parts, establishing political positions, not goals. It corroborates principles and agreements adopted in Stockholm-72 and Rio-92, calls for increased financial assistance to poor countries, and acknowledges that the objectives established in Rio-92 were not achieved. It also highlights the importance of the United Nations establishing a mechanism to monitor the decisions taken at the Johannesburg Summit. The

2002 meeting represents an attempt by the United Nations to reassess and implement the conclusions and guidelines obtained at Rio-92, particularly regarding advancing discussions and setting new, specific, and well-defined targets for some of the main global environmental problems. These include climate change, the growth of poverty and its effects on environmental resources, the spread of diseases such as AIDS, the scarcity of water resources and minimal sanitary conditions in some areas of the planet, pressures on fishery resources, biodiversity conservation, and the rational use of natural resources, including various energy sources.

Subsequently, in 2012, the event known as Rio+20 was held with the objective of reaffirming the States' commitment to Sustainable Development. The main objective of Rio+20 was to renew and reaffirm the participation of world leaders in relation to sustainable development. It was, therefore, a second stage of the Earth Summit (ECO-92) that took place 20 years earlier in the same city of Rio de Janeiro. The main outcomes of this event were the States' commitment to eradicating extreme poverty, the initiation of an intergovernmental process for the creation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the establishment of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, and the encouragement of strengthening the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

With the evolution of the term "sustainable development" and the maturation of the population's concern for the environment, Brazil and other countries committed to preserving and advancing objectives for sustainable development. The Final Declaration of the Rio+20 Conference, the document "The Future We Want," recognized that goal setting could be useful for launching coherent and focused global action on sustainable development. Thus, the foundations were laid for a comprehensive and transparent intergovernmental process, open to all stakeholders, to promote sustainable development goals. This orientation guided the actions of the international community over the next three years and initiated a global consultation process for the construction of a set of universal sustainable development goals beyond 2015.

The conscious focus on environmental causes was certainly a step forward for the present generation, as it took centuries for humanity to realize the finitude of natural resources and the negative effects of environmental degradation, which include disasters around the planet and climate changes experienced by the global population.

Following the agreement in 2012, Heads of State and Government, as well as high representatives, gathered at the United Nations headquarters in New York from September 25 to 27, 2015, when the Organization celebrated its seventieth anniversary, to decide on the new Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs were built on the outcomes of Rio+20 and took into account the legacy of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which consisted of eight poverty-combating goals that the world committed to achieving by 2015.

In January 2015, the General Assembly initiated the negotiation process for the post-2015 development agenda. This process culminated in the subsequent adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with 17 SDGs at its core, at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015.

To monitor the progress of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) was created. The HLPF meets annually to provide information on the progress of the Goals worldwide and is the central UN platform for monitoring and reviewing the SDGs. The scale and ambition of the new Agenda require a global partnership to ensure its implementation, based on solidarity and intensive support for the implementation of all Goals and targets, bringing together governments, the private sector, civil society, the UN system, and other actors, and mobilizing all available resources.

The SDGs and their targets are integrated and indivisible, of a global nature, and universally applicable, taking into account different realities, capacities, and levels of development, and respecting national policies and priorities. The goals are defined as ambitious, and each government sets its own national priorities, considering its context. Each government will also decide how these goals should be incorporated into national planning processes, policies, and strategies. It is important to recognize the link between sustainable development and other relevant ongoing processes in the economic, social, and environmental fields.

3. Governance and New International Actors: The Fundamental Role of Networks in Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals

The right to development must play a central role in the global partnership for sustainable development to achieve progress in all dimensions: including social development, environmental sustainability, economic prosperity, well-being, and peace and security. The emergence of new actors and new approaches to strengthening the global partnership for development reflects efforts to address challenges with the help of existing partnerships.

In 2008, the Group of Twenty (G20) held a forum for discussion among finance ministers, including Heads of State and Government, with the aim of jointly addressing the global financial crisis. The group agreed that a broader political response was necessary, based on closer macroeconomic policy and cooperation, to restore growth, avoid negative repercussions, and support emerging market economies and developing countries. They also agreed to intensify their efforts to create a more favorable environment for cooperation and development to improve living conditions worldwide and protect the most vulnerable. Partnerships are important for technology transfer and knowledge sharing in more collaborative ways, offering structures for greater diffusion of environmentally sound technologies, especially to developing countries.

In this context, there is also an increasingly important role for decentralized development actors, namely, local and territorial governments, who are gaining

influence and recognition. Local governments' importance is increasingly acknowledged in local territories. Local government bodies and non-state entities form development partnerships. Beyond traditional partners, civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) emerge as actors involved in development cooperation. NGOs are securing financial resources and available knowledge, drawing attention to approaches that combine a non-profit focus with a business orientation.

The United Nations emphasizes that these diverse roles and national circumstances should be reflected and respected. The UN reports that in recent years, development and assistance provided by the private sector have substantially increased, bringing benefits such as greater visibility, interventions to improve program efficiency, experimental support grants, and innovative approaches, among others. Therefore, a framework that can facilitate transparency, accountability, and sustainability in global partnerships is needed. Stakeholders with strong commitments can enhance transparency and social responsibility.

States, in turn, must engage and take responsibility for the fair and inclusive sustainable development of their nations. Partnerships with stakeholders are being built through the creation of new projects and initiatives via networks and cross-sectoral capacities. This type of partnership requires strong support from international organizations and investments in both the development of the technical capacity of non-state actors and the support and mobilization of resources.

This connection of partnerships preferably occurs through networks, based on multi-level governance, from local interaction to national and international contacts. The key points are dialogue and the recognition of new actors and the consensual nature of agreements that are of common interest to countries and humanity's goals, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Multi-level network approaches facilitate cooperation, with the sharing of information and resources. Interactions between levels are facilitated if network communities include actors operating at different levels of governance. Enhanced interactions between levels can result from bottom-up policy processes with more active participation at the local level (Ingold, 2011) or through dominant network communities operating between levels of governance.

In this context, alongside fixed territorial spaces and hierarchical scales of the global environment, alternative approaches focusing on horizontal governance structures are emerging. According to Bulkeley (2005), actors and institutions operate simultaneously at multiple scales, with networks encompassing three developed concepts related to global environmental governance (Betsill & Bulkeley, 2004); epistemic communities (Haas, 1990); transnational advocacy coalitions (Keck & Sikkink, 1998); and global civil society (Lipschutz, 1996).

The concept of an epistemic community can be defined as a network of experts sharing an understanding of the scientific and political nature of a specific problem (Haas, 1990; Paterson, 2000). A transnational advocacy network (TAN), on the other hand, includes a broader range of actors working internationally on

an issue, “united by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services” (Keck & Sikkink, 1998: p. 2). Both theories emphasize that political authority reverts to networks through their ability to gather and deploy information, knowledge, and values (Haas, 1990; Lipschutz, 1996; Keck & Sikkink, 1998).

Bulkeley (2005) highlights that power is seen as the result of multiple sources of authority, including expertise and moral positions. In each case, the power of transnational networks resides in their ability to influence nation-states, which remain key to governance development (Rosenau & Czempiel, 1992: p. 170). While these approaches suggest that environmental issues have led to the creation of transnational policy networks, the authority of such networks remains tied to traditional political arenas, primarily the nation-state (Betsill & Bulkeley, 2004).

In the third approach, called global civil society, scholars began to examine the role of transnational networks in a more innovative way (Lipschutz, 1996; Wapner, 1998). This approach has shifted from being state-centered to considering the multiplicity of actors and institutions that influence how global issues are addressed at different scales. Thus, governance occurs through spheres of authority (Rosenau & Czempiel, 1992), which can be territorial or non-territorial networks that compete and cooperate through the exercise of formal and informal authority:

A Governance operates on a global scale through the coordination of states and the activities of a wide range of rule systems that exercise authority in pursuit of goals beyond the normal national jurisdictions (Rosenau & Czempiel, 1992: p. 172).

It reflects the belief that, although governments possess the main institutions, politics as a politically relevant activity or behavior does not end with them (Wapner, 1998: p. 7). This approach diverges from state-centered activity analyses to consider the multiplicity of actors and institutions that influence global environmental issues at different scales. Thus, state and non-state actors can be part of networks, and they are seen operating simultaneously at national and international levels. Consequently, power is viewed as a result of multiple sources of authority.

In this vein, networks are not only considered influential as they shape the reach and scope of state action but also as significant venues for the governance and debate of global environmental issues. At this juncture, political authority is not confined to territorially bounded entities, such as global regimes and nation-states, but accumulates in spaces. The authority and territoriality of the state are being rearticulated and rescaled through networks.

In a globalized world, there can be a greater degree of convergence of interests and the emergence of a new global public domain. As Ruggie (2004: p. 519) points out:

[...] The new global public domain is an institutionalized domain, serving as an arena for discourse, contestation, and organized action around the produc-

tion of global public goods. It is constituted by interactions between non-state actors as well as states. This domain allows for the direct expression and pursuit of a variety of human interests, not only those mediated (filtered, interpreted, promoted) by states. It “exists” in transnational, non-territorial spatial formations and is anchored in norms and expectations, as well as networks and circuits within, across, and beyond states.

For [Bulkeley \(2005\)](#), policy debates need to break free from the territorial constraints easily tied to demarcations, requiring an approach that neither assumes nor closes off the boundaries of the city, region, nation, global, local, individual, family, and so on. It should seek to integrate a politics of scales with a politics of networks, as networks have scalar dimensions that extend beyond the traditional spatialities of governing and regulating, which tend to be orchestrated around territorial boundaries, engaging with new political spaces that accumulate beyond and within this order.

This analysis is not merely a matter of conceptual significance; it provides a means to develop successful governance cases at various levels through networks, creating a new space that enhances the creativity of central governing modes and the development of successful public policies beyond territorial contexts. Governance cannot be understood separately from the broader shifts of authority in global politics ([Paterson, 2000: p. 7](#)). This important dynamic of change involves the state being reconfigured and rearticulated across spatial scales, creating geographies of governance. Thus, the functions of the state are redistributed among international and transnational organizations and institutions, as well as cities and regions, alongside non-state actors.

For a country to advance in global agendas and develop according to the goals of the 2030 Agenda, it must go through essential stages for its evolution. One of these stages involves dialogue between the state and other actors, whether state or non-state (for example, through networks). Given the heterogeneous interests, the governance model requires open dialogue from societies so that the law can be effective and public policies can be implemented effectively for all groups and actors within a nation.

4. Final Considerations

Network governance provides functional improvements in governance arrangements, with the emergence of collective actions under conditions suitable for organizational learning within the institutional environment. There is an evolutionary process that generates new possibilities and selects from them. In this evolutionary process, networks for sustainable development play a role in maintaining the broadest possible range of actions for the actors involved, with feedback cycles that enable an institutional process of critically evaluating the consequences of new institutional mechanisms and policies aimed at implementing sustainable development.

The 2030 Agenda presents a global challenge by aligning environmental, eco-

conomic, and social dimensions. Each country has a long way to go, considering the short ten-year timeframe to complete the agenda. It is envisioned that global governance refers to collective efforts to identify, perceive, or address global problems that exceed the individual capacities of any single state to resolve, leading to the conclusion that global governance reflects the international system's ability to provide multi-level and multi-actor solutions. For the advancement of cross-border issues, dialogue between countries, institutions, and civil society is essential. Based on this premise, we have an important ally in soft law, which, despite not being codified, is adopted and recognized as no less important than codified legislation.

Thus, International Environmental Law is consecrated as a science that recognizes such institutes—governance, soft law, new actors—and becomes a new branch capable of understanding and developing through essential instruments fundamental to the progress of bold agendas such as the 2030 Agenda.

As contextualized, networks play a crucial role in the dialogue that is sought to be established. When challenges cease to be “mine” and become “ours,” communication and the exchange of strategies, investments, and technology are necessary to address challenges that are global, cross-border, and of great complexity and magnitude.

Brazil is a country recognized for its active diplomacy, having played an important role in advancing Agenda 21 and the Millennium Development Goals, as well as approving the 2030 Agenda. However, under the current government, Brazil is experiencing a period of obscurantism and discredit with science, reflected in international isolation and reduced foreign investment. In 2019 and 2020, Brazil, which customarily submitted Voluntary National Reports on the progress of the SDGs to the High-Level Political Forum at the United Nations headquarters in New York, refrained from submitting them.

Therefore, it is believed that networks of subnational governments represent a new mode of operation composed of actors previously excluded from the international scene, who now represent the new global reality and reflect in their structures the innovative ways of acting and interacting used in global governance.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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