

RESEARCH ABSTRACTS FROM THE VOLUNTEER RESEARCHER PROGRAM - IPRI/FUNAG

Line of research

Cooperation and themes of the international agenda

Title

Asymmetries and potentialities in the international engagement of Brazilian subnational governments: a comparison analysis between São Paulo (SP) and Mangaratiba (RJ) and the role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in strengthening decentralized international cooperation.

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Abstract

The research analyzes the asymmetries and potentialities in the international action of Brazilian subnational governments, based on a study of the municipalities of São Paulo (SP) and Mangaratiba (RJ), as well as the role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MRE) in strengthening decentralized international cooperation. The study is based on the recognition that, although Brazilian foreign policy is constitutionally centralized at the federal level, municipalities have expanded their international engagement in search of solutions to local challenges that are aligned with global agendas. The analysis demonstrates institutional, technical, and financial differences between the two cases: São Paulo presents a consolidated structure, a specialized technical staff, and broad participation in international forums, whereas Mangaratiba has initiatives that are still incipient, limited by the absence of institutionalization and resources, although it



demonstrates interest and potential for international engagement. The research highlights the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a strategic actor in reducing these asymmetries through technical capacity-building, federative coordination, and the expansion of access for smaller municipalities to international opportunities. Finally, recommendations are proposed that are aimed at strengthening the institutional framework of international action, integrating it with local planning, and aligning subnational actions with Brazilian foreign policy, thereby contributing to a more balanced and effective internationalization.

Methodology

The research adopts a qualitative approach of an exploratory and analytical nature, grounded in the triangulation of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include direct observation derived from the author's professional work at the Municipal Secretariat for International Relations of São Paulo (SMRI), as well as unstructured exploratory interviews and technical exchanges with local authorities from Mangaratiba and with diplomats who served in the Regional Offices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Minas Gerais. Secondary sources comprise a review of academic and institutional literature on subnational diplomacy, decentralized international cooperation, and multilevel governance, with particular emphasis on the Economy and International Policy Bulletins (BEPI) published by IPEA, especially issue number 37. Additionally, documentary analysis of legal and administrative frameworks at the federal and municipal levels was conducted, enabling an articulation between theory and practice and the formulation of public policy-oriented recommendations.

Research stage

The research is at an advanced stage, with the mapping activities completed, and is expected to be concluded in October 2026. Until that time, the aim is to begin the pilot implementation of some of the proposed recommendations in the municipalities analyzed, in order to test their practical applicability and generate additional empirical evidence. At a later stage, the study intends to be further developed and systematized as a general guide to the internationalization of subnational entities, to be prepared in coordination with the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MRE), consolidating best practices, operational guidelines, and mechanisms of federative coordination for decentralized international cooperation.

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