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## International projection as a development strategy: Rio de Janeiro and the loss of industrial competitiveness

*Projeção internacional como estratégia de desenvolvimento: o Rio de Janeiro e a perda de competitividade industrial*

*Proyección internacional como estrategia de desarrollo: Río de Janeiro y la pérdida de competitividad industrial*

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### Abstract

This article sought to conduct a bibliographic and documentary analysis through the lens of foreign policy analysis focused on Rio de Janeiro within the context of its capitality. Throughout the research, a correlation was identified between the topic and the state's hollow productive structure, a phenomenon of production chain thinning that undermines the maintenance of a competitive manufacturing industry. It is observed that, since the 1996 Rio Sempre Rio strategic plan, the city's international projection has increasingly sought in the international arena an alternative path for its development. The study therefore examines the correlation between these paradiplomatic initiatives and the weakening of the city's economy.

Keywords: Rio de Janeiro; Paradiplomacy; Hollow Productive Structure; Development; Fluminense Economy.

### Resumo

O presente artigo realiza um estudo documental e bibliográfico sob a lente da análise de política externa do Rio de Janeiro no contexto de sua capitalidade. Ao longo da pesquisa, identifica-se uma correlação entre o tema e a estrutura produtiva oca do estado, marcada pelo desadensamento das cadeias produtivas e pela consequente perda de competitividade industrial. Nesse cenário, observa-se que, desde o plano estratégico Rio Sempre Rio (1996), a projeção internacional da cidade passou a buscar no meio internacional alternativas ao seu desenvolvimento. Analisa-se, portanto, a correlação entre tais investidas paradiplomáticas e o enfraquecimento da economia carioca.

Palavras-chave: Rio de Janeiro; Paradiplomacia; Estrutura Produtiva Oca; Desenvolvimento; Economia Fluminense.

### Resumen

El presente artículo buscó realizar un análisis bibliográfico y documental bajo el enfoque de la política exterior de Río de Janeiro en el contexto de su capitalidad. A lo largo de la investigación se identificó una correlación entre este tema y la estructura productiva hueca del estado, caracterizada por el desensamblaje de las cadenas productivas y la consecuente pérdida de competitividad industrial. En este escenario, se observa que, desde el plan estratégico Rio Sempre Rio (1996), la proyección internacional de la ciudad ha buscado en el ámbito externo una alternativa para su desarrollo. El estudio, por tanto, analiza la correlación entre dichas iniciativas paradiplomáticas y el debilitamiento de la economía carioca.

Palabras clave: Río de Janeiro; Paradiplomacia; Estructura Productiva Hueca; Desarrollo; Economía Fluminense.

## 1 Introduction

To speak about Rio de Janeiro is necessarily to speak of a wonderfully exceptional city, a *sui generis* case. Whether due to its privileged geography, marked by singular landscapes, or its history as the epicenter and ground zero of the Brazilian nation, both as the cultural reference that constituted the national identity and as the commercial and administrative hub around which other regions organized themselves. It is undeniable that, even before Dom João VI made it the capital of the United Kingdom of Portugal, Brazil, and the Algarves, the city already enjoyed a cosmopolitan dream.

This, broadly speaking, remained intact throughout its history and is a fundamental part of the ethos of Rio, particularly due to the city's proximity to the idea of the nation and to the most relevant and impactful decisions in the country. This is the essence of the concept of capitality proposed by Lessa (2001): the combination of a cosmopolitan tendency and the economic and cultural role played by a city that assumes the function of a national nucleus.

Thus, the role of the State as a dynamizing element of the economy of Rio de Janeiro is evident, given the presence of public bureaucracy with its income spent within the territory, creating a virtuous cycle, and state investments, which are highly concentrated in Rio. However, this advantage provided to the territory by its capitality began to be overshadowed in relative terms by the vigor of São Paulo's industrial sector. It is worth adding that there was a notable inflection point: the move of the federal capital to Brasília, which led to a process of continuous displacement of the public machinery apparatus from the capital in Rio towards the newly planned city.

From this perspective, it is clear that the deindustrialization that occurred in the Brazilian economy from the 1960s onwards had its epicenter in the state of Rio de Janeiro, weakening its productive structure. In this vein, the municipality had to take on functions previously reserved for the federal sphere, mobilizing resources, building networks, and developing its own initiatives on the international stage.

The designation for this practice is called Paradiplomacy, a concept that governs the means of action and insertion into the international system when carried out by subnational and/or regional entities. It is a public policy that can be mobilized both to promote symbolic and cultural power and to capture resources intended for urban projects, strengthen national power structures, among other purposes.

This article aims to analyze the paradiplomacy of Rio de Janeiro in light of the political, economic, and institutional context experienced by the municipality in recent decades. The choice of topic is justified by the understanding, present in the literature, of the exceptionality and continuity of this public policy in municipal management. The analysis is conducted based on the five dimensions of paradiplomacy presented by Mercher and Pereira (2018): Gestão Política, Mercado, Institucional, Agentes Externos e Epistêmica (Political Management, Market, Institutional, External Agents, and Epistemic). Given the history of loss of competitiveness of the economy of Rio de Janeiro in the national scenario, it is argued that paradiplomacy has come to play a central role in maintaining the capitality of Rio.

## 2 Writing Methodology

The framework of Foreign Policy Analysis of paradiplomacy as proposed by Mercher and Pereira (2018) was followed, as they consider endogenous factors to the city and domestic political crises as legitimate means for external projection. This conceptual framework proved fundamental for analyzing the main dimensions of the variables present, revealing a clear predominance of market and institutional ones. As explained by the Undersecretariat of International Relations of the State of Rio de Janeiro (SSRI) in 2017, paradiplomacy has a voluntary character and is a form of public management; therefore, the motivations for decision-making are to be found

in the most influential policies and documents published within and present in the context.

Knowing that paradiplomacy has become a continued practice across different administrations, an economic analysis was chosen, considered essential to clarify the reasons for its emergence as a public policy, as evidenced in the first government plans that adopted this approach. Subsequently, through bibliographic and documental review, the article sought to map the main initiatives resulting from this practice, highlighting the institutional protagonism of the municipality in the search for development alternatives. This approach proved appropriate, as the discussion of each of these initiatives and the key documents for the analysis allowed for a qualitative determination of a correlation.

This correlation can be justified by the importance of the collected documents and the longevity of the analyzed public policies, especially the continuity of this political orientation (Mercher; Pereira, 2018). To this end, the article was divided between an analysis of the hollow productive structure of the state of Rio de Janeiro, a factor related to the loss of competitiveness of the city of Rio, and the paradiplomatic analysis, followed by a mapping of the main policies implemented and the influential documents of the period.

Once the aforementioned correlation was found, this study sought to answer the following question: is paradiplomacy the solution found to continue exercising the capitality of Rio, given the thinning out of the productive structure of Rio de Janeiro?

### **3 The History of Rio's Capitality**

With the arrival of the Portuguese court in 1808, the year Dom João came to take refuge in Brazil due to the Napoleonic persecutions, Rio de Janeiro received, along with the royal family, about 15 thousand new inhabitants. This population influx drastically increased public spending, consumption, and local economic activity, functioning as an exogenous stimulus to the city's economy (Lessa, 2001, p. 76-77). Thus, many institutions that are culturally relevant on a national scale and located in Rio de Janeiro were created after the arrival of these migrants, some of which endure to this day, such as the National Museum and the National Library. Furthermore, the popular imagination, fed by a Rio intellectual elite that yearned for a truly autochthonous artistic tradition, constituted a national identity based on the country's specificities, particularly the traits found in the capital (Osório and Versiani, 2016). In light of the above, beyond institutions of secular importance, in this first moment, the "Brazilian identity," the national identity, was formed from the marvelous city. "The national identity constitutes itself in the city, which provides the sociopolitical and economic foundation for social formation" (Lessa, 2001, p.64).

However, the city would later suffer the consequences of the economic regression stemming from the disarticulation of the Mineira Economy in the early 19th century. Although it was not a hub for this extractive activity, as was the case with the state of Minas Gerais (Furtado, 2007, p.124), the Rio capital received the enslaved people who worked in it, collected the royal fifth (tax), and carried out various other administrative activities (Lessa, 2001, p. 68-69). Parallel to the decline of the mining sector, there was significant growth in coffee exports. In a mountainous region near the then capital of the country, the first phase of coffee expansion took place, based on the utilization of pre-existing resources left idle by the retraction of the gold economy (Furtado, 2007, p.169).

The rise of the aforementioned coffee economy was a process with its contradictions. On one hand, it was responsible for income concentration, increasing the disparity between Brazilian regions; on the other, it "endowed Brazil with a solid nucleus around which the other regions necessarily had to articulate themselves" (Furtado, 2007, p. 328): Rio de Janeiro. This is the genesis of the importance of the future "marvelous city" in the eyes of the nation; Rio was essential not only in articulating a mercantile-administrative hub that unified the Brazilian productive

structure but also in consolidating an elite linked to the coffee complex, which would come to lead the first efforts of national industrialization.

The gestation stage of the coffee economy is also that of the formation of a new entrepreneurial class that would play a fundamental role in the subsequent development of the country. [...] The city of Rio de Janeiro represented the country's main consumer market, and the consumption habits of its inhabitants had transformed substantially since the arrival of the Portuguese court. [...] The proximity to the country's capital constituted, evidently, a great advantage for the leaders of the coffee economy. Early on they understood the enormous importance the government could have as an instrument of economic action. [...] The central government was subjected to interests that were too heterogeneous to respond with the necessary promptness and efficiency to the calls of local interests (Furtado, 2007, p. 170-172)

It can be inferred from the excerpt above that the city of Rio de Janeiro was a commercial hub, the cradle of future urban elites and public administration. In line with Furtado's thinking regarding the sui generis role of the city of Rio de Janeiro in the economic, social, and political formation of Brazil; Carlos Lessa came to use the concept of capitality, which makes a city, in the eyes of the people and the world, de facto the capital, applied to the marvelous city:

Knowing Rio de Janeiro requires an understanding of the meaning of capitality, [...] the city's capitality cannot have its origin in empire, nor religion, nor nationality. [...] Whatever the genetic-constitutive process, the city, converted into a capital, is the beneficiary of a simple logic derived from being the seat of political power: historical choices move in its favor. Almost always perceived as superior to the countryside and other cities, the capital tends to be prioritized as the place where power demonstrates the wealth and civilization of a nationality. The logic of capitality gives the city cumulative advantages to continue being one. [...] Capitality is always unique, as its genetic-constitutive process, mode of insertion, relative weight, as well as its accommodation to the regional and horizontal pact of governability are specific. (Lessa, 2001, p. 64-65)

For Lessa (2001), the capital of a country is not only the "calling card" of the nationality but also the seat of a set of organs such as institutions, associations, academies, cultural bodies, and the main influencers of public opinion; it is, for all intents and purposes, "the apex of the civic-cultural reality of the state." (Lessa, 2001, p. 64) The city bearing capitality always provokes the most diverse sensations in the population, being an object of love as Paris is to the French, or of hatred as Madrid is to some Spaniards, but it is never treated with indifference by the inhabitants of other subnational entities, nor by immigrants (Lessa, 2001, p. 64-67).

As the capital, it was the most cosmopolitan space in the country: through Rio, Brazil articulated itself with other societies. It was the city preferred by foreigners to settle in and tended to be the port of reception and incorporation for visitors. (Lessa, 2001, p. 67)

Between the 1920s and 1960s, marked as the "golden decades" due to the immense prosperity and prestige achieved by the marvelous city, there was a great modernization of the old state of Rio de Janeiro, following the paths traced by the urban reforms of Pereira Passos (Lessa, 2001, p.237). In this golden period, the following were created: the National Bank for Economic and Social Development (BNDES) (1952), Petrobras (1953), Eletrobras (1962), and Vale do Rio Doce (1942) as state powers, and knowledge-promoting institutions such as: the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) (1937), the Institute of Pure and Applied Mathematics (IMPA) (1952), the Military Institute of Engineering (IME) (1959), and the Museum of Modern Art (MAM) (1948) (Osório and Versiani, 2016). In this context, it is observed that the centrality of the city of Rio – marked by its history as a logistical axis, its role as the national capital, and productive state investments in the former state of Rio – highlighted the strategic action of the State in the economy

of Rio de Janeiro (Osório and Versiani, 2016, p. 82), in tune with the dynamism of the Brazilian economy in the period.

From the 1960s onwards, especially from the 1970s onward, the participation of the state of Rio de Janeiro in the Brazilian GDP began to decline in relative terms, a loss of 33.2% between 1970 and 2011 (Osório and Versiani, 2016). This decline is also expressed in the number of formal jobs, even in the service sector, which grew in absolute terms (92.8% between 1985 and 2012), it remained considerably less significant than the same growth in the entire national territory (167.3% in the same period) (Osório and Versiani, 2016). Furthermore, formal employment in the manufacturing industry, a dynamic sector of the economy, showed a similar decline. Rio presented an absolute decline of 10.67%, opposite to a growth of 56.3% in Brazil in the aforementioned period; this statistic will be particularly relevant later. These phenomena have explanations: 1) the move of the Federal Capital to Brasília, accompanied by a slow perception of its consequences by the local population and public authorities; and 2) The crisis of the 1980s, which restricted the state's capacities for public investment, the inducer of economic development in Rio de Janeiro until then consolidated (Osório and Versiani, 2016).

Regarding the first point mentioned, it is opportune to reiterate the relevance of the capital and the presence of the State for the dynamism of the local economy, both in Rio city and the state of Rio de Janeiro (Osório; Versiani; Rabelo, 2022). Considering this factor, it can be stated that the transfer of the federal capital to Brasília, carried out without any financial compensation to the regional economy, had detrimental effects on the state of Rio de Janeiro. In this sense, the loss of 35% of the state of Rio's share in the national GDP between 1970 and 2018, the largest among all federative entities, cannot be dissociated from this process (Osório; Versiani; Rabelo, 2022). Furthermore, regarding the decline of the state of Rio de Janeiro, especially concerning the second point raised:

In the 80s, the failure of the resumption of Rio de Janeiro's industrialization became visible. At the same time, the corrosive effect of the capital transfer became evident. The expression 'emptying out' of Rio became commonplace. [...] The classic role of Rio as a commercial hub had been structurally surpassed. Structural changes in commercialization patterns, and the flight from the cumulative 'cascade' incidence of the old tax on sales and consignments led to the formation of broad and integrated commercial networks that atrophied the classic wholesale trade based in Rio. [...] In the 80s, there was both an attempt to reissue the national-developmental discourse, with the proposal to install industrial complexes in Rio, and to preserve the priority of science and technology. [...] The idea that industrial development would be increasingly dependent on technological and scientific stimulation was repeated exhaustively. Here would lie the strategic core for recovering importance for Rio de Janeiro. The city does not control the macroeconomic variables that affect its present performance in terms of income and employment: investment decisions depend, among other variables, on the systemic costs of the location, compared to other possible locations. Costs related to infrastructural and circulation conditions can be decisive. These variables, which affect the cost of the location, are partly under the purview of local political powers, provided they have financial leeway and autonomy. The progression of the Brazilian crisis, however, shortened the maneuvering room of local administrations. (Lessa, 2001, p. 351-352)

In light of the above, despite the structural overcoming of the need for Rio de Janeiro as a commercial and productive hub, and the state facing a continuous and expanding crisis, problems of disarticulation of the productive chain and, consequently, of tax revenue, its role as a "cultural capital" was preserved (Lessa, 2001). This is the found way to continue exercising Rio's capitality: culture, major global events, and tourism in general have been encouraged to keep the spotlight on Rio's lands, especially through paradiplomatic channels. However, before we

dive properly into the discussion that this work aims to initiate, it is interesting to address some issues, such as: 1) Addressing the sociopolitical contradictions between Rio's apparent independence, with its major paradiplomatic events, and the current erasure and detachment presented by the marvelous city in relation to the issues of the state of Rio de Janeiro as a whole; 2) Deepening the debate on the weakness of the productive structure of Rio de Janeiro state.

#### **4 Hollow Productive Structure and Rio's "Detachment"**

Starting from the "emptying out" of Rio de Janeiro as a problem to be solved (Lessa, 2001, p. 351-352), Rio's paradiplomacy enters the scene as a way to continue leveraging the historical capitality of Rio de Janeiro. However, despite these paradiplomatic efforts by the city of Rio as a subnational entity with its apparent independence from the rest of the state, the structural deficiency of the economy of the Rio de Janeiro region, being the epicenter of the Brazilian deindustrialization process, especially after 1980, persists in demonstrating that the state's productive problem has its particularities (Sobral, 2017). In this vein, this section of the article seeks to highlight both the weakening of the productive structure of Rio de Janeiro state and the failure to address this situation by the state's recent governments.

As already presented in the previous section, both the share of Rio de Janeiro state in the industrial GDP and the number of formal jobs in the region have decreased in relative terms since the move of the capital to Brasília, a trend that accelerated after the crisis of the 80s (Osório and Versiani, 2016). Thus, between 1956 and 1961, the foreign direct investment received by the capital, São Paulo, surpassed that raised by the marvelous city by seven times, so "the structural difference of Rio in relation to São Paulo regarding industrial development was already crystallized" (Lessa, 2002, p. 345). Despite the clear disarticulation of the regional productive bases, it can be inferred that the city of Rio continued as an axis that condensed national activities and a cosmopolitan center, even with an empty hinterland in Rio de Janeiro state (Lessa, 2002, p. 346).

As a way to try to regain Rio's productive protagonism, the state of Guanabara was created in 1960 with a strategic proposal for its development being industrialization (Lessa, 2002, p. 347). Even with an initial negative diagnosis about the disadvantage of the high prices of industrial land in Rio, the initiative is notable, highlighting the creation of the "Companhia Progresso do Estado da Guanabara", Copeg, and the industrial districts it supported, reaching nine districts by the early 70s (Lessa, 2002, p. 348). However, it is necessary to emphasize that during the 1970s the structural problems of Rio de Janeiro were disguised by the "economic miracle"; once this period ended, the problem began to become more apparent. Given the end of the state of Guanabara, with the continuous transfer of bureaucracy to Brasília and the failure to leverage Rio's potential in the oil and gas sector, the city was left to maintain its capitality only as the capital of tourism. (Lessa, 2002, p. 348-350)

This declining trend of the industrial GDP of Rio de Janeiro state, sometimes in relative terms, sometimes in absolute terms, is maintained in data presented in more recent studies such as (Sobral, 2017, p. 407-408), which presents empirical evidence of the "hollow productive structure" of Rio de Janeiro from the early 1990s until 2013, and in (Aucar, 2024, p. 157-159), which covers the time period from 2004 to 2020, emphasizing the continuity of the problem and its structural dimension. Regarding the issue of the hollow productive structure, Sobral (2017) synthesizes:

This latter phenomenon is understood as a process of thinning out important production chains, leading to a worsening of the conditions that prevent the manufacturing industry from constituting the key engine of economic growth and technical progress. In this sense, it is an emptying that leads to the fraying of the productive fabric and the idleness of a series of resources in the territory. This occurs due to a loss of productive diversification and complexity stemming from a trajectory centered on operational survival capacity with lower added

value [...] Although there are some gaps for competitive gains in isolated sectoral niches, there is no confrontation of the structural problems, which prevents the emergence of new, more systemic competitive advantages. (Sobral, 2017, p. 404)

Therefore, with a weakened productive base like Rio de Janeiro's, the risks of generalized economic regressions in the region increase, due to its great vulnerability, making it a territory more susceptible to suffering more intensely from any crises – national or international (Sobral, 2017). In this sense, Sobral (2019, p. 22) warns: "The search for efficiency without seeking efficacy tends to generate not a leaner and more streamlined structure, but rather to amplify the disorganization of a machine that already suffers from this problem." Although Rio de Janeiro ceased to be formally the capital of Brazil in the 1960s and lost its protagonism in the national economy, its capitality continues to be exercised through tourism; major geopolitical and sporting events, such as the Olympics (2016), G20 (2024), and the BRICS summit (2025); and the fact that it still officially hosts several federal government organs – for example: the National Bank for Economic and Social Development (BNDES), the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz), the National Health Agency (ANS), and the National Archives. It is worth noting that Osório and Versiani (2016) also considered tourism, sporting, cultural, artistic, and leisure activities as historically inducing development in Rio de Janeiro, especially in the metropolitan region. In this sense, analyzing the progress of infrastructure improvements and their correlation with major events for the marvelous city is essential.

Considering such a correlation, which will be presented in the following sections of this article, between the use of Rio's paradiplomacy as an attempt to maintain its relevance as a global city to project its power and image and, therefore, secure funding; it is paramount to question: is paradiplomacy, leveraging Rio's historical capitality, a viable way to replace an industrialization plan in order to promote the development of the marvelous city? To answer this significant question, it will be necessary to delve deeper into the concept of paradiplomacy from the perspective of international relations and study whether the aforementioned correlation is mentioned in the official documents of the municipality of Rio de Janeiro.

## **5 The Decentralized Alternative**

The phenomenon of globalization has made the borders between states more fragile, promoting more intense connections and growing interdependence between territories. This great connectivity and permeability between borders even reached subnational governments (states, municipalities, and provinces), which coexist, or act, continuously as transnational agents. Due to this more active participation in international politics, this practice was named "paradiplomacy."

The literature on the topic was initially developed by the American Ivo Duchacek and the Canadian Panayotis Soldatos. For Duchacek, the shift in the international paradigm and the new context of the system would have delegated to federative entities attributions traditionally reserved for central powers, configuring a dynamic of tension or cooperation between different levels of government (Duchacek, 1990).

For Soldatos (1990), the phenomenon of paradiplomacy constitutes a form of foreign policy exercised by federative units, displacing international action from the exclusively federal axis. In his view, this process redefines the power dynamic, as there is continuity, not tension, between the diplomacy conducted by the federation and that developed by cities, even though they operate with distinct competencies.

It is important to emphasize that the main difference between municipal participation in the international market and formal paradiplomacy, with diplomatic missions and specific external action, would be a recent practice that aims not only at market expansion but also at addressing certain regional issues. The policy was often understood as a necessity for certain governments rather than a luxury or a particular practice of a temporary administration, acquiring an expansion of the

economic, technological, educational, and scientific framework of the subnational unit.

Unlike embassies that guarantee information, goods, and crucial relations for the recognition of a State, paradiplomacy has a multiform aspect since it is not subordinate to a formal standard and, therefore, focuses on themes such as raising funds for its economic activity, technical cooperation, and international projection, in a characteristically decentralized manner, a case especially relevant for Rio de Janeiro (SSRI, 2017, p. 26-31).

It occurs when nation-states can no longer meet the needs of their internal entities, leading these actors to seek partnerships outside their territorial limits and resort to integration with other states as an alternative to reach new perspectives. An example of this practice would be the regional integration promoted by Mercosur, which has had, in its structure since 2004, the Consultative Forum of Municipalities, Federated States, Provinces, and Departments of Mercosur (FCCR), and the Mercocities Network since 1995. The FCCR established itself as a formal structure for the consultative participation of subnational entities in the bloc (Prado, 2011), while Mercocities became responsible for strengthening cities and their integration (Sadeck; Froio; Medeiros, 2017, p. 142), both positioning themselves as an essential part of a decentralized regional integration process of the federative unit.

According to Aldecoa and Keating (2013), there would be three main motivations for subnational governments to seek actions at the international level: politics, economy, and culture, adding the fourth motivation developed by John Kincaid (2010), that of cross-border housekeeping (transborder governance). In summary, the growing international projection of subnational entities stems from the capacity these actors have to find solutions more suited to the specificities of local problems, precisely because they are closer to the concrete demands of their territories and because they fill gaps left by national governments.

According to the Undersecretariat of International Relations of the State of Rio de Janeiro (SSRI), paradiplomacy emerges as a result of structural changes in the international system. The end of the Cold War, economic globalization, the technological revolution, and the strengthening of transnational networks opened space for local actors to exert greater influence, driven by social movements and new agendas of global reach (SSRI, 2017, p. 37-45). In Brazil, this practice was initially imported from the experiences of European cities and the Urb-AI and Mercocities networks. Its consolidation was also favored by the 1988 Constitution, which expanded the political autonomy of subnational entities, and by the institutional reorientation of the federal government (SSRI, 2017, p. 23-34).

As pointed out by Carneiro and Torres (2024, p. 110-113), although there were already specific experiences, paradiplomacy was effectively institutionalized starting with the Rio-92 and, later, incorporated by the Union's own efforts. Within the scope of addressing climate issues, cities began to occupy a central position for the implementation of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Starting from COP-16 (2010), they were recognized as stakeholders in this process (Zeppel, 2013) and even received a specific goal, SDG 11, related to Sustainable Cities and Communities. Thus, municipalities gained prominence in the execution of the 2030 Agenda, highlighting the need for greater attention to this administrative unit for achieving concrete social development results.

Although paradiplomacy is often interpreted from the international dimension, it is important to recognize that it is, first and foremost, a consequence and result of public policies, constituting part of the strategies for formulating and implementing actions linked to the interests of managers. In this sense, its character is necessarily political and voluntary, being directly associated with management guidelines, and often, with party orientations. Furthermore, the multiple factors that condition its effectiveness cannot be ignored, such as the existence of a market, the interest of the administration, the availability of a technical team, the participation of



international agents, and the support of actors external to the public power (Mercher; Pereira, 2018, p. 206–217).

International recognition and prestige contribute to the formation of a symbolic-commercial system, in which slogans and epithets, such as "Cidade Maravilhosa" (Marvelous City), "O Rio Sempre Rio" (Rio Always Rio) (1996), "Um novo mundo" (A New World) (2016), "Rio: Capital do Mundo" (Rio: Capital of the World) (2024), and "O Rio de Janeiro continua lendo" (Rio de Janeiro Keeps Reading) (2025), come to represent the city abroad. These statements mobilize the state administration, the business sector, and even the imagination of the local and external population, linking the city's image to these nomenclatures.

Thus, paradiplomacy is an instrument of great relevance for cities, not only as a tool for resolving local problems but also as an apparatus for promoting local development. An opportunity resulting from a need to obtain prominence, natural for certain cities, due to their increasingly prominent political structure or due to internal needs that would not be so easily addressed by the federal administration. It is important to emphasize that it is not enough to merely identify the existence of paradiplomacy; it is necessary to analyze which agents or dimensions defined or contributed to its nature in each case studied.

## **6 Main Proposals and Achievements**

The paradiplomacy adopted by the city of Rio de Janeiro must be understood as a continuous extension of its public policy. According to the intersection between Foreign Policy Analysis and Public Policy Analysis, as proposed by Leonardo Mercher and Alessandro Pereira (2018), the subnational reality of cities, more sensitive to the traditional logic of both approaches, introduces new variables to the analysis of the adopted policies (Mercher; Pereira, 2018).

The first relevant point for the analysis of Rio's paradiplomacy was the strategic plan "Rio Sempre Rio" (Rio Always Rio) by César Maia, conceived in 1993. The idea of urban planning and infrastructure development for the city is not new, see for example the attempts of Mayor Pereira Passos (1836-1913) or the Greek urbanist Apostolos Doxiadis (1913-1975) to develop a master plan for the city's development, but the initiative in question was characterized by seeking solutions for internal management beyond Brazilian borders. It is equally important to emphasize that this plan did not mark the emergence of paradiplomacy in the city, which was already present in a symbolic and disarticulated form, but rather its formal institutionalization, largely driven by the hosting of Eco-92 (Carneiro; Torres, 2024, p. 113–114). Although there were numerous previous urban planning initiatives, the focus of this article falls on the 1993 plan, as it was the first to explicitly incorporate the dimension of international projection.

In its elaboration, it was divided among various Diagnostic Groups (GD) with the objective of scrutinizing specific areas of the city and how the public power should act in each, until their work was reflected in the final report (Guanais; Fischer, 1999). The report, considered by the city hall as the first strategic planning document for the city in writing, already perceived a loss of competitiveness (RIO DE JANEIRO, 1996, p. 27) in the face of the globalized economy and the deindustrialization experienced by Brazil in the context in question. The biggest problems derived from the plan in relation to its infrastructure were the very Brazilian problems of accessibility, lack of integration between regions of the city, the lack of quality of existing constructions compared to other cities, and the high irregularity of occupation of the municipal territory in the form of favelas (RIO DE JANEIRO, 1996).

Therefore, the objectives of the plan can, broadly speaking, be divided into three main axes of action: 1) to restructure the city's infrastructure and integration in the face of its degradation, 2) to make Rio a "regional, national and international hub", and 3) to structure programs to minimize precarious housing developed over the

years. Faced with a highly competitive environment, it is highlighted that Rio de Janeiro sought not only to rethink its infrastructure but also,

To be a cultural hub and center of national and international attraction is an objective of the city, supported by the richness of its cultural life. Converting the objective into reality obliges the development of infrastructures and activities, and to clearly address the economic aspect of culture and art. To take advantage of the interventions being carried out in the Center to convert it into a nucleus of high cultural density, and a basic formative element of the carioca identity (RIO DE JANEIRO, 1996, p. 28).

Thus, the need to reimagine the urbanization the city underwent was intertwined with a goal of seeking global capital in an increasingly competitive environment. This was imagined as potentially achievable once the city became the "articulating center of the Metropolitan Region" again, especially through the complexification of its integration and the gain in competitiveness and infrastructure (and through comparative advantages over other cities). It is perceived, then, that the market dimension played a fundamental explanatory role in the elaboration of such a plan, especially when evidenced by the participation of the Commercial Association of Rio de Janeiro (ACRJ) and the Federation of Industries of the State of Rio de Janeiro (FIRJAN) in the plan's elaboration (Guanais; Fischer, 1999).

Later, another attempt at international insertion that would span the governments of Maia and his successor was the Mercocities initiative. The idea for a regional formation encompassing the municipal scope of the Southern Cone emerged in a seminar organized by the parent economic bloc of the initiative, Mercosur, in Asunción. The idea would gain traction, leading to a declaration, where:

It emphasized the need to create a Network of Cities of the countries that make up the Common Market of the South, MERCOSUR, to give democratically elected municipal authorities the possibility to participate in decisions for regional integration on issues within their competencies (MERCOCIUDADES, 2001).

In November 1995, Rio de Janeiro became a founding member of the network of municipalities in Porto Alegre, which contributed to consolidating external action as a state policy of the city hall. The creation of the network marked a period of transition, during which Maia no longer had enough time to use it fully for the city's development. Nevertheless, the permanence of the same political group in power played a decisive role in the continuity of these initiatives, as observed by Sólomon and Nunes (2007) and Mercher and Pereira (2018). In the dimension of political management, this continuity ensured the maintenance of paradiplomacy as a recurring practice of the municipality.

For example, plans and programs like "Rio Cidade" and "Favela Bairro" had continuity in the government of Luiz Paulo Conde. The first, influenced by his training as an architect, aimed to integrate the territory and modernize the urban landscape, playing a central role in articulating different regions and in the international projection of the city (Sartor, 2000). The urban interventions followed the same logic as the strategic plan of his predecessor, oriented towards the requalification of public space in the face of the loss of the municipality's comparative advantages in relation to other Brazilian and global cities (Sartor, 2000). Among the main results of these initiatives were the interventions on Avenida Nossa Senhora de Copacabana (Copacabana), Estrada do Galeão (Ilha do Governador), and Avenida Rio Branco (Centro), among others. It is worth noting that these actions represented about 24% of the municipal budget between 1995 and 1996 (Sartor, 2000, p. 81).

It is highlighted that the permanence of the same political group in power allowed the continuity of the Favela Bairro program, foreseen in Rio Sempre Rio (1996, p. 30–31), showing that the administrations of the period incorporated the urbanization of the peripheries as part of a structured strategy. When articulated with

paradiplomacy, this policy ceased to act only on the social plane and began to fulfill a strategic function: using the requalification of popular territories as an international showcase and a mechanism for attracting external resources. In this sense, the integration of the peripheries into the urban network began to operate as an instrument for the city's competitive repositioning.

Furthermore, Rio de Janeiro's bid to host the 2004 Olympic Games should be interpreted as part of the strategy to maintain its capital city and its international projection. The initial choice of Ilha do Fundão reveals the influence of the Barcelona-1992 model, insofar as it sought to integrate an area marginalized by the Rio Sempre Rio plan, bringing infrastructure to the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) and incorporating the territory into the urban fabric (Silvestre, 2017). Although there were disagreements about holding the event, the resources allocated to the university were effectively applied in its renewal and evidenced the coordinated action of the three spheres of government, municipal, state, and federal, in the effort to reposition the city internationally.

This paradiplomatic strategy focused on sports resulted in initiatives such as the Guanabara Bay depollution program, financed by the Inter-American Development Bank and the Japan International Cooperation Agency, with the objective of preparing the region for the event. Likewise, the environmental recovery and revitalization of areas like Maracanã, São Cristóvão, and the Port Zone, in addition to the allocation of federal resources for the revitalization and landscaping of assets of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), constitute investments directly related to the attempt to host the Olympic Games (Silvestre, 2017).

Still in sports, the elimination of Rio's bid to host the 2004 Olympic Games changed the paradigm of public administration, placing it in a more pragmatic mentality and one of adaptation to international demands (Silvestre, 2017), despite the Barcelona case study still being very alive in the minds of Rio's management. It was during the terms of Maia (when re-elected) and Eduardo Paes that the Coordinator of International Relations (CRI) stood out in the search for and promotion of sporting events, projecting its image by hosting the Pan American Games in 2007, the Military World Games in 2011, among others (Carneiro; Torres, 2024, p. 115).

Thus, the adoption of a clearly developmentalist mentality by the municipality is perceived. In the 2009-2012 Strategic Plan, the Olympic Games and the 2014 World Cup are presented as true windows of opportunity, allowing Rio to benefit from a particularly favorable international context (RIO DE JANEIRO, 2009). In the subsequent plan, these same events are highlighted again, reiterating the same logic in the face of the recognized loss of competitiveness of the city in the national and international scenario:

We learned from the example of Barcelona that, when hosting the Olympic Games, the public power must decide if the city will serve the event or the event will serve the city. We chose with absolute certainty the second path. [...] Of course, part of our efforts also contributes to the realization of unforgettable Games. To make our city even more admired worldwide and attract new visitors, investors, and major international events. But the Games pass. And our responsibility is to ensure that the greatest possible benefits remain here forever. Olympic City is about building a fairer, more integrated, and more developed Rio. (RIO DE JANEIRO, 2013)

There is continuity, now in the governments of Eduardo Paes, of the projection and developmentalist plans of the CRI. His administration, regarding paradiplomacy, was characterized by hosting such mega-events and by environmental agreements, in addition to continuing its hunt for resources alternative to those from Brasília. One achievement was the 2010 agreement with the World Bank which, despite requiring reforms in the city's debt management, enabled it to continue with the reurbanizing bias it has assumed since Rio Sempre Rio (Carneiro; Torres, 2024, p. 115). Furthermore, partnerships like Urban-LEDS, the rapprochement with the city of

Cologne through "Partnerships for Climate", the articulation of the implementation of BRT (Bus Rapid Transport) systems, and the hosting of the Rio+20 meeting in 2012 configure an indicator of the effort regarding the environmental agenda (Carneiro; Torres, 2024, p. 116).

Finally, the administration was marked above all by the hosting of two mega-events: the 2014 World Cup (partially hosted in the city) and the 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Made possible through cooperation with the federal government, these events redirected Rio's paradiplomacy, conducted by the Coordinator of International Relations (CRI), towards organizing the necessary infrastructure and capturing external investments (Carneiro; Torres, 2024, p. 118). As a fruit of these efforts, the city came to count, among other facilities, on the Olympic Park.

It is perceived, therefore, that the dimensions of political management (expressed in the strategic plans), external agents (with the global repositioning of Rio), and, to a certain extent, the institutional dimension (with the efforts destined for the construction of the Olympic Park) were determining factors for the international positioning of the city in the analyzed period. Moreover, the alignment of interests between the federal, state, and municipal governments, associated, from the perspective of Mercher and Pereira (2018), with the dimension of political management, was decisive in enabling a more audacious performance on the international stage.

## **7 Final considerations**

Starting from the historical capitality of the "marvelous city," it is possible to understand the role of the State in ensuring the dynamism of the local economy. Even before Dom João VI decreed that Rio de Janeiro would be the capital, this territory already concentrated a commercial and administrative hub, given that the royal fifth (tax) was collected in smelting houses located in Rio territory during the mining economy. Once the capital, Rio was politically and economically stimulated to continue playing this role, because as seen in Lessa (2001), "capitalities gives the city cumulative advantages to continue being one." (Lessa, 2001, p. 65)

However, there was a significant inflection point: the transfer of the capital to Brasília. With the continuous loss of competitiveness in relative terms compared to other subnational entities, the productive emptying of the state of Rio de Janeiro, accentuated in the 80s, left its mark, the end of the golden years. The literature indicates that the Rio region has, since then, had a hollow productive structure, with numerous industries fleeing its territory and its GDP, especially in the industrial sector, having grown less compared to other Brazilian states. Thus, Rio de Janeiro perceives paradiplomacy, foreign policy as conducted by the municipality, as an alternative to development directed by Brasília.

In this vein, the problem of deindustrialization was recognized by the public administration in the city's first strategic plan, "Rio Sempre Rio" (1996). However, instead of advocating for the resumption of a national development plan, the Rio administrations of the period, mindful of the city's loss of relative competitiveness, concluded that aid to address its lack of infrastructure and funds could be obtained through an external projection beyond this political chessboard.

In light of the transformations brought about by globalization, and by the new demands of our society, we observe a growing protagonism of subnational governments on the international stage, especially cities, which begin to act as true diplomatic agents, due to the possibilities and advantages they possess. Therefore, the practice of paradiplomacy emerges as a response to the limitations of the nation-state in dealing with complex local demands and as a strategy for political, economic, and cultural projection. The city of Rio de Janeiro demonstrated a systematization of this search with a public policy that sought, beyond financing, the resolution of the city's structural problems and the reclaiming of its capitality, which had shown itself to be dimmed in the face of the conjuncture.

Through initiatives of international cooperation, regional integration, transnational networks, and public policies aimed at strengthening sectors like the creative industry, Rio de Janeiro not only seeks more effective local solutions but also positions itself as a hub of innovation and cultural reference. The consolidation of Rio's paradiplomacy does not occur in isolation: it depends on a set of factors involving market, political will, technical infrastructure, and social participation, in addition to the stimulation of innovative economic arrangements, such as the creative economy, which, besides dynamizing the economy, strengthens the city's brand.

The paradiplomacy employed by the city, through its efforts, evidenced a dual function: besides acting as a mechanism for the city's identity-based and competitive affirmation in the international system, it is simultaneously a survival strategy in the face of the limits of the centralizing model historically offered by Brasília. The public policy in question contradicts Brazil's historical behavior, where political power has traditionally been concentrated in the Executive since the imperial period through a centralization conceived as a force to keep the national territory unified.

The 1988 Constitution, although marked by a decentralizing character, ended up generating a legal tension. This is because, as pointed out by the SSRI (2017), the fragmentation of political power and the expansion of the possibilities for action by subnational entities occurred at the same time as the exercise of foreign policy remained rigidly concentrated in Itamaraty (the Foreign Ministry). In other words, political decentralization was not accompanied by a redefinition of competencies in the international field. In this sense, Carneiro and Torres (2024) observe that the absence of a clear delimitation of subnational powers created a legal vacuum, resulting in a paradiplomatic agenda of low impact, incapable of assuming, in fact, the restructuring role that this policy could play.

Based on the research evidenced here, it was concluded that the city of Rio de Janeiro sought through regional diplomacy an alternative to Brasília, turning to the renewal of infrastructure, the resolution of historical complications, and the recovery of its economy's competitiveness, which had been affected and slowed down in previous decades.

This approach functioned as a strategy for reinventing the city's image, attracting investments, building cooperation networks, and developing more efficient responses to its needs. More than a foreign policy tool, the paradiplomacy approach proves essential for integrated and multidisciplinary development, as it stimulated various areas such as urban planning, environment, and culture.

However, no strong enough indication of its full success was perceived, demonstrating that international projection alone was not a sufficiently viable alternative for development led by the capital (Brasília).

In light of all the above, Rio's paradiplomatic policy appears to be a necessary condition for ensuring investment and the recovery of local productive structures, as it utilizes the historical advantages of capitality. However, it does not prove sufficient to overcome the hollow productive structure of the state of Rio de Janeiro, since it does not structurally attack the thinning out of the territory's productive chains. To ensure local economic development, it is recommended, alongside paradiplomacy, initiatives such as the Plano de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Social do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (PEDES - Economic and Social Development Plan of the State of Rio de Janeiro), established by Constitutional Amendment No. 92/2022, because public policies of such nature are complementary and not exclusionary, since the establishment of the marvelous city's capitality. Thus, using major events to serve the city, and not the opposite, and considering how to strengthen the territory's economic complexes, thinking about its local competitive advantages in a dynamic way, paradiplomacy shows itself as an interesting way to carry out "state policies", even as a state or municipality, and ensure regional development.

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## **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.



### **About *Coleção Estudos Cariocas***

*Coleção Estudos Cariocas* (ISSN 1984-7203) is a publication dedicated to studies and research on the Municipality of Rio de Janeiro, affiliated with the Pereira Passos Institute (IPP) of the Rio de Janeiro City Hall.

Its objective is to disseminate technical and scientific production on topics related to the city of Rio de Janeiro, as well as its metropolitan connections and its role in regional, national, and international contexts. The collection is open to all researchers (whether municipal employees or not) and covers a wide range of fields — provided they partially or fully address the spatial scope of the city of Rio de Janeiro.

Articles must also align with the Institute's objectives, which are:

1. to promote and coordinate public intervention in the city's urban space;
2. to provide and integrate the activities of the city's geographic, cartographic, monographic, and statistical information systems;
3. to support the establishment of basic guidelines for the city's socioeconomic development.

Special emphasis will be given to the articulation of the articles with the city's economic development proposal. Thus, it is expected that the multidisciplinary articles submitted to the journal will address the urban development needs of Rio de Janeiro.