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## The dilemma of local participation in the Brazil-France cross-border cooperation (1990-2015)

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### The dilemma of local participation in the Brazil-France cross-border cooperation (1990-2015)

**Abstract:** From the 1980s/90s, Brazilian foreign policy adopted a more assertive agenda regarding neighboring countries in northern South America. In this context, the celebration of the Framework Agreement between Brazil and France is inserted, an institutional framework that implemented cross-border cooperation between Amapá and French Guiana. At the time, France was interested in projecting itself politically and commercially in South America. On the other hand, Brazil has also achieved success with this new agenda. However, after twenty-four years in force, cross-border cooperation does not show effectiveness regarding the results expected by the collectives on both sides of the Guiana-Amapá border. This article seeks to discuss that the lack of local participation has become a contender in the development of this cooperation, which has not resulted in a political project capable of promoting the aggregation of cultural matrices that stimulate an identity of objectives. To development the reflection, non-participant observation, interviews with residents in the city of Oiapoque were used, as well as the examination of some agreements concluded between Brazil and France and the minutes of the meetings of the Joint Cross-Border Commission-CTM. The specificities that make the Guiana-Amapá border interesting to the governments of Brazil and France are found in the temporal experiences of multiple actors, unrelated to chronologies, but rather to the length of life lived.

**Key words:** France-Brazil bilateral relations. Guiana-Amapá border. Cross-Border Cooperation Local participation.

### O dilema da participação local na cooperação transfronteiriça Brasil-França (1990-2015)

**Resumo:** A partir das décadas de 1980/90 a política externa brasileira adotou uma agenda mais propositiva em relação aos países vizinhos ao norte da América do Sul. Nesse contexto se insere a celebração do Acordo-Quadro entre Brasil e França, moldura institucional que implantou a cooperação transfronteiriça entre o Amapá e a Guiana Francesa. À época interessava a França se projetar política e comercialmente na América do Sul. Por outro lado, o Brasil também logrou vantajosa essa nova agenda. Contudo após vinte e quatro anos de vigência a cooperação transfronteiriça não mostra eficácia em relação aos resultados esperados pelas coletividades em ambos os lados da fronteira guiano-amapaense. O presente artigo busca discutir que a falta de participação local se tornou um contendor no desenvolvimento dessa cooperação, a qual não resultou num projeto político, capaz de promover a agregação de matrizes culturais, promotoras de uma identidade de objetivos. Para desenvolvimento da reflexão foram utilizadas observação não participante, entrevistas com moradores na cidade de Oiapoque, assim como o exame de alguns acordos celebrados entre Brasil e França e as atas das reuniões da Comissão Mista Transfronteiriça-CTM. Se assegura que as especificidades que tornam a fronteira guiano-amapaense interessante aos governos de Brasil e França são encontradas nas experiências temporais de múltiplos atores, sem relação com cronologias, mas sim com durações de vida vivida.

**Palavras-chave:** Relações bilaterais França-Brasil; Fronteira guiano-amapaense; Cooperação transfronteiriça; Participação local.

### El dilema de la participación local en la cooperación transfronteriza Brasil-Francia (1990-2015)

**Resumen:** A partir de los años ochenta y noventa, la política exterior brasileña adoptó una agenda más asertiva en relación con los países vecinos del norte de América del Sur. En este contexto, se inserta la celebración del Acordo-Quadro entre Brasil y Francia, un marco institucional que implementó la cooperación transfronteriza entre Amapá y la Guayana Francesa. En ese momento, Francia estaba interesada en proyectarse política y comercialmente en Sudamérica y, por otro lado, Brasil también logró esta nueva agenda política de manera ventajosa. Sin embargo, después de veinticuatro años de vigencia, la cooperación transfronteriza no es efectiva en términos de los resultados esperados por los colectivos en ambos lados de la frontera guiano-amapense. El presente artículo busca discutir que la falta de participación local se ha convertido en un contendiente en el desarrollo de esta cooperación, que no ha resultado en un proyecto político, capaz de promover la agregación de matrices culturales, promoviendo una identidad de objetivos. Para el desarrollo de la reflexión, se utilizaron observación no participante, entrevistas con residentes en la ciudad de Oiapoque, así como el examen de algunos acuerdos concluidos entre Brasil y Francia y las actas de las reuniones de la Comisión Conjunta Transfronteriza (Comissão Mista Transfronteiriça-CTM). Se garantiza que las especificidades que hacen que la frontera guiano-amapense sea interesante para los gobiernos de Brasil y Francia se encuentran en las experiencias temporales de múltiples actores, no relacionadas con las cronologías, pero sí con la duración de la vida.

**Palabras clave:** Relaciones bilaterales Francia-Brasil. Frontera guiano-amapense. Cooperación transfronteriza. Participación local.

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## Introduction

From the second half of the twentieth century, international relations in northern South America presented a new configuration, particularly regarding the Guyana region and Brazil<sup>1</sup>. The three political entities of the Brazilian surroundings, the Cooperative Republic of Guyana (former British colony), Suriname (former Dutch colony) —after their independence processes—, and French Guiana, entered a process of economic modernization that greatly affected the relationship with Brasília.

British Guyana achieved its independence in 1966 and, in 1970, declared itself a Cooperative Republic, with a reorganization of the domestic economy and a position in foreign policy towards non-aligned countries, including Cuba and China. Suriname, independent of Netherlands since 1975, suffered a coup military in 1980; a situation that, equally directed the country towards the non-aligned field in diplomacy and towards the socialist ideology in internal politics.

French Guiana<sup>2</sup>, after a wave of emancipation in the 1970s, had a reconfiguration after the administrative reform carried out in Paris in 1982, reaching significant levels of autonomy. Nevertheless, it remained a French overseas territory, the only one of its kind in South America<sup>3</sup>.

Brazil played a key role in the problems of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, especially in the erratic nature of its foreign policy, sometimes attached to the USA, sometimes allied to the movement of non-aligned countries; the same happened in Suriname with the famous “Venturini’s mission”, which landed in early 1983 in Paramaribo offering economic and military aid in exchange for the government’s distance from Cuba (ÁVILA, 2011). French Guiana was left with something distant, being only indirectly affected by the Brazilian foreign policy.

In the wake of the end of the Cold War and the Washington Consensus, both the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and Suriname settled their diplomatic quarrels, redefined their states in the sense of liberal democracy and, with American support, fully joined the market economy. As they were focused on the Caribbean and Europe, their trade with Brazil remained at a low level, conferring little energy and concern from Itamaraty.

<sup>1</sup> A region that joins the former colonial portions of France, Great Britain, and Netherlands. Guyana is the current name given to all coastal lands located between the deltas of the Orinoco and Amazon rivers (ROMANI, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> According to Silva and Granger (2016), French Guiana is one of the nine outermost regions (ORs) of the European Union and has been part of the Republic of France since 1946, when it lost its colony status; in 2016 it became an overseas territorial collectivity. The authors report that French overseas departments, regions and local authorities enjoy complete legal equality with Hexagonal France.

<sup>3</sup> Inspired by the decolonization movement in the world, some groups in French Guiana guided the total separation from European France, especially students, professors, some unions, and the black movement, in that time linked to the appreciation of *creole* and local culture (MAURICE, 2014).

French Guiana, on the other hand, was involved by the French government in a policy of convergence with Brazil, quite clear in the 1990s and accelerated in the 2000s; thereby raising the largest space on the Brazilian international agenda regarding Guyana. Certainly, the development of a cross-border cooperation project between France and Brazil<sup>4</sup> on the French Guiana-Amapá border, besides historical interactions and political affinity, united an economic and cultural agenda (MARTINS, 2014).

The reasons for that rest in France's interest in its political and commercial projection in South America. On the other hand, Brazil has also found this new agenda interesting, with potential implements in the vectors of security, trade, environmental protection, and infrastructure development. The French Guiana-Amapá border has acquired new contours and possibilities. In general, as stated by Granger (2011), French Guiana finally became South Americanized and Amapá entered the European Union circuit<sup>5</sup>.

Considering the scope of this dossier — History and International Relations in the Guyana Region — this article aims to discuss that the lack of local society participation has become a contender in the development of the Franco-Brazilian cross-border cooperation project. An argument is that the construction of this proposal did not result in a political project, as according to Dagnino (2004, p. 98, free translation), “[...] the notion of political projects is that they are not reduced to strategies of political action in the strict sense, but they express and convey and produce meanings that integrate broader cultural matrices”.

Therefore, adopting a local scale perspective would mean establishing a platform not only with local demands, but also recognizing that domestic or external political processes imply ruptures that carry continuities (HARTOG, 2014), admitting that these elements would enable to shape an identity of goals. In the construction of Franco-Brazilian cross-border cooperation, socio-historical experiences of its populations were not combined with the transformations proposed by the cooperative design.

Studies by Martins (2008, 2014) and Brito, Brito e Batista (2018), on the other hand, have already started to indicate this problem. Explicit signs of the mentioned failure can be found in the Binational Bridge case, completed in June 2011 and opened twice, in 2017 and 2019<sup>6</sup>; as well as in

<sup>4</sup> The 1713 Treaty of Utrecht defined the Oiapoque River channel (the deepest line) as the boundary between Portuguese Guyana (current Brazilian state of Amapá) and French Guiana. But this treaty did not prevent the establishment of a border dispute, which was only settled with international arbitration in 1900 (MARTINS, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> According to IBGE (2020) in 2019 the population of the city of Oiapoque had 27,270 inhabitants and the commune of Saint-Georges de l'Oyapock had in 2017 a total population of 1,207 inhabitants (INSEE, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> In 2017, the Binational bridge operated from Monday to Friday, from 8:00 am to 12:00 pm and from 2:00 pm to 6:00 pm; as of August 2019, its traffic was also released on weekends and holidays with the inclusion of the interval from 12:00 pm to 2:00 pm.

the project of the Binational University of Oiapoque, a Franco-Brazilian partnership, whose proposition was abolished after the economic crisis of 2008. Another unresolved issue refers to the mobility of people on the Guiana-Amapá border, in international migration, smuggling and/or human trafficking or cross-border circulation, identified in the transit of residents of the communities located on the margins of the Oiapoque River, who sometimes sail on the Brazilian side of the river, sometimes on the French side of the river<sup>7</sup>.

The concluded agreements were handled by the traditional means of the State apparatus, inflating the deficit of popular participation, as French Guiana and Amapá are far from the decision-making centers, Paris and Brasília in this case. The political and economic elements that structured the global rhetoric of a world without borders were not enough to transform the French-Brazilian cross-border cooperation into a successful project due to the non-internalization of demand by the actors at a local scale.

To develop the analysis non-participant observation was used, interviews with traders, civil servants, boatmen in the city of Oiapoque in different periods (July/2013, September/2016, December/2019). As well as the examination of some speeches by politicians, agreements signed between Brazil and France, the minutes of the meetings of the Joint Cross-Border Commission – CTM (Comissão Mista Transfronteiriça). The concept of local participation is guided by Dagnino's (2004) premise that identifies, in the context of Brazilian democratization in the second half of the 1980s, a shift in the political meaning of participation as an effective sharing of decision-making power for the management function, that is, fulfilled in the implementation and execution of public policies.

### **Franco-Brazilian cooperation on the Guiana-Amapa border: historical notes**

In 1991, following the goals of the 1988 Constitution, Amapá started to have its first elected governor, Aníbal Barcelos, overcoming the condition of federal territory, instituted in 1943. Amapá became a full state in the federative unit, with a state constitution and relative autonomy in economic and financial matters.

Also in that time, a new stance emerged from France concerning its Guiana. With the end of the Cold War, Paris understood the necessity for a certain economic and political opening,

<sup>7</sup> Regarding the subject, see the text « *Des migrants brésiliens entre le Brésil et la Guyane Française: um espace social em construction ou en tension permanente dans um contexte (trans)frontalier* » de Martins, Pinto and Superti (2016). According to the International Center for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), between the years “[...] 2011 to 2013, the French are the people who most visited Brazil entering the Oiapoque border. In 2013 alone, 11,138 French people entered the country” (ICMPD, 2016, p. 104).

considering the struggle with food supply once the failure of the Green Plan, implemented in 1977, was recognized.<sup>8</sup> Hence, the most promising neighbor was Brazil, also in the process of economic transformation and democratic construction, after the period of military presidents and José Sarney governments.

The French were also interested in greater legal support, on the part of Brasília, for combating the illegal exploitation of gold mining on the Guiana-Amapa border, as well as the immigration of undocumented Brazilians to French Guiana. Consequently, in 1996, the new diplomacy began to materialize and, regarding this, the recitals of the Brazil-France Framework Cooperation Agreement stand out:

[...] Anxious to promote cooperation in the economic, cultural, scientific and technical fields, as well as in new sectors of common interest; Desiring to develop their good neighborly relations in the border area situated on one side and the other of their common border; Considering that Brazil is a member of Mercosur and France is a member of the European Union, and aware of the importance of the increasingly close dialogue that these two regional groups develop (BRASIL, 1997, p. 1, free translation).

The following year, Presidents Jacques Chirac and Fernando Henrique Cardoso met in the commune of Saint-Georges de l'Oyapock. Since General De Gaulle, no incumbent president had stepped on Guyanese soil. The Brazilian president, in turn, was the first foreign leader to visit the French commune. The meeting of these presidents became a symbolic act of integration of bilateral relations between the two countries in the historical interactions on the Guiana-Amapa border. From then on, the establishment was:

The Contracting Parties shall hold consultations each year to promote cross-border cooperation in all areas of common interest and for examining projects developed by the local authorities of the two countries, within the framework of national legislation. Representatives of these local communities may be associated with these works. This consultation group will meet alternately in Brazil and France (BRASIL, 1997, p. 1, free translation).

The Joint Cross-Border Commission was organized, composed of Brazilians and French, arising from the opportunity to create a dialogical dimension in which the topics of common interest to the parties were discussed. In all, eleven meetings happened between 1997 and 2019, the first in Brasília (1997), all the others alternated between the cities of Cayenne (1999, 2008, 2010, 2013, 2016) and Macapá (2002, 2009, 2011, 2015, 2019) (MARTINS, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> The Green Plan, launched under the baton of the French prime minister at the time, Jacques Chirac, was a series of guidelines to enhance French Guiana's industry and agriculture. For several reasons, it did not reach the established goals and had to be abandoned.

Below is a list of the problems faced by the population of Oiapoque — produced with data obtained from the fieldwork conducted in the city —, which corroborates the argument that no border integration policy can be implemented without the participation of local actors and actions from the States directed to the demands presented by these individuals:

- the peripheral location due to the distance from decision-making centers, both state and federal. BR-156, a federal highway that will integrate Oiapoque to Macapá by land, is not ready; approximately 160 km of asphalt pavement is missing and as the road is extremely steep, this stretch still partially supports the state of isolation that the population of Oiapoque suffers (SILVA, 2017);
- the low demographic and economic potential compared to its national societies make the city unattractive to foreign investments; This situation may change when oil exploration begins in the wells acquired by the company E&P Brasil, a consortium between the French TOTAL (40%), the Brazilian Petrobras (30%) and the British BP (30%)<sup>9</sup>. The exploration assets are located on the coast of Amapá, very close to French Guiana (LUNA; VETTORAZZO, 2013);
- absence of infrastructure (energy, transport, communications). The city suffers from a recurring lack of electricity; absence of asphalt pavement in the main streets and avenues, basic sanitation and internet;
- vulnerability in the face of illegal acts: trafficking in drugs, weapons, and people; sexual exploitation of children and adolescents; smuggling of gold and fish; degradation of natural heritage (GÓES, 2019);
- the precariousness of the communication channels so that the population can direct their demands to the decision-making process;
- the lack of public policies aimed at promoting improvements in education, health, urban infrastructure; combating the prostitution of children and adolescents and drug trafficking and assisting those who discharged from such situations.

Lourenço (2012) indicates that those are the peculiarities observed in border areas — infrastructural weakness; low economic performance; new territorial dynamics due to the intensification of the flows of people, capital, and goods — which subsidize the proposal for cross-border cooperation in the European Union. The author argues that decision-making processes must occur at a local scale, that is, that decisions must be processed in border regions so that their development occurs based on the local reality.

<sup>9</sup> Three public hearings were held in Belém, Oiapoque and Macapá in the first half of November 2017. The meetings were intended to hear residents of these cities about maritime drilling activity in Bloco FZA-M-59, in the Foz do Amazonas River basin (FIGUEIREDO, 2020).

Also according to Lourenço (2012), in the European Union, the proposal is to promote the territorial development of the community space and, consequently, constitute priority to the efforts of integration and reduction of the economic and social fragmentation caused by national borders. In this context, and with this proposition, the ideal is that uniting people is more important than uniting States.

However, this is not confirmed in the institutionalization of Franco-Brazilian border cooperation and there are at least three significant arguments in this direction, namely:

- the visa requirement for Brazilians to enter French Guiana, considering that in France this is exempted for a period of three months; on this topic, the Brazilian Party manifests:

The Brazilian delegation underlined that the visa requirement to enter French Guiana is an obstacle to further bilateral integration and limits the potential for economic and social development of the cooperation. The Brazilian delegation reiterated the desire to see the entry visa requirement reconsidered, while recognizing the efforts undertaken by the French side to mitigate the issue (REUNIÃO..., 2016, not paginated).

- traffic barriers on the Binational Bridge over the Oiapoque River are discussed in more detail a few paragraphs ahead;
- the ratification of the agreement to combat illegal mining operations, operated jointly between Brazilian and French military institutions, which reduced the number of mining activities without, however, creating subsistence alternatives for the miners (REUNIÃO..., 2016, not paginated).

Below is an excerpt from the 2008 agreement that allows to understand the provision of inspection and surveillance measures related to gold mining in the Guiana-Amapa border region, including the restriction of boat traffic to transport cargo and passengers on the Oiapoque River:

The Parties commit to institute and implement a complete internal regime for the regulation and control of gold mining and exploration activities conducted in protected areas or areas of patrimonial interest within their respective jurisdictions.

To this end, each Party commit to:

- a) submit research and gold mining activities to prior administrative authorization;
- b) submit the exercise of commercial activities related to unprocessed gold, especially sales and resale activities to administrative authorization;
- c) submit companies that sell granulometric sieves (crushers and mills) or mercury to the declaration of their activity to the competent administrative authorities (BRASIL, 2014, p. 2).

However, on the Brazilian side, this activity is regulated and it is not in a historical vacuum, since the nineteenth century there have been records of gold mining in the region of the Oiapoque river bay (ROMANI, 2013; DUARTE, 2016). As seen in the fragment, the agreement provides a set

of inspection and surveillance measures related to gold mining in the Guiana-Amapa border region, including the restriction of vessel traffic to transport cargo and passengers on the Oiapoque River. Such measures were not combined with others, such as the generation of jobs and income for Brazilians repatriated that are from clandestine mines in French Guiana.

### **Local participation in French-Brazilian cross-border cooperation**

Some of these issues can be identified in the interviews conducted in Oiapoque, when some of the respondents who, in their reports, made references to the Brazilian Army operations, which were aimed at combating cross-border and environmental illicit activities on the Brazilian border with French Guiana and Suriname (which is marked by the Oiapoque River channel). In these operations, however, approaches and searches of vehicles, boats, clandestine moorings, river and land patrols were conducted.

As part of the cooperation on the Guiana-Amapa border, an agreement was signed in 2008 in the area of combating illegal gold mining in protected areas or areas of patrimonial interest, the main scope of which is the protection and conservation of the Guiana Plateau's environmental heritage (BRASIL, 2014).

The complication appeared when the Brazilian military began to monitor the traffic of Brazilians going to Ilha Bela and Vila Brasil, because, according to the information of the interviewees, all kinds of exaggeration happened in these approaches since the Army was considering that the passers-by were going to French Guiana's clandestine mines or transporting goods that are used in the activities that subsidize it, such as fuels, food, and drinks.

Furthermore, the greatest indignation lay in the perception that these operations were in solidarity with the government of France and against the Brazilians; a fact that ended up triggering several criticisms and the following excerpts show that:

[...] I am the president of the Vila Brasil residents' association and I am a counselor in the municipality of Oiapoque, I have lived in Vila Brasil for twenty-eight years, I have a history and hope and trust in Brazil and in Brazilians who have the power to decide. Because of the mining on the French side, the barrier of the Brazilian Army was created and then the worst humiliations that Brazilians could endure arose. The Brazilian Army. They were there to defend France and humiliate the Brazilians who lived there (I 12, Councilor and President of the Vila Brasil Residents' Association, in an interview granted in July 2013, free translation).

The battle against the activity of Brazilian gold miners in the exploration of clandestine gold developed in French Guiana was the subject of the considerations of Sebastião Bala Rocha (at the



time a federal deputy for the PDT-Amapá), emphasizing that the 2008 Agreement resulted in a series of conflicts involving police forces: *Gendarmerie*, *Police aux Frontières*, Brazilian Army, and users of the transport system on the Oiapoque River, conducted by the *catraieiros*<sup>10</sup>. This one connects all collectivities located on both sides of the Guiana-Amapa border. For the deputy:

France established a major action to combat gold mining. It has generated conflicts. Anything that goes up towards the Oiapoque River is supervised by the Brazilian Army. This has left the population in a situation of great despair and dissatisfaction. Going up the waterfall of the Oiapoque River, there are two Brazilian communities, Vila Brasil and Ilha Bela, where Brazilians reside and have their right to come and go restricted, in a way (ROCHA, 2010, p. 1).

The deputy did not defend the illegal practice of gold mining, which is very harmful to the environment and the riverside populations, however, from his manifestation it appears that the decision was between the governments of France and Brazil, without the participation of representative segments of local societies, such as *catraieiros* or entrepreneurs in the river transport sector.

[...] I have a transport company, I make a line via Oiapoque, Ilha Bela and Vila Brasil and we have a steakhouse here in the city too, right? We have lived here in Oiapoque for eleven years and we were very embarrassed by the Brazilian Army, they made a barrier to inspect (I 9, Merchant of the river transport sector, in an interview granted in July 2013, free translation).

Because there was a time when they, the French, closed the passage to Saint-Georges, it was the biggest struggle for us to pass. The councilman struggled to get it, we paid a lawyer and that's how we got to work again (I 6, Catraieira, in an interview granted in July 2013).

Border cooperation is part of the regionalization policy in Europe, which recognizes the importance of creating community spaces with the involvement of contiguous territories and the integration of people (CRUZ, 1995; OBSERVATÓRIO PARA TRANSFRONTEIRIÇA COOPERAÇÃO, 2004; MEDEIROS, 2009); however, in the Oiapoque-French Guiana integration, this has no correlation, as many outstanding issues exist, especially those related to the interaction between people.

On a local scale, there are recurring demonstrations that question the “[...] cooperation between Saint-Georges and Oiapoque, for example, at least in this matter, today there is not a

<sup>10</sup> Catraias or pirogues are local names for a self-propelled canoe, which holds 20 passengers and fifteen hundred kilos, made of wood or light metal, powered by an engine located at the stern with a power of 40, 60 or 80 HP's and since 1970 they have transport demands across the Oiapoque River. Catraieiros are the professionals who drive small motorized boats, they organize themselves in cooperatives: Cooperativa de Transporte Fluvial e Terrestre de Oiapoque (COMFCOI); Associação dos Pilotos Fluviais de Vila Vitória (APFVV); Cooperativa de Transportes e Turismo de Oiapoque (COOPTUR); Associação Valle de Saint-Georges L'Oyapock (SANTOS; SANTOS, 2016).

defined policy yet. (I 5, Professor and Advisor of the municipal executive, in an interview granted in July 2013, free translation). The immediate result of this is that the population of Oiapoque feels excluded from this process and resents being neither informed nor having effective participation in the meetings of the Joint Brazil-France Cooperation Committee:

The information that leaves Guiana, for example, goes directly to Macapá or Brasília, it never comes here. When we know, it's all last minute, we are never informed in the way we had to be informed (I 4, Returned immigrant and Merchant of the hospitality sector, in an interview granted in July 2013, free translation).

The agreement 2008 is considered outrageous to Brazilian sovereignty, especially for politicians and jurists from Amapá. To highlight the Gordian knot, deputy Sebastião Bala Rocha's arguments are used, who constituted a separate vote within the scope of the Committee on Foreign Relations and National Defense (BRASIL, 2013), positioning himself for the rejection of the approval of the Project of Decree-Law No. 1,055/2013, referring to the agreement. In this context, the deputy says:

It should also be noted that the negotiations occurred in absentia of the Government of Amapá and its people, without prior consultation or participation by society and the leaders of the State and municipality of Oiapoque, who did not have the opportunity to express their real interests, opinions and concerns regarding the issues that the Agreement signed intend to protect, in a process of exclusion of representatives of the Amapá people. [...] As for the economic aspects, it must be emphasized that the increase in repression of merchants and navigators on the Oiapoque River, will cause the unemployment in the municipality to worsen and expose the community to an increased risk of the occurrence of violence, drug use, and child prostitution (BRASIL, 2013, p. 20, free translation).

The question raised by the deputy demonstrates the lack of participation by the population of Oiapoque on the normalization of the fight against illegal gold mining in a perimeter of 150 km of Brazilian territory, an area that covers the municipality of Oiapoque in its entirety and part of the municipality of Calçoene. However, this is not a defense of illegal practices, but, as Bala Rocha argues, there was no concern in recognizing the existence of minings and miners in the Brazilian territory. If the combat operations are successful, there will be a flow of approximately fifteen thousand miners returning to Brazil and, their arrival will certainly happen in Oiapoque.

In addition, even though they are not established in the city, this contingent will cause a series of breakdowns in the daily life of the city. On the other hand, the area of competence of the agreement could seriously affect several Brazilians who work legally in the mining activity, such as the Lourenço mining, in the municipality of Calçoene:

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We have no mining problem in Brazil, if you look, the mining area we have is in Lourenço, but it is legalized, on our side. We have no conflict, we have no problem with illegal mining. So they [french] have to take care of their area, we think so, they have to guard their area, preventing illegal miners from entering (I 3, Merchant in the civil construction sector, in an interview granted in July 2013, free translation).

Another point that corroborates the assertion about the lack of local participation in cross-border cooperation is the fact that in twenty-four years of validity, its real manifestation is the Binational Bridge over the Oiapoque river “[...] The biggest benefit that we received here was during the construction of the Binational Bridge. So here is one of the benefit factors: the bridge! But we know that it will really benefit the French” (I 1, Communication Advisor to the Oiapoque Prefecture, in an interview granted in July 2013, free translation).

Therefore, a close association between French-Brazilian cross-border cooperation and the Binational Bridge is observed; a fact that stems from the local belief that the bridge will bring new opportunities in terms of socio-economic development, without, however, having the knowledge to whom the bridge will truly benefit.

According to Silva (2013), the physical integration provided by the Binational Bridge is interesting to France because of the connection it will establish with the Port of Santana<sup>11</sup>, which has an 11-meter draft against 3.7 from *Port of Dégrad-des-Cannes*, the most important in French Guiana. Still according to this author, the entire French Guiana port infrastructure is connected to this “[...] main trade port located a few kilometers from Cayenne, through which almost all of its export-import agenda passes” (SILVA, 2013, p. 165, free translation). In addition to this port, it is noted that “French Guiana also has attached ports, but of little significance, such as those of Kourou and Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni” (SILVA, 2013, p. 165, free translation).

Regarding the mode of maritime transport for imports and exports, the connection from Cayenne to the Port of Santana will represent cost reduction, innovation with a new route for the circulation of products and goods, and creation of alternatives to consolidate the development of French Guiana with the consequent overcoming condition of territorial enclave (D’HAUTEFEUILLE, 2009).

The struggles indicated demonstrate that the historical friendship between Brazil and France is not enough to overcome differences. For a better understanding, it is considered pertinent to resume some points of the process that resulted in the bridge between Oiapoque and Saint-Georges. The bridge construction project happened in two bilateral agreements, signed in 2001 and 2005 respectively.

<sup>11</sup> Amapá municipality 17 km from the capital Macapá, Santana form a conurbation with Macapá

In the 2005 agreement, which complements and/or confirms the previous ones, in addition to deciding the cost division and who would be responsible for the role of managing country (which in this case was the Brazilian government), it was established that Brazil and France should bear expenses related to the construction of the necessary infrastructure for the operational use of the bridge; defining the bridge and all public investments necessary for its use by operation area: 1) the bridge and its safety and signaling equipment; 2) the two access roads between Oiapoque and Saint-Georges and their signaling and security equipment; 3) border inspection posts and respective facilities (BRASIL, 2007). When commenting in the Federal Senate on the results achieved by the government of Amapá at the VIII Meeting of the Mixed Committee on Cross-Border Cooperation occurred in the city of Cayenne in 2013, the then senator for Amapá João Alberto Capiberibe ensures that:

The bridge is ready, it is the result of that meeting between President Jacques Chirac and President Fernando Henrique. This bridge was built under President Lula's government and completed in 2011. However, the customs and inspection structure is not yet complete. The French side is completely finished. All the necessary structure to meet the flow of transport and passengers and people on the bridge, on the French side, is ready, on our side, there are the buildings to place the Federal Police, the Federal Revenue, ANVISA. But we are absolutely convinced that this issue will be settled soon because there is great interest in opening this bridge for the flow of vehicles and people (CAPIBERIBE, 2013, p. 1-2, free translation).

The delay in the opening of the Binational Bridge was recurrently attributed to the lack of compliance by the Brazilian government in implementing its area of operation, which on the French side was ready in 2011. However, in addition to the delay in the construction of the definitive Customs on the Brazilian side, the absence of a legal framework to regulate the circulation of people, vehicles and goods was also a factor. This, in turn, was a recurring concern in the cooperative dialogue between Brazilian and French representatives: *“Les parties se sont engagées à élaborer la structure juridique nécessaire à la circulation transfrontalière de personnes et marchandises, pour préparer l'inauguration du pont sur le fleuve Oyapock”*<sup>12</sup> (REUNION..., 2011, p. 1)<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Free translation: “The parties were engaged to elaborate the necessary legal structure in the cross-border circulation of people and goods to prepare for the opening of the bridge over the Oiapoque River”.

<sup>13</sup> This situation was settled with the signing of the following agreements in 2014: I) international road transportation of passengers and cargo – Decree No. 8.964/2017 (BRASIL, 2017a); II) special cross-border regime for the circulation of subsistence goods between Saint-Georges de l'Oyapock and Oiapoque – Decree No. 8,960/2017 (BRASIL, 2017b); III) regime of cross-border circulation between the state of Amapá and French Guiana, which resulted in Ordinance No. 1,512/2014 (BRASIL, 2014b) of the Ministry of Justice that normalized the dispatch of the identity card of a border resident, a document issued under the terms of national laws by the Federal Police in Brazil and Police aux Frontières in French Guiana.

The Binational Bridge over the Oiapoque river cost 71 million reais. The allocation of this resource expresses the financing of an intergovernmental program with priority given to the economic infrastructure, which has the purpose of favoring the convergence of public action in the Oiapoque-French Guiana border territory. The view of the bridge causes discomfort to a more observant observer because while the population of Oiapoque suffers due to the lack of investments in education, health, urban infrastructure, and sanitation, there is the bridge, built according to modern standards of civil engineering and architecture, but which, for the time being, does not serve anything or anyone, that is, as stated by d'Hautefeuille (2009, p. 9, free translation), “this bridge does not have a local origin”. For local actors, the connection between improvements in their living conditions and the bridge over the Oiapoque River is not so evident.

This reflects the complete disconnection of this project from the local context. A simple element supports this observation: no study prior to this decision has ever been conducted to identify socio-economic opportunities for Guyana or even Amapá [...]. These types of studies were conducted only once the announcement was made, just because French law requires the preparation of impact studies before the implementation of infrastructure. These studies, incidentally, are based only on the microlocal and cross-border scale. They, therefore, ignore the presidential decision without justifying the necessity or the opportunity to build a bridge over the Oiapoque River (D'HAUTEFEUILLE, 2009, p. 10, free translation).

In the same direction was the pronouncement of federal deputy Sebastião Bala Rocha (PDT-AP) regarding the Binational Bridge, a circumstance in which he ensures that this infrastructure does not meet the demands of the local population on either side of the Guiana-Amapa border, as it is the result of a public policy that

The bridge will serve for Bala Rocha, who has a diplomatic passport, or for Deputy Evandro Milhomen or for a businessman or a trader who obtains a visa and crosses. For the poor people of Oiapoque, the bridge is useless; it serves French interests as well, because, instead of bringing three ships with goods from France to the Port of Cayenne, it will bring only one to the Port of Santana, which is larger, has 12 meters of draft - the Cayenne only has three meters. But it is important to make it clear that it will not serve the people of Oiapoque; it will serve for Macapá, Cayenne, but not for São Jorge [Saint-Georges de l'Oyapock] and for Oiapoque. (ROCHA, 2010, p. 2).

In Decree No. 6.250, of November 2007, that promulgated the 2005 agreement, the Bilateral Franco-Brazilian Commission — established since the 2001 agreement — changed its name to the Intergovernmental Commission. When examining the composition and competences of this commission, the lack of representation of the Oiapoque population in the project and construction process of the Binational Bridge is confirmed. This commission was responsible for: 1) gathering data and providing the necessary complementary studies related to the technical, environmental,

economic and financial aspects of the work; 2) organize the data obtained in the previous step to indicate the location and the technical, administrative and financial modalities for carrying out and operating the work; 3) to propose, at the request of the Parties, the terms of the international public works contract containing the definition of the work, the form of management and the modalities of financing and operation of the work; and 4) to propose, at the request of the Parties, the terms of an international tender for public works, containing the definition of the works to be conducted and the process for choosing the performing companies (BRASIL, 2007). Note the composition of the delegations:

Brazilian delegation: Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Civil House of the Presidency of the Republic; Justice ministry; Ministry of Transport; Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Planning, Budget, and Management; Ministry of the Environment; Defense Ministry; Ministry of Tourism; Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply; Ministry of Health; and Amapá State Government.

French delegation: Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ministry of Economy, Finance and Industry; Ministry of Transport, Equipment, Tourism and the Sea; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries; Ministry of Ecology and Sustainable Development; Ministry of Ultra-Mar; Guyana City Hall; Guyana region; Guyana General Council; City Hall of Saint-Georges do Oiapoque; and Gendarmerie and Police Service (BRASIL, 2007, not paginated).

Therefore, the representativeness of Amapá and French Guiana are not equivalent. This is because Amapá was represented by its governmental institutions, with no reference to a representation of Oiapoque, nor the municipal government, nor the local population. French Guiana has been represented by three institutional levels: Prefecture of Guyana, Guyana Region, General Council of Guyana; and Saint-Georges was represented by its prefecture.

Finally, reference is made to the decentralized cooperation agreement signed in Oiapoque, in December 2008 (BRASIL, 2017c). Although it is not specific to the border relationship, its proposal to strengthen ties between subnational units would be punctual for the development of partnerships between local communities, if from Oiapoque-Saint-Georges. Furthermore, while recognizing the importance and the role of central governments in border cooperation, decentralization would act as a driving force at the local level, insofar as it would expand border understandings at a local scale (MEDEIROS, 2009). This agreement was ratified nine years after its signature, in its text the governments of Brazil and France define that decentralized cooperation is constituted with

[...] the forms of cooperation and international action established between French territorial entities and Brazilian federal entities, as well as the respective civil society actors to strengthen the ties between the two countries, in line with the foreign policies conducted by National governments and with the internal legislation of each Party (BRASIL, 2017c, p. 2, free translation).

To decentralize, in these terms, is to multiply actors and interests, bringing along the possibility of overcoming social, economic and cultural obstacles; which would make border cooperation more operational. In France, since 1982, there is a legal framework that regulates international relations of collectivities, however, the same has not happened in Brazil, which still does not have a law that regulates decentralized cooperation. However, even if decentralized cooperation has advanced in unofficial meetings, the agreement that will standardize it is currently pending in the National Congress and, if ratified, will provide significant advances for border communities in Oiapoque and others in French Guiana, as the governments of Brazil and France seek to strengthen their bilateral relationship: “Aware of the growing importance of the cooperation actions promoted and conducted by French regions, departments, groups and municipalities in partnership with the federal entities - Brazilian states and municipalities” (BRASIL, 2017c, p. 2).

In addition to defining the understanding of decentralized cooperation, the text is organized around the following axes: I) operational modalities of decentralized cooperation, provisions on the ways it works; II) means for conducting actions and projects, defining competences and performances; III) advisory bodies, validation of the instrument application and increase in its effectiveness (BRASIL, 2017c, p. 2-3).

The obstacles related to the institutionalization of border cooperation are precisely the lack of involvement of local actors and of resources to finance actions aimed at the reality of these populations, not considering as participation the presence of some border actors in the meetings of the Joint Cross-border Commission. For border cooperation to remain not only in the rhetoric of the actors and in more allegorical than concrete actions, but it is necessary to expand the communication channels, and this cannot happen without the “conceptual” involvement of the whole community as an informed community, understanding that the sharing of a common language and symbolic historicity is the most complete way to achieve this unity (BERGER; LUCKMANN, 1985).

Below I 4, returned immigrant, who currently has an inn in the city of Oiapoque, criticizes that border cooperation unfolds without the information on her deliberations reaching the Oiapoque, stating that:

Information goes over our heads. So the people of Oiapoque, even here, are practically discriminated, you know? I always tell that to other people, we Brazilians, here we are at Oiapoque, we really are, having everything over our heads, we don't have this information as we need to have (I 4, Returned immigrant and Hotel Industry Trader, in an interview granted in July 2013).

This information shows that the attempt to promote border integration to encourage socio-economic development of border communities should include a conceptual framework that incorporates the experiences of the local population.

The people from Macapá came, the people from Brasília came and passed over everyone here [Oiapoque], even the local authorities were not heard. Then it came from Brasília, and even from Macapá. So we are harmed here because we live here, we know the problems, we know the deficiencies. (I 2, Computer technician and Advisor to the municipal executive, in an interview granted in July 2013).

I see a situation here that is a fact, we always thought like this: we have a meeting here in Saint-Georges, in Cayenne, here. Today the mayor [...] has a good relationship with the politicians there in Saint-Georges, with the mayor here in Saint-Georges. [...] But the order that they have from French Guiana and Saint-Georges and that we received here come from above, from France over there and from Brasília over here. Look, for example, an agreement was made here in two thousand eleven that the Brazilian could enter Saint-Georges, shop, etc. and it was agreed between politicians! Brasília's order came, they sent it to Gendarmerie, with an order to expel it, so it didn't help the local agreement go ahead. (I 5, Professor and Advisor to the municipal executive, in an interview granted in July 2013).

The study of the minutes of the meetings of the Brazil-France Joint Cross-Border Commission allowed to abstract from the documentation some of the benefits that outline the horizon of Franco-Brazilian border cooperation. However, it also favored to verify that there is a lack of: I) synergy between actors involved in the institutionalization of cross-border cooperation; II) adjustments to reconcile constitutional differences in favor of common interests; III) attract financing resources.

When the bridge was designed, they did not include the catraieira class, they forgot the catraieira class, they did not hold a public hearing to discuss the conditions, what could happen with the economic impact, with the social impact, with the environmental impact. They forgot about the municipality, if they did something, it didn't come to the attention of the catraieira class. (I 10, Catraieiro, in an interview granted in July 2013, free translation).

The advances in French-Brazilian cross-border cooperation are timid, but they were identified in exchange for information to combat communicable diseases, as well as in exchanges in the educational, cultural, sports, and security and social defense areas. The partnerships with some more effective results are the following: the construction of the Binational Bridge and the extension of the French Guiana's optical fiber to Macapá, which will significantly improve broadband internet in the state of Amapá.

### Final considerations



However converging the interests of Brazil and France may have been, the non-involvement of the border societies, Oiapoque and Saint-Georges de l'Oyapock, became the contender for the development of cross-border cooperation on the Guiana-Amapa border. The decisions made in the traditional centers of power emptied the control of the immediately affected population, generating not only the lack of identification with the project but also a series of counterproductive attitudes, such as abusive inspection, state authoritarianism, among other attacks.

Gonçalves' (2020) reflection, when problematizing the participation of non-state actors in governance in the field of international relations, inspires the argument that Franco-Brazilian cross-border cooperation must guarantee definitive and uninterrupted character to the local participation. And considering that the social reality on the Guiana-Amapa border demands public policies for health, education, and urban infrastructure; and, on the other hand, of legal and institutional effectiveness in tackling pedophilia and sexual exploitation of children and adolescents and other cross-border crimes, it is imperative to recognize — in the context of decentralization — the relevance of non-governmental organizations and/or subnational entities.

Cross-border cooperation configured in the dimension of bilateral France-Brazil relations, as an innovative and necessary approach, remains in the imagination as an element to be realized in the future. This is confirmed by the arguments presented here that indicate the absence of local participation as a restraint to its construction as a political project that aggregates the aspirations (beliefs, interests, worldviews) of what is intended as collective life (DAGNINO, 2004).

In other words, in May 2020, when French-Brazilian cross-border cooperation will be twenty-four years old, there is much more to be done by governments to discipline the historical interactions between Oiapoque and Saint-Georges de l'Oyapock than cooperation aimed at incorporating multiple actors, expanding local participation in the decision-making process concerning the Guiana-Amapa border region.

Although border populations of Oiapoque and Saint-Georges de l'Oyapock experience many necessities, it is not a matter of intending that the governments of Brazil and France decide how these needs should be addressed. It is ensured that the specificities that make the Guiana-Amapa border interesting to these governments, cannot be interpreted only by premises that homogenize, sustained in methodological nationalism; or that exoticize, similar to others based on the geopolitical fact that this border forms a dyad between a European country and another South American country. They are spaces constituted by layers of time, in a multiplicity of ways of life, which are not related to chronologies, but to stories, of different temporal durations.

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