

The resurgence of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO): institutional advancements in the promotion of sustainable development policies

O ressurgimento da Organização do Tratado de Cooperação Amazônica (OTCA): o avanço institucional na promoção de políticas de desenvolvimento sustentável

El resurgimiento de la Organización del Tratado de Cooperación Amazónica (OTCA): los Avances institucionales en la promoción de políticas de desarrollo sostenible

La résurgence de l'Organisation du Traité de Coopération Amazonienne (OTCA) : les avancées institutionnelles dans la promotion des politiques de développement durable

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Abstract

Since the Amazon biome is shared by nature, the integration of the South American Amazon is an indispensable prerequisite for integration into the global economy, avoiding isolation and fostering reflection on the political and economic impacts of cooperation, as well as the long-term prospects of this process in a globalized scenario. In other words, it ratifies the institutional resurgence of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) for the construction of a deterrent force aimed at defending strategic areas, under the exclusive responsibility of the Amazon countries. This article aims to present the historical evolution of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) towards policies directed at the sustainable development of the region. Using the historical-deductive method and the systematic literature review methodology through the use of

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primary sources and specialized bibliographic references on the subject, the central analytical assumption is that ACTO has been emerging from its institutional immobility to establish itself as a pillar of Amazon integration via sustainable development, mainly since the signing of the Belém Declaration during the Amazon Summit, in 2023. Consequently, the benefits of integration are multipliers and radiators, with the main objectives being the reduction of regional asymmetries, the construction of a regional identity, and the expansion of economic and social components.

Keywords: Amazon; Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization; sustainable development; Belém Declaration.


Resumo

Uma vez que o bioma amazônico é compartilhado por natureza, a integração da Amazônia Sul-Americana é pré-requisito indispensável para se integrar à economia mundial, evitando o insulamento e estimulando a reflexão sobre os impactos político-econômicos da cooperação, assim como as perspectivas de longo prazo desse processo num cenário globalizado. Em outros termos, ratifica a retomada institucional da Organização do Tratado de Cooperação Amazônica (OTCA) para a construção de uma força dissuasória que vise defender áreas estratégicas, sob a responsabilidade exclusiva dos países amazônicos. Este artigo tem como objetivo apresentar a evolução histórica da Organização do Tratado de Cooperação Amazônica (OTCA) rumo às políticas direcionadas para o desenvolvimento sustentável da região. Utilizando-se do método histórico-dedutivo e da metodologia de revisão sistemática de literatura, através do emprego de fontes primárias e referências bibliográficas especializadas na temática, o pressuposto analítico central é que a OTCA vem saindo de seu imobilismo institucional para se firmar como sustentáculo da integração amazônica via desenvolvimento sustentável, principalmente a partir da assinatura da Declaração de Belém durante a Cúpula da Amazônia, em 2023. Consequentemente, busca-se reiterar que os benefícios da integração são multiplicadores e irradiadores, tendo como objetivos principais a redução das assimetrias regionais, a construção de uma identidade regional e a ampliação da participação de componentes econômicos e sociais.

Palavras-chave: Amazônia; Organização do Tratado de Cooperação Amazônica; desenvolvimento sustentável; Declaração de Belém.

Resumen

Dado que el bioma amazónico es, por naturaleza, compartido, la integración de la Amazonía sudamericana constituye un requisito indispensable para su inserción en la economía mundial, evitando el aislamiento y fomentando la reflexión sobre los impactos político-económicos de la cooperación, así como sobre las perspectivas a largo plazo de este proceso en un escenario globalizado. En otros términos, se ratifica la reactivación



institucional de la Organización del Tratado de Cooperación Amazónica (OTCA) para la construcción de una fuerza disuasoria destinada a defender áreas estratégicas, bajo la responsabilidad exclusiva de los países amazónicos. Este artículo tiene como objetivo presentar la evolución histórica de la Organización del Tratado de Cooperación Amazónica (OTCA) hacia políticas orientadas al desarrollo sostenible de la región. Utilizando el método histórico-deductivo y la metodología de revisión sistemática de la literatura, a través del empleo de fuentes primarias y referencias bibliográficas especializadas en la temática, el supuesto analítico central es que la OTCA ha venido superando su inmovilismo institucional para consolidarse como pilar de la integración amazónica mediante el desarrollo sostenible, principalmente a partir de la firma de la Declaración de Belém durante la Cumbre Amazónica de 2023. En consecuencia, se busca reiterar que los beneficios de la integración son multiplicadores y difusores, teniendo como principales objetivos la reducción de las asimetrías regionales, la construcción de una identidad regional y la ampliación de la participación de componentes económicos y sociales.

Palabras clave: Amazonía; Organización del Tratado de Cooperación Amazónica; desarrollo sostenible; Declaración de Belém.

Résumé

Étant donné que le biome amazonien est, par nature, partagé, l'intégration de l'Amazonie sud-américaine constitue un préalable indispensable à son insertion dans l'économie mondiale, permettant d'éviter l'isolement et de stimuler la réflexion sur les impacts politico-économiques de la coopération, ainsi que sur les perspectives à long terme de ce processus dans un contexte mondialisé. En d'autres termes, il s'agit de ratifier la relance institutionnelle de l'Organisation du Traité de Coopération Amazonienne (OTCA) en vue de la construction d'une force de dissuasion destinée à défendre les zones stratégiques, sous la responsabilité exclusive des pays amazoniens. Cet article a pour objectif de présenter l'évolution historique de l'Organisation du Traité de Coopération Amazonienne (OTCA) vers des politiques orientées vers le développement durable de la région. En recourant à la méthode historique-déductive et à une méthodologie de revue systématique de la littérature, à partir de sources primaires et de références bibliographiques spécialisées dans le domaine, l'hypothèse analytique centrale est que l'OTCA est en train de sortir de son immobilisme institutionnel pour s'affirmer comme pilier de l'intégration amazonienne par le biais du développement durable, notamment depuis la signature de la Déclaration de Belém lors du Sommet de l'Amazonie en 2023. En conséquence, il s'agit de réaffirmer que les bénéfices de l'intégration sont multiplicateurs et diffus, avec pour principaux objectifs la réduction des asymétries régionales, la construction d'une identité régionale et l'élargissement de la participation des composantes économiques et sociales.

Mots-clés : Amazonie; Organisation du Traité de Coopération Amazonienne; développement durable; Déclaration de Belém.


1 INTRODUCTION

Historically, the Amazon has been viewed as one of the last frontiers of global capitalist expansion, perceived as a geopolitically strategic area given the global perspective of scarcity of natural resources necessary for the growth of the world economy. Consequently, the Amazon countries face numerous challenges: domestically, there is the issue of their occupation and integration, as well as the effective presence of the State; regionally, integration with neighboring countries under the historical maxim of integrating so as not to surrender, from a Pan-Amazonian perspective; internationally, the problem of the historical dispute over their territories with the dichotomy of sovereignty or internationalization.

Since the Amazon biome is shared by nature, the integration of the South American Amazon is an indispensable prerequisite for integration into the global economy, avoiding isolation and stimulating reflection on the political and economic impacts of cooperation, as well as the long-term prospects of this process in a globalized scenario. In other words, it ratifies the institutional resumption of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) for the construction of a deterrent force aimed at defending strategic areas under the exclusive responsibility of the Amazon countries.

This article aims to present the historical evolution of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) towards policies directed towards the sustainable development of the region. Using the historical-deductive method and the methodology of systematic literature review through the use of primary sources and specialized bibliographic references on the subject, the central analytical assumption is that ACTO has been emerging from its institutional immobility to establish itself as a pillar of Amazon integration through sustainable development, mainly since the signing of the Belém Declaration during the Amazon Summit in 2023. Consequently, it seeks to reiterate that the benefits of integration are multiplier and radiating, with the main objectives being the reduction of regional asymmetries, the construction of a regional identity, and the expansion of the participation of economic and social components.

This work is divided into three sections, in addition to this introduction and the final considerations. The first part will present a historical analysis of the creation of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO). Subsequently, the main cooperation and integration projects for the sustainable development of the region supported by



ACTO will be formalized. And, in the third and final section, the main characteristics of the Belém Declaration of 2023 will be presented, highlighting the document as a possible innovative milestone for sustainable Amazon development.

2 THE HISTORICAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE AMAZON COOPERATION TREATY (ACT) TO THE CELEBRATION OF NEW AGREEMENTS

To constitute a whole through the addition or combination of parts or elements in order to form an organized society, regional integration presents itself as a fundamental modality for countries that wish to elevate their status quo in the international system. According to Padula (2010, p. 44), the first systematized contributions of international relations theory to the theory of regional integration were made by Karl Deutsch and David Mitrany, marked by the “first wave” that began after the Second World War and which had the experience of European integration as its icon in the 1950s (Padula, 2010, p. 17-18).

Haas (1964, p. 710) states that integration means “the process of transferring exclusive expectations of benefits from the nation-State to some larger entity”. For Herz and Hoffmann (2004, p. 168), “regional integration “can be defined as a process along which initially independent actors unify, that is, become part of a whole,”¹ whether governmental or non-governmental, national, subnational, or transnational. However, while in its initial phase integration visibly had a purely economic focus, with the result of countries' efforts aimed at development (Chiarella; Cortegiano Junior, 1995, p. 27), its multifaceted character must be highlighted, interested in promoting policies that favor both socioeconomic development and the reduction of inequalities and asymmetries (Santos; Diniz Júnior, 2017).

Integration is a joint decision-making project aimed at overcoming political, economic, physical, and social challenges between neighboring (or non-neighboring) countries that collaborate in the management of common resources and assets; it is an instrument, a tool, a means to overcome underdevelopment and leverage a projection of regional power at the international level. In the South American case, it encompasses strengthening the region's international position in the world system, addressing inequality/deconstructing regional asymmetries, building a regional identity, self-determination among peoples/nations, and

¹ Free translation by the translator.

expanding the participation of economic and social components (Rodrigues, 2022a, p. 127).²

Since its incorporation into the world system in the 16th century, South America has faced physical obstacles to its integration, "which has resulted, precisely, in a low degree of interdependence between national economies, still marked today by great economic extroversion"³ (Almeida, 2006, p. 15). However, it is recognized that without South American integration, local economies could be exposed to global marginalization (Kelly, 1997, p. 159), which has intensified the "awareness that small isolated countries will not be able to cope with the growing problems posed by overcoming underdevelopment"⁴ (Furtado, 1970, p. 290).

Consequently, it is of paramount importance to analyze to what extent regional integration can act as a catalyst for the common objectives of the Amazon countries. It is in this sense that the Amazon Cooperation Treaty (ACT) gains fundamental prominence for the integration of the Amazon region in the 21st century. Signed on July 3, 1978, in Brasília, by the eight countries belonging to the Amazon Basin, its objectives include raising the standard of living of their populations, the rational and ecological use of flora and fauna, scientific and technological research, and the exchange of information between the parties (Ribeiro, 2005, p. 258). For Mattos (2011, p. 117-118), its five fundamental principles are: exclusive jurisdiction of the Amazon countries in their development and protection; national sovereignty in the use and preservation of natural resources; regional cooperation; balance and harmony between development and ecological protection; and equality among all partners.

According to the author Calmon de Passos (2009), environmental problems are some of the factors that have contributed to altering the perspective of the international community, making them a global issue. It was with this new recognition that, in 1972, world authorities took the initiative to develop legal instruments aimed at protecting the international environment, supported by a new agenda planned by the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, also called the Stockholm Conference (Calmon de Passos, 2009, p. 2).

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In that same year, the Stockholm Conference brought environmental concerns to the forefront, resulting in the development of international environmental protection measures that raised concerns among the leaders of the Amazon region. Furthermore, the Brazilian government's main reason for initiating the first regional agreements stemmed from a new international context disseminated by the Club of Rome and was largely influenced by the group's impact (Nunes, 2016, p. 223).

In addition to this, Nunes (2016) highlights some of the reasons for the signing of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty:

[..]the desire to assert sovereignty over the territory and natural resources, in order to guarantee the continuity of economic projects in the region and ward off the specter of internationalization; the desire to present to the international community a document that safeguarded the exclusive management of Amazon problems in line with environmental protection; and, finally, Brazilian concern about possible isolation due to the construction of the Itaipu dam (Nunes, 2016, p.223).⁵

The main expectation of the actors involved in the creation of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty was to reiterate among the signatory states themselves the recognition of sovereignty over the part of the Amazon that belongs to them, as Zevallos (1993) states:

The importance of the ACT lies in the recognition of the sovereignty of each of the signatory countries over its corresponding part of the Amazon – this is called regionalization – as a concept opposed to internationalization, also allowing discussion and the taking of positions on the problems of the whole[...]⁶

In summary, it is clear that three main reasons motivated the ratification of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty: to categorically reaffirm the exclusive sovereignty of the Amazon countries over the region, rejecting the idea of internationalization; to seek the economic development of the Amazon territories through the rational exploitation of natural resources and international cooperation; and to resolve the imbroglio involving the Itaipu dam with Brazil and Argentina (Fernandes, 2013).

But, beyond the arguments presented so far, what are the reasons that led the Amazon states to decide to cooperate in resolving political issues related to the environment? This is the question that Le Prestre (2000) will ask and attempt to answer throughout his work. In the following passage, he argues that the transnational dimension

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of the environment, in this case of the Amazon, is not limited to a single state: “the transnational character of numerous environmental issues obliges states to conclude agreements with other countries, on which the achievement of their national and international objectives depends”⁷ (Le Prestre, 2000, p. 284).

The delay in crystallizing another regional agreement in the Amazon is due to the human and economic void in the region. Even so, Brazil forwarded the initiative to create the Amazon Cooperation Treaty (ACT) with the intention of serving as an instrument to guarantee the sovereignty of the Amazon countries over the northern portion of South America, as well as to promote the development of the region with the use of its natural resources, through cooperation between the Amazon countries themselves (Macedo, 2021, p.194).

Initially, the ACT is commonly remembered for its long period of inactivity from 1978 to 1989. Although the Treaty itself contributed to improving and enhancing relations between the Amazon countries (Silva, 2012, p. 106), the 1980s would be marked by several public debt crises, economic instability, and social redemocratization processes that profoundly affected the South American states.


Given this context, the efforts of these countries will be directed, at the regional level, towards areas other than the environmental one, as identified by Quiroga and Marcovitch (2003) and Silva (2012). Macedo (2008) reinforces the thesis that the Amazon nations had a greater interest in closer ties in the commercial area:

It is with the Amazon Cooperation Treaty (ACT) structured in this way, therefore, that the future of this extremely important geographical area, where the largest continuous tropical forest in the world is located, with extraordinary biodiversity, begins to be considered jointly with the countries over which the Amazon extends. It cannot be denied, as Silveira (2005, p. 72) states, that since its creation in the 1970s until today, there has been a significant rapprochement between the Amazon nations, notably in the commercial and technical area, in which the economic interest of the parties involved has predominated (Macedo, 2008 p.188).⁸

The ACT facilitated closer ties between the countries of the region. This statement will be better understood with some of the international commitments made between Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Venezuela, and Ecuador, as pointed out by Silva (2012). Since 1989, the ACT member states have been making it more operational and efficient,

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recognizing that the existing structure was not very well suited to the renewal of function that was intended to be implemented (Antiquera, 2006, p. 136). The first problem identified by the authors Filippi and Macedo (2022, pp. 194-195) refers to some of the dissatisfactions of the Amazon countries in relation to the ACT, highlighting institutional issues: the general guidelines did not specifically outline the duties of each member state nor the concrete policies for the region; it lacked mechanisms capable of resolving possible controversies; finally, the internal structure of the ACT had a simple layout, presented in its articles and preamble, without any internal division or subdivision.

In his thesis, Antiquera (2006) cites, in addition to the aforementioned institutional issues, three specific points that led to the institutional change creating the permanent secretariat. The first point is the history of little cooperation and centuries-old conflicts. For an international agreement to be cooperatively effective, historical differences and conflicts that may involve the interested members must be considered. This can bring new conceptions of the use of tools in response to the challenges of the Amazon territory. For example, the political harmony that would require greater alignment of conceptual and technological instruments, such as the collection of data from each country with different criteria and variables, will make it difficult to formulate proposals common to continental Amazonia (Antiquera, 2006, pp. 136-137). In addition to this difference in conceptions, there will also be the difficulty of overcoming various historical border disputes between the Amazon countries.

The second point highlighted by Antiquera (2006, p. 140) is the lack of knowledge about the region. It is frequently described as a mythical area in a generalizing way, without sufficient understanding of its particularities, specificities, and inhabitants. This lack of knowledge hinders the formulation of effective public policies, and the combination of this challenge with the precarious infrastructure of the region further complicates the development of active projects and the acquisition of international resources.

The third point is the lack of resources, a fundamental theme for understanding the absence of results from the ACT. In the 1980s, Latin American countries faced an economic crisis that would worsen any ongoing public policy project due to budgetary constraints. This crisis occurred shortly after the Amazon Cooperation Treaty came into effect. That said, Antiquera (2006) highlights two problems related to the lack of

resources: the first is the economic insufficiency of the countries to finance their projects, including the ACT; and the second is the constant need to seek external sources of funding. Therefore, the financial involvement of Amazon countries, depending on external support, would limit the choices of beneficiaries. But for this to be viable, it was necessary to have an organized structure capable of formulating and attracting projects that met the requirements of international funders. Therefore, the author outlines that the initial idea of excluding countries outside the region is set aside in favor of attracting new partners who can financially support their plans (Antiquera, 2006, pp. 140-142).


Over the years, environmental issues intensified even further around the challenges faced in the Amazon region, adding to this factor the unsatisfactory institutional perception of the ACT to strengthen the foundations for Amazonian cooperation to reach another level, through an International Organization (Simões, 2012, p. 39). According to Teixeira (2006, p. 10):

[...]the beginning of the 1990s would reverberate with strong pressures on Brazil, especially the Amazon, which would become a target of globalist discourse, notably due to the scenario of forest destruction, the death of Chico Mendes, and the violation of indigenous rights, which led to a shift in Brazilian policy towards the region.⁹

In other words, the 1990s brought to light new notions of environmental issues. The Rio-92 Conference and the Brundtland Report introduced the idea of sustainability at an international level, although a more critical look leads to ambiguous interpretations of the latter (Santos, 2000). Due to this new vision of the use of environmental goods, the Amazon Cooperation Treaty would undergo institutional changes (Macedo, 2020, p. 180).

Following several meetings to revise the Amazon Cooperation Treaty's structure, significant changes began after the third Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Quito in 1989, repositioning the treaty as a tool for Amazonian sub-regional integration (Filippi; Macedo, 2022, p.). The Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) was created to stimulate cooperation among the Amazon countries, thus resulting in projects and initiatives for international cooperation in the region. It itself will be responsible for promoting political coordination among the signatory members and for reaffirming their

⁹ Free translation by the translator.



sovereignty in the use and conservation, through the sustainable development of their Amazon territories (Silva, 2012, p. 130).

In 1995, the bloc's foreign ministers decided to establish a Permanent Secretariat (PS), based in Brasília, to host the Pact, and the new status of recognition of international legal personality would allow its future administrative department, on a permanent basis, to sign agreements with international organizations, participate in multilateral forums, and obtain international loans to promote environmental preservation and infrastructure projects important for the integration of the region (Santos, 2000, p. 114).

In fact, the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization only became operational in 2002, when Colombia, the last party to the ACT, ratified the Amendment Protocol, which altered the wording of Article XXII of the original ACT, changing the temporary secretariat to a permanent one. From December 13, 2002, the Permanent Secretariat would exercise its duties, which allowed it to be: a consensus builder; a facilitator of political and technical dialogues; a coordinator; a manager of support for regional and international cooperation; a manager of regional information; and a promoter of actions aimed at strengthening the internal institutional capacity of member countries (Santos, 2000, p. 115).

The transformation of the ACT into an international organization with legal personality allows for a reduction in uncertainties and the construction of a more regionally articulated political environment. Taking the 1989 Amazon Declaration as an example, the pact sought to represent an effort of cohesion and awareness among the countries of the Amazon region regarding the need to intensify the effective implementation of a regional integration and cooperation body that would enable the maintenance of sovereignty and the promotion of development, allowing the Pan-Amazon region to "awaken from its centuries-long slumber"¹⁰ (Mattos, 2011, pp. 132-133). Furthermore, from a regional perspective, the ACTO will be constituted as a bridge for the project of articulation among South American countries (Antiquera, 2006, pp. 166-167).

The Amazon Cooperation Treaty establishes two institutional bodies understood as branches of the Amazon cooperation process: the Amazon Cooperation Council

¹⁰ Free translation by the translator.

(CCA); and the Permanent National Commissions. As pointed out by Silva (2012, p. 132), the CCA's responsibilities include conducting intergovernmental policy, as well as directing the fulfillment of projects and decisions within the scope of the ACT. Article XXI of the ACT addresses the functions of the Amazon Cooperation Council, among them:

(...) to take under consideration initiatives and plans presented by the Parties as well as to adopt decisions for undertaking bilateral and multilateral studies and plans, the execution of which, as the case may be, shall be the duty of the Permanent National Commissions; to evaluate the implementation of bilateral or multilateral interest; to draw up the Rules and Regulations for its proper functioning (ACT, 1979, Article XXI).¹¹

In the Permanent National Committees, the following will be assigned:


the application of the Treaty's provisions in their respective territories; the execution of decisions and agreements adopted at the Meetings of Ministers and the Amazon Cooperation Council; proposing measures and actions of internal and external policy related to the topic; ensuring the proper implementation of the Treaty's plans, programs and projects (Silva, 2012, p.133).¹²

That is, these are bodies that operate within the national scope of the ACT members and, according to the decisions of the Meetings of Ministers and the Amazon Cooperation Council, coordinate joint actions with the Special Commissions (Silva, 2012, p. 133). Antiquera (2006, p. 76) points out that, from a meticulous reading of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty, the agreement reveals great caution regarding sovereignty, in which it is perceived that interests within the national scope are considered a priority, while multilateral cooperation is relegated to a secondary level. Following this reasoning of the author, one can perceive the idea of priority in a national plan of each State, in the preamble of the ACT itself, which states that both “socioeconomic development and the preservation of the environment are responsibilities inherent to the sovereignty of each State and that cooperation between the Contracting Parties will serve to facilitate the fulfillment of these responsibilities [...]” (TCA, 1978).

However, after more than 40 years of the Amazon Pact's implementation, few concrete advances have been made: "in any circumstance, it is necessary to emphasize that the Amazon Pact has not yet had sufficient deterrent power, in the face of rich

¹¹ Taken from the original at: <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%201202/volume-1202-I-19194-English.pdf>.

¹² Free translation by the translator.



countries, regarding their ambitions in relation to the Amazon" (Ribeiro, 2005, p. 259). Given that the integration of the South American Amazon is revealed as one of the main objectives of the institutional arrangements, it is necessary to resume and intensify the initial political-institutional spirit of the Treaty's signing, recognizing the indispensability of joint action, since integration is one of the best antidotes to promote cooperative sustainable development projects.

Therefore, even though the ACT prioritized a national perspective and conceived of multilateral action as subsidiary and complementary to national actions, the change from a temporary to a permanent secretariat will alter this idea, including with regard to sustainable development. This new phase of the Organization is of fundamental importance for understanding its role as a catalyst for the sustainable development of Amazon countries in the 21st century.

3 ACTO AND COOPERATION AND INTEGRATION PROJECTS FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE REGION

The environmental movement, which emerged from the Club of Rome after the publication of the Meadows Report in the early 1970s, transcended the scientific environmental issue and entered the economic domain. That is, in general, it established the emergence of environmental preservation as a topic of economic, social, and political relevance. This movement pointed to a possible, if not probable, incompatibility between economic growth and the preservation of environmental resources, based on the experiences of the 20th century. As in 1972, at the Stockholm Conference, the thesis of Ecodevelopment gained prominence, according to which economic development and environmental preservation are interconnected and depend on each other to achieve the dimensions of sustainable development (Freire *et al.*, 2006, pp. 13-14).

The concept of sustainable development is dynamic and always open to many interpretations, which reflect perspectives considered culturally appropriate and of local relevance (UNESCO, 2005, p. 26). However, the concept gained strength with the publication, in 1987, of the book *Our Common Future*, by the Commission on Environment and Development, which defined it as: "sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of

future generations to meet their own needs"¹³ (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1991).

The idea of sustainability in environmental policy emerged as an attempt to reconcile the demands of economic growth with the demands for forest preservation (Silva, 2012, p. 110). This new concept only gained global reach and, at the same time, became incorporated into the discourses of world politics with the Brundtland Report in 1987 (Ipiranga, 2011). Furthermore, some changes were even more evident during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, also known as Rio-92, in 1992, with the objectives of Agenda 21; and at the Johannesburg Conference in 2002, with the broadening of the traditional vision of sustainability to include the fight against poverty and social justice.


Since the themes of sustainable development have become essential in international relations, this demand led the Presidents of the Amazon countries to incorporate this new language into the Amazon Declaration (Silva, 2012, p. 110). This process took place through debates with the participation of the eight member countries of the ACT during the Tarapoto Process. As expressed by Silva (2012), the Tarapoto proposal would create “common tools for planning sustainable development, through instruments for quantitative and qualitative analysis of sustainability, established through consultation and validation processes at national and regional levels”¹⁴ (Silva, 2012, p. 111).

The Amazon plays a strategic role in sustainable development and requires interdependence and complementarity for the strategies undertaken in the Amazon regions of the ACT countries (Helissa, 2003, p. 12). Additionally, it is within the context of this debate that a new phase in the process of regional cooperation and integration among Amazon countries began after the establishment of the Permanent Secretariat (PS). Initially, the 2004-2012 Strategic Plan would be crucial for the dynamics of increasing cooperation between Member States and other international organizations, as well as for addressing new environmental challenges.

The Strategic Plan was approved in 2004 at the VIII Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Amazon States, with the aim of guiding the PS/ACTO in four

¹³ Taken from the original at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf>.

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strategic axes and six cross-cutting programmatic areas (OTCA, 2004, p. 21). That is, this Strategic Plan would be a political guideline that attempted to respond to the new challenges that the Amazon demanded of ACTO. The Plan establishes that ACTO's decisions and administration must be aligned with various mechanisms that aim to "order" and give "coherence" to the organization's present and future programs and projects, enabling the determination of the cross-cutting impacts of the initiatives carried out and, thus, the corresponding strategic objectives.

The four strategic axes presented by the 2004-2012 Strategic Plan were structured as follows: Conservation and Sustainable Use of Renewable Natural Resources; Knowledge Management and Technological Transfer; Regional Integration and Competitiveness; and Institutional Strengthening (OTCA, 2004, p. 24). Given that the focus of this work is sustainable development, attention will be concentrated on the first axis, which addresses the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Renewable Natural Resources, and on the third axis, Regional Integration and Competitiveness, with one of its dimensions of regional integration.

Within the framework of Conservation and Sustainable Use of Renewable Natural Resources, as stated in the Strategic Plan, the main challenge for the ACTO Member States is "to towards creating economic opportunities for the Amazon populations and the nations as a whole."¹⁵ Furthermore, " it is important to explore and develop sustainable uses of biodiversity and of natural resources of the Amazon region, as a viable mean to stimulate mechanisms that create networks that promote Amazon products within a sustainable framework."¹⁶ (OTCA, 2004, p. 25). Also, according to the Plan, this new approach to managing environmental resources could encourage new economic activities for the "generation and retention of income" in other sectors, such as genetic knowledge, ecotourism, timber and non-timber derivative products with the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) certificate, phytotherapeutics, cosmetic and food products (OTCA, 2004, p. 25).

One of the priorities of the Member States, as stated in the Strategic Plan, is to establish the foundations for sustainable development, generating social well-being and

¹⁵ Taken from the original at: <https://otca.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Strategic-Plan-2004-2012.pdf> (p. 25).

¹⁶ Taken from the original at: <https://otca.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Strategic-Plan-2004-2012.pdf> (p. 25).


increasing the countries' participation in the global economy in the long term. The Strategic Plan will add, in its third axis, three series of dimensions of regional integration that aim to focus their efforts among the members. The first issue addresses Amazonian water resources as a pillar of development, focusing on sustainable management from a regional perspective and with integrated action among the countries of the Amazon basin. The second point reinforces the need for Amazon countries to coordinate and converge on economic policies and the development of precise actions for regional sustainable development, which is a challenge for integration into international markets. Finally, the third point highlights the challenges in building cooperative instruments amidst national inequalities and asymmetries between countries. Therefore, the ACTO must align with the Millennium Development Goals for 2015 (and currently with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030), aiming for sustainable development. The Plan also recognizes the importance of strengthening communication and cooperation as a way to integrate common elements among the countries of the region (OTCA, 2004, pp. 33-34).

According to Simões (2012), from 2009 to 2014, after the creation of the PS, a new phase of revitalization of the ACTO began with the launch of the Strategic Agenda 2010-2020, which originated the Manaus Declaration. For him, it is in this context that "the ACTO will gain a renewed and modern role as a forum for cooperation", soon after, "recognizing the sustainable development of the Amazon as a priority, through an integral, participatory, shared and equitable administration, as a way to give an autonomous and sovereign response to current environmental challenges"¹⁷ (Simões, 2012, pp. 40-41).

The Strategic Agenda was approved in November 2010 at the 10th Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the ACT, which included the vision, mission, and strategic objectives of the ACTO. Regarding the Amazon Region, the ACTO aims to achieve sustainable development through the balanced use, protection, and conservation of its resources. Furthermore, it aims to be an organization recognized in its member countries and internationally as a benchmark in regional cooperation.

Its mission is to be a permanent forum for cooperation, exchange, and knowledge, with principles of reducing regional inequalities among Members and assisting in national socioeconomic progress. Finally, the strategic objectives are: to ensure respect for and

¹⁷ Free translation by the translator.



promotion of the interests and sovereignty of Member Countries; to facilitate exchange and cooperation among Member Countries, promoting sustainable development and sustainable ways of life of a strategic nature in the region; and to promote the coordination of Member Countries' Plans and Programs for the development of Amazonian populations (OTCA, 2010, pp. 15-16).

According to Rodrigues (2022b), the Strategic Cooperation Agenda is one of the pillars for the new sustainable development agenda of the ACTO:

The Amazonian Strategic Cooperation Agenda encompasses a series of cooperation initiatives in the area of conservation and sustainable use of renewable resources. Its main objective is to enable dialogue to analyze the impacts of incorporating the Amazonian regions into national economic systems through road and river networks and information technologies, in harmony with the preservation of ecosystems. Furthermore, supported by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Paris Agreement, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, its actions are oriented towards consolidating the ACTO as a key actor in strategic issues for the region (Rodrigues, 2022b, p. 190).¹⁸

Additionally, the two cross-cutting approaches for implementing the Strategic Agenda are presented: conservation and sustainable use of renewable natural resources; and sustainable and social development (ACTO, 2010, p. 17). Furthermore, the Strategic Agenda presents several approaches to various themes divided into sub-themes, including: forests, water resources, management, monitoring and control of wild flora and fauna species threatened by trade, protected areas, sustainable use of biodiversity and promotion of "bio-trade", research, technology and innovation in Amazonian biodiversity, protection of the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples and other tribal communities, environmental health, technology to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of health interventions, financing of the health agenda, strengthening the tourist image of the Amazon, as well as emerging themes such as climate change, regional development and energy (OTCA, 2010, p. 19).

According to Silva's explorations (2012, p. 160), the Strategic Cooperation Agenda gave greater attention to forest issues, establishing a broad set of short-term activities. For Rodrigues (2022b), two other projects also stand out as milestones in this

¹⁸ Free translation by the translator.


green shift of the ACTO in the first decades of the 21st century: the ACTO/UNEP/GEF Project (2012) and the Bioamazon Project (2016).

However, as seen throughout its implementation and institutional maturation process, some setbacks to the environmental agenda within the ACTO were observed in the 2010s, mainly concerning the largest Amazonian country. During Jair Bolsonaro's Brazilian government, actions aimed at making implemented environmental policies more flexible were seen, and the president himself made statements contrary to the environmental preservation agenda (Martoni, 2019), causing delays to the environmental governance system in the last decade.

A practical example was the implementation during the Bolsonaro government of the "repeal" measures, which annulled decrees related to environmental areas because they were considered "unnecessary." The National Environment Council (CONAMA), the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation (ICMBio), and the Brazilian Institute for the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA) were politicized and had their budgets reduced (Rodrigues, 2022b; Loureiro, 2023), with their composition altered, weakened, and excluded, as well as the displacement of the participation of the scientific community. Conservation Units were removed from the climate change sectors; the Amazon Fund was paralyzed; and, lastly, the encouragement of deforestation, fires, illegal logging, and land grabbing was a constant variable in the Bolsonaro government (Seixas *et al.*, 2020, p. 18).

Although the Bolsonaro government positively established the Leticia Pact on September 9, 2019, with the objectives of combating deforestation, creating forest restoration initiatives, sustainable use of natural resources, actions to strengthen indigenous peoples, and the creation of educational campaigns on the importance of the region (as well as the exchange of information in real time and monitoring in the face of attempts to internationalize the Amazon), it is easily noticeable that the Amazonian ecosystem has been at high risk for many years (and intensified under this administration), as already highlighted by Becker (2015, p. 79) "due to the national/transnational model adopted, and because transnational corporations have long participated in the environmental and social degradation of the Amazon."¹⁹

¹⁹ Free translation by the translator.



Therefore, it is important to point out that several initiatives are running counter to this Bolsonaro project. One of the most interesting in terms of research is the "Amazon 2030" project, an initiative by Brazilian researchers to develop a sustainable development plan for the Brazilian Amazon, with the aim of enabling the region to achieve a higher level of economic and human development, and to achieve the sustainable use of natural resources by 2030 (Amazon 2030, 2025).

In monitoring the Amazon, the Amazon Mission project, from the National Institute for Space Research (INPE), will provide remote sensing data to observe and monitor deforestation, especially in the Amazon region, seeking to act in synergy with existing environmental programs, mainly through the planned use of three remote sensing satellites (Amazonia 1, Amazonia-1B and Amazonia-2) (INPE, 2024).

Within the framework of paradiplomacy, the Interstate Consortium for Sustainable Development of the Legal Amazon (2021) launched, in July 2021, the Green Recovery Plan. This consists of a transition strategy towards a green economy for the Amazon region that is compatible with combating inequalities, generating employment and income, and achieving sustainable economic growth. Its four pillars include curbing illegal deforestation, a green economy with sustainable production, green technology/capacity building, and green infrastructure (Alvares; Rodrigues; Narita, 2022).

Within the context of the South American Amazon, linked to the debate on climate security, regional efforts have also become increasingly prominent since the 2020s. In this sense, intergovernmental coordination has found one of its main pillars in the Belém Declaration project, as will be analyzed below.

4 BELÉM DECLARATION: A MILESTONE FOR PAN-AMAZONIAN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

As previously highlighted, one of the key milestones for a sustainable development project in the Amazon countries was the creation of the Belém Declaration at the Amazon Summit, held between August 8 and 9, 2023. At this meeting, the leaders of the States Parties to the ACTO brought to the forefront the main international demands related to the environment, focusing on the Amazon region. They decided to coordinate efforts among their governments, promoting a new agenda that included 113 cross-cutting

objectives and principles for its implementation. Among these, the following can be highlighted:

under the objective of sustainable development, conservation of forests, sustainable use of biodiversity, forests and water resources, urgent action to avoid the point of no return in the Amazon, the fight against deforestation and illicit activities in the region, economic development with social inclusion and generation of income and employment, based on mechanisms of social participation, particularly of indigenous peoples and local and traditional 8 communities, and the strengthening of ACTO.²⁰ (OTCA, 2023a, p.8).

This Declaration will play a very important role, as it outlines, in its main objectives, the implementation of a cooperation agenda in the Amazon, guided by sustainable development and a commitment to an integrated vision and collective action. As mentioned earlier, the Declaration reaffirms its commitment to social aspects, promoting active participation and respect for the rights of traditional peoples. Furthermore, it also highlights economic aspects that seek the inclusion of the region, with the aim of preventing the Amazon from reaching a point of no return. (OTCA, 2023a, p.1).


Throughout the Declaration, some of the cross-cutting objectives and principles reflect the commitment of the leaders of the States Parties to the pursuit of sustainable development, with the ACTO being:

the sole intergovernmental coordination body for the eight Amazon countries with regard to jointly implementing projects, and actions that produce equitable and beneficial results to Amazon countries, due to its institutionality, its extensive knowledge of the region, and the 7 relevant experience of its Permanent Secretariat in coordinating dialogue and implementing development cooperation initiatives²¹ (OTCA, 2023a, p.7).

It is also added that the ACTO's medium- and long-term objectives are in line with the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (OTCA, 2023a, p. 15). For example, the document will include the importance of eradicating hunger, poverty, and violence against Amazonian populations, an indispensable requirement for the sustainable development of the region. To this end, the document condemns the

²⁰ Taken from the original at: <https://otca.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Declaration-of-Belem.pdf> (pp. 7-8).

²¹ Taken from the original at: <https://otca.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Declaration-of-Belem.pdf> (pp. 6-7).



proliferation of unilateral trade measures that, based on environmental standards, result in trade barriers, since these measures will harm small producers in developing countries in their efforts to promote Amazonian products and eradicate poverty, including hunger. (OTCA, 2023a, p.5).

In the Declaration itself, the topic “Sustainable Infrastructure” listed three measures aimed at strengthening public policies, namely: 68. cooperation and dialogue for sustainability standards in the execution of infrastructure projects in the Amazon; 69. promotion of technological inclusion, eliminating digital divides and empowering communities, supporting environmental monitoring and regulating joint infrastructure mapping; and 70. deepening the integration of clean energy to promote access to energy in isolated locations in the Amazon countries.²² (OTCA, 2023a, p.29-30).

Specifically, in the section on “Amazon Cities” in the Belém Declaration, the commitment within the ACTO to establish the Amazon Cities Forum will be highlighted, aiming to strengthen collaboration among local authorities of member countries. This forum will aim at the implementation, at the local level, of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals. It will also seek to strengthen indigenous, local, and traditional leadership, promoting interculturality. In this context, three main proposals for action addressing the urban challenges of the Amazon will be identified, such as access to public services for Amazonian populations, and the development and implementation of public policies (OTCA, 2023a, p. 12).

Finally, in the section "Economics for Sustainable Development," thirteen measures are outlined to promote sustainable development in the Amazon region, highlighting:

(...)

71. promotion of the sustainable use of natural resources, family farming, forestry, and other areas, through integrated forest management, recognizing traditional agricultural production practices, which will include the recovery of degraded areas;

72. encouragement of geochemical studies on soils and hydrographic resources of the Amazon region to develop agroecological zoning and climate risk instruments, aiming to define suitable areas for productive activities, through sustainable means;

²² Free translation by the translator.

73. development of a strategic agenda, executed by ACTO, for the integral development of production based on the sustainable use of Amazonian biodiversity resources;

74. establishment, within the scope of this strategic agenda, of a program of sustainable use production chains, with interests directed towards indigenous peoples and traditional local communities, aiming at forest management and recovery, income generation and promotion of quality of life, training and strengthening of productive organization, and sharing technologies for greater value aggregation for these peoples;

80. promoting the development of sustainable tourism, which will include typologies and morphologies specific to the region, such as nature tourism, cultural tourism, indigenous tourism, regenerative tourism, community tourism, and agro-ecotourism, to contribute to the sustainable development of the region; and,


81. adopting urgent measures to eliminate air, soil, and water pollution from the Amazonian rivers, in which countries commit to adopting public policies for sustainable production and strengthening waste management, the recyclability of materials, and the sustainability of economic chains for product recycling.

As pointed out in the official document “Amazonian Cooperation: Institutional Strengthening and Integrated Action” (2023), the Amazon Summit renews the political will regarding the region and strengthens it as a provider of solutions and opportunities, aiming to sustain the leading role of the ACTO among the main actors in the regional and global scenario for sustainable development.

With new and broader guidelines and a pragmatic approach, the Belém Declaration propels the work of the ACTO, which, in turn, implies strengthening national, binational, and trinational action among Member Countries, including more actions in border areas. Furthermore, the Declaration reinforces, strengthens, and modernizes the institutional framework and governance of the ACTO by updating the organization's mandates and encouraging the use of new management and consolidation tools²³ (OTCA, 2023b, p. 14).

In other words, the Belém Declaration ratifies that the preservation of ecological balance is not inversely proportional to the exploitation of regional potential, since it is possible to achieve a new pattern of economic development that overcomes the dilemma of conservation versus use with destruction. In other words, "only by assigning economic

²³ Free translation by the translator.



value to the forest will it be able to compete with commodities, imposing the need for a true scientific and technological revolution for this purpose."²⁴ (Becker, 2015, pp. 46-47).

Additionally, Rebelo (2024) confirms that the defense of the Amazon must be understood as a challenge for national policy. That is, when reflecting on strategic planning for the region, it is fundamental to understand its strategic value, assess its potential, and identify opportunities for utilizing Amazonian assets as crucial points for changing economic development. In other words, the South American Amazon has always been on the radar of two development projects: the first, aiming to make it untouchable and conserved, thus hindering its potential; and the second, seeking to make its resources accessible in a predatory and irrational way driven by pure economic short-sightedness. Therefore, instead of relying on an autonomous project, a third path of rational exploitation is envisioned, based on the promotion of Science, Technology, and Innovation (Nobre, 2019). This is a new production paradigm, capable of utilizing natural resources without destroying them.

In this respect, the initial outline of the Belém Declaration confirms the essential need to delineate strategies that mitigate negative environmental externalities as much as possible, since even the slightest possibility of destruction of the Amazon would mean the failure of any possibility of a political-strategic project oriented towards a Green Power Brazil (Rodrigues; Góes, 2024). Conversely, the resumption of the dream of a South American and Amazonian union could be represented by a new development model that preserves the great humid tropical forest, a Modern Biodiversity Economy (Rodrigues, 2022b).

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article aimed to provide a historical and current overview of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization's participation in sustainable development projects for the region. It noted that, although the ACTO has gone through turbulent periods and periods of low institutionalization, it is the only integration and cooperation project for the promotion of sustainable development policies in the region. Similarly, although still

²⁴ Free translation by the translator.

in its early stages, the project proposed by the Belém Declaration presents a high potential for positive socio-environmental externalities for the Amazon in the medium to long term.

It is worth highlighting that both the 5th Summit of Presidents of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) (to be held between August 18 and 22, 2025) and the 30th United Nations Conference on Climate Change (COP30) (to be held between November 10 and 21, 2025) are two extremely significant events for consolidating the sustainable path initiated with the Belém Declaration (2023). Both seek to renew commitments to the Amazonian agenda and strengthen regional cooperation, ensure the well-being of its peoples, and project its voice on the global agenda. Consequently, their monitoring and analysis are fundamental for future research.

In conclusion, this work reiterates that regional integration is not purely political, nor purely economic-commercial, nor purely physical; it is a combination of distinct perspectives that complement and overlap each other, aggregating geopolitical, institutional, regulatory, and social demands that are dynamic and therefore transform over time. Even considering possible barriers in the Amazonian context – such as the lack of political convergence, the disparity in development and technological power, economic uncertainties, legal insecurities, and aversion to the loss of national sovereignty – the benefits of integration are multiplied and radiating, with the main objectives being the reduction of regional asymmetries, the construction of a regional identity, and the expansion of the participation of economic and social components.

The Amazon is one of the main pillars of the green transition project in the 21st century. For such a plan to succeed, it is necessary to articulate a Sustainable Political Economy Project with a Regional Sustainable Development Project, establishing a development path based on Science, Technology and Innovation, understanding its metabolic complexity and using its natural heritage without destroying it. Therefore, it is necessary to raise awareness among public agents and the population about the ecological problems involved, to promote the sustainable use of strategic natural resources, to intensify technical and scientific support made possible by the growth of researchers in and from the Amazon, and, fundamentally, to understand that regional integration is an inexorable path to sustainable development in a forest that knows no borders.

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