

WORDS BEYOND THE PANDEMIC: A HUNDRED-SIDED CRISIS

Coord.: José Reis
A collective work by CES

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Centro de Estudos Sociais
Universidade de Coimbra



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COIMBRA



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das Nações Unidas
para a Educação,
a Ciência e a Cultura



Universidade de
Coimbra - Alta e Sã
inscrita na Lista do Património
Mundial em 2013



PROGRAMA OPERACIONAL COMPLEXIDADE E INOVAÇÃO



UNIÃO EUROPEIA

Fundo Europeu
de Desenvolvimento Regional



Fundação
para a Ciência
e a Tecnologia

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Editor

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Publisher

Centre for Social Studies
University of Coimbra

Scientific Review

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December, 2020

This work is funded by ERDF Funds through the Competitiveness Factors Operational Programme - COMPETE and by National Funds through the FCT - Foundation for Science and Technology within the UIDB/50012/2020 project.

The data and opinions included in this publication are the exclusive responsibility of its authors.

ISBN

978-989-8847-28-7

INTERNATIONAL GOVERNANCE AND MULTILATERALISM

Maria Raquel Freire, Paula Duarte Lopes

International governance has always been a challenge, traditionally marked by binary relations of cooperation/competition, at different times returning to a more unilateral and often even protectionist posture. Especially since 1945, multilateralism has tried to assert itself as a path towards greater coordination and coherence between different actors in order to shape a system of international governance. More recently, however, we have witnessed a fragmentation of this process, with multilateralisation facing a rollback on specific issues', such as the fight against climate change. These dynamics are extremely problematic because, on the one hand, many of the issues on the agenda cannot be properly managed without everyone's participation and, on the other hand, the analytical frameworks continue to seek to identify power centres, undermining the sustainability of a multilateral system of international governance.

An effective and resilient international governance model must be able to make timely decisions, with increasing degrees of uncertainty, and review those decisions quickly if necessary, as the current COVID-19 pandemic clearly demonstrates. The variety of actors that make up the international system – such as States, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, organised crime

networks or multinational companies – extends the international governance challenges well beyond the traditional territorialised conceptions of the sovereign States. Thus, this multilaterality should not only involve several States, it must also include, at all levels, the other relevant actors regardless of their nature, offering creative opportunities for international governance sensitive to thematic specificities. Moreover, this multilateralisation must not focus on decision-making alone, but also promote the multilateralisation of global benefits, beyond the actors directly involved. This model of governance must stand as a networked assembly of different actors, changing according to the relevant theme, adjusting in terms of participants and instruments, co-constituting itself and reinventing itself according to each situation and its level of complexity. It is essential to make the negotiation and conciliation mechanisms involving the different actors more responsive. The benign or more competitive character of this model, which varies according to context, must nevertheless remain under scrutiny. Unilaterality has become obsolete, as shown by the pandemic. It is now essential to co-develop a dynamic and resilient multilateralism, striking a balance between the territoriality of causes and effects and the deterritorialisation of multilateral governance.