

ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE AND LACK OF ADEQUATE BASIC SANITATION

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the environmental crisis, in the context of the absence or inadequate supply of basic sanitary conditions, as well as social inequality, establishing the line of intersection between them. Thus, we demonstrate that the copious differentiation in the distribution of income can directly influence the current compromise of natural resources. The population with the lowest income is often the one that most closely faces environmental problems. A clear example is the basic sanitation issue, where the lack of provision of decent health and hygiene conditions for part of the population by the State affects not only all environmental interactions, but also favors illness in low-income people. Depending on the analysis, this context directly impacts on the feeling and establishment of citizenship by people, where the absence of basic means that make a healthy, clean, and livable area, as well as where adequate living conditions offered to a population, can hinder any sense of belonging. We applied a

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deductive method, starting from general principles to arrive at a particular understanding, based on scientific literature and jurisprudential review.

Keywords: inequality; injustice; poverty; sanitation; sickness.

*A INJUSTIÇA AMBIENTAL E A AUSÊNCIA DE SANEAMENTO
BÁSICO ADEQUADO*

RESUMO

O presente artigo investiga a crise ambiental perante a ausência ou do fornecimento inadequado de condições sanitárias básicas, bem como a desigualdade social, estabelecendo entre elas linha de interseção. Assim, demonstra-se que a copiosa diferenciação na distribuição de renda pode influenciar diretamente no atual comprometimento dos recursos naturais, sendo a população de menor renda, por muitas vezes, a que mais de perto enfrenta as mazelas ambientais. A título de exemplificação, é possível citar a política pública de saneamento básico, em que a ausência de fornecimento pelo Estado de condições de saúde e higiene dignas para parte da população afeta não apenas as interações socioambientais, como gera o adoecimento dos menos abastados. Consoante toda análise, o contexto impacta diretamente a construção da plena cidadania, em que a ausência de meios básicos que tornam uma área sadia, limpa, habitável, onde se ofereçam condições adequadas de vida, pode impossibilitar qualquer sensação de pertencimento ao meio, originando a injustiça ambiental. Aplicou-se o método de abordagem dedutivo, partindo de princípios gerais para se chegar a uma compreensão particular, utilizando-se de revisão de literatura e jurisprudencial.

Palavras-chave: *adoecimento; desigualdade; injustiça; pobreza; saneamento.*

INTRODUCTION

In this article, we analyze the environmental crisis that afflicts contemporary society, combined with the constant population growth and the anthropic actions that cause devastation of natural agents, which are the base of ecological balance.

If, on the one hand, technological development – in favor of capitalism, whose objective is the constant search for profit –, has improved the quality of life of the human being, at the same time, it has increased the need for anthropic actions on nature, which directly interfere in the environmental balance and may generate negative effects. Examples include the emission of pollutants, deforestation, contamination of groundwater, and others.

Brazil's context, together with other own economic and social conditions of its situation as a developing country, is characterized by a marked increase in social inequality, in which most of its population does not have access to information or even basic sanitation and hygiene conditions. A consistent example is given by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics – IBGE (TRATA BRASIL, 2016, p. 80). Data shows that, in 2016, while the most developed cities in the country, such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, had sewage treatment rates of over 80%, several others, such as Porto Velho (3.39%) and Teresina (23.49%), did not share the same privilege.

The absence of adequate basic sanitation is a limiting factor for healthy living, rendering the feeling of citizenship innocuous. In 2010, the United Nations General Assembly (UN) recognized that “the right to safe drinking water and sanitation is a human right, indispensable for leading a life in human dignity” (BRITTO; FORMIGA-JOHNSON; CARNEIRO, 2016, p. 183).

It is worth mentioning that citizenship is a broad concept, built over time according to the historical-geographical reality and its vicissitudes. The word comes from the Latin *civitas* (COMPARATO, 1993, p. 85), which means “city.” Today, without exhausting its classic significance, it refers to the feeling of belonging and participation of a certain community.

This feeling will generate obligations towards the social body, as well as benefits from the feeling of being part of it. However, those who do not

share this feeling somehow feel excluded from that locus, because citizenship encompasses political, civil, and socio-environmental rights. Just like “I feel human,” I may or may not “feel like a citizen.”

Therefore, the lack of adequate provision of basic sanitation directly interferes with the concept and feeling of citizenship. This absence is closely related to the social inequality that afflicts the State, given that a large part of the population in these conditions has low income. This circumstance is clearly an environmental injustice, as this social class is affected more severely and punctually by environmental problems.

Furthermore, the lack of adequate water and sanitation supply promptly interferes with public health issues and contributes to the illness of this population. Examples of these diseases include diarrhea, dengue, and leptospirosis (TRATA BRASIL, 2020).

These diseases, when related to the lack of adequate provision of sanitary conditions, are common among the less wealthy population and are a further consequence of social inequality. Given all the deficiencies in access and information to the appropriate means of health and hygiene, there is a clear relationship between social inequality and basic sanitation.

This study used the deductive research method, through literature and jurisprudential review. We considered the current capitalist scenario in a society based on consumption and governed by the logic of the market, and the consequent social inequality as a factor of the environmental crisis. From this perspective, we present the concepts of justice and environmental inequality.

The article is divided into three sections. The first analyzes the capitalist economic system as one of the factors of environmental crisis; the second discusses environmental justice as a right and social inequality as an effect of not having access to an ecologically balanced environment. The last topic addresses national characteristics, reflections and panoramas on the lack of basic sanitation in some areas.

1 THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS IN THE CONTEMPORARY CAPITALIST SOCIETY

The contemporary environmental crisis has past roots and diverse motives, and man, with emphasis on the post-World War II historical context and the strengthening of capitalism, has been increasingly seeking technological innovations, economic advances, as well as the development of cities and consumer goods. Regarding this topic:

We can state that a heteronomous subjectivity, that elaborates the cognitive, moral and aesthetic rationality, was created. Citizens become predetermined to desire products presented on the market and believe that happiness is found in the acquisition of these products (PEREIRA; HORN, 2009, p. 13).

The environment⁴ mentioned above consists of the interactions between the abiotic environment and the other living species. Here, we do not intend to be definitive in its doctrinal significance, given the breadth of existing concepts. There is a dynamic dependency that characterizes this relationship, in which the withdrawal of resources and environmental devastation are greater than the environment's capacity to recycle or renew itself, resulting in a often irreversible scenario of pollution and environmental damage, potentially resulting in an environmental crisis.

The historical context brings us valuable information about the current reality:

In fact, the possibility of conflicts tends to increase, since the world, after having faced the oil crisis in the second half of the 20th century, is now preparing itself – with the inevitable growth of the population and the unavoidable need to reduce the poverty – to face a much darker situation, with more soil degradation, more desertification, more water crisis, loss of biodiversity, etc., not to mention worsening climate change (MILARÉ, 2013, p. 228).

Historically, we can state that after the Second World War, international society went through the historical phase known as the “cold war,” in which the polarization of the capitalist and socialist strands took place, and with the collapse of the Soviet Union, capitalism emerged prevalent, generating the rise of the process of economic globalization. This phenomenon is “multifaceted with economic, social, political, cultural, religious and legal dimensions that are interconnected in a complex way” (SANTOS, 2001, p. 106).

Thus, monocausal explanations and monolithic interpretations of this phenomenon appear to be inadequate (SANTOS, 2001, p.106).

The “cold war” did not represent a direct military clash, but a conflict of ideologies. With the victory of capitalism over socialism, several countries started to adopt it, with the exaltation of private property, focus on profit and accumulation of wealth, and control of productive systems by private power.

4 Law 6.938/1981, Art. 3, I, defines the environment as: “the set of conditions, laws, influences and interactions of a physical, chemical and biological order, which allows, shelters and governs life in all its forms” (BRASIL, 1981).

The context of this mass society in a globalized environment⁵, consequently, generates a community that focuses primarily on consumption. To create goods, more raw materials are required, which consequently results in greater exploitation of the environment.

Contemporary society relies on serial production and the massive distribution of products and services. Unnecessary consumption, increasing production, and waste and effluents contribute to one of the most serious environmental problems in the world today: the depletion and contamination of natural resources. Excessive domestic waste, the result of this social scenario, is currently one of the major environmental concerns and has become a problem for cities around the world, given that its composition is no longer mostly organic (GOUVEIA, 2012, p. 1503-1510)

We live today at the mercy of a model of maximization of production and profits, generating the depletion of natural resources. Consequently, human activity subject to the control of the commodity can turn the productive forces into destructive forces, resulting in the environmental crisis.

In addition, demographic density has been constantly increasing, especially in developing countries. As cities grow, so do their needs. However, the State and the environment itself are sometimes unable to keep up with the needs imposed by the demographic increase. Besides to the possible depletion of resources, access to adequate environmental conditions has been distancing itself from all social classes, opening “space for the emergence of huge business conglomerates, the massification of productive processes and the progressive use of advertising devices in economic transactions, causing deep imbalances in the consumer society” (SOARES, 2007, p.13). Consequently, the image of a “vulnerable consumer, increasingly threatened in terms of economic, physical and mental integrity” starts to appear (SOARES, 2007, p.13).

The American economist Victor Lebow proposed to the US government, in 1995, a new model in which consumption became spiritual, being essential for the economic and social survival of the country.

Our enormously productive economy demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfactions, our ego satisfactions, in consumption. The measure of social status, of social acceptance, of prestige, is now to be found in our consumptive patterns. The very meaning and significance of our lives today expressed in consumptive terms.

The greater the pressures upon the individual to conform to safe and accepted social

⁵ Herbert Marcuse explains the American mass society as a “one dimension” society, characterized by full economic-technological dominance over people (CAPELLARI, 2007, p. 21).

standards, the more does he tend to express his aspirations and his individuality in terms of what he wears, drives, eats- his home, his car, his pattern of food serving, his hobbies (LEBOW, 1995, p. 3).

Analyzing the current society, we observe the partial concretization of Lebow's ideas, considering that the search for this realization immediately goes through an exacerbated consumption that often does not address social and environmental issues with good sense, aiming at the economic development from a strictly materialistic perspective.

Thus, the concept of planned or programmed obsolescence also emerges, that is, a given product has its useful life deliberately reduced, requiring its replacement more quickly, fostering production and, consequently, generating waste and emitting more pollutants, among other environmental degradations.

This is a vicious circle that, for Bauman (2008), represents true food for the ego. Consuming becomes "investing in one's own social affiliation" (BAUMAN, 2008, p. 77).

This model was accepted and started to compose, with a strong increase, the society's way of life. In the 21st century, in the so-called "hyper-consumption society," the economy of individualistic speed of substitution is worshiped, generating the excess between what is acquired and what is discarded, with a negative impact on the socio-environmental balance.

From this context, consumption and demographic density take off, and the environmental crisis and inequality stand out. Now, in a society that produces more consumer goods, the man-nature relationship is unbalanced, as well as the income concentration and poverty.

The increase in population also aggravates the problem, but it is not necessarily responsible for its creation, since "the effects of demographic dynamics on the environment depend on economic, technological and cultural interventions, through which population growth induces an overexploitation of nature, overconsumption of limited resources, and processes of environmental degradation" (LEFF, 2001, p. 298-299).

It is worth mentioning that, in this society, the concept of citizenship is inverted several times, as the feeling of belonging and even happiness starts to be directly related to the expenditure and acquisition of goods.⁶

Along with the American conception with the post-war situation, we

⁶ Silvio Rodrigues (2002, p. 115) defined goods as follows: "For the political economy, goods are those things that, being useful to men, provoke their cupidity and, therefore, are objects of private appropriation."

can infer that the environment where hedonistic life reigns, or, in other words, where there is a great concern with the immediate result, without evaluating the future consequences, disregarding that such results directly influence the reality of class distribution, generates an unbalanced environment.

Therefore, we may state that human society does not create relationships in blocks, but rather in estate-based manner, dividing itself into social classes. Contemporary development is based on the prevalence of the market, consumption, and the individual. Therefore, the less privileged classes consume less, given their financial impossibility to keep up with the market, but they are the ones that are most intimately affected by the environmental problems of unrestrained production, which fuels consumerism.

Nowadays, along with the class collectivity, the idea of progress is development based on the domination of nature, with unlimited appropriation of its resources. With economic globalization, the environmental crisis is becoming multinationalized, in a market that abandons as quickly as it creates, within a consumer society in which the demands do not end.

In a critical view between existentialism and commercial nature, Marcuse states that “commercialized nature, polluted nature, militarized nature cut down the life environment of man, not only in an ecological but also in a very existential sense” (MARCUSE, 1973, p. 64).

This environmental unsustainability panorama is felt with the other humanity’s probations (social, health, energy, among others) which, due to their aggravation, have perceptible consequences for all countries, but especially in the marginalized ones or even in those under development.

The current stage of development and the form of the economy directly influence the increase in socio-environmental inequality. A model focused on consumption drives the exploitation of resources and pollution, which also imposes difficulties on future generations regarding their dignified existence.

2 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY

In view of the context mentioned above, the neediest part of the population is the one that suffers the most from the lack of access to socio-environmental resources, and from the neglect of the public authority.

The concept of environmental justice brings to light that the least favored, sometimes the least benefiting from the benefits of capitalism, bear

substantially more with the consequences of environmental degradation.

Individuals who are part of society are not equal, nor are consonants in property ownership and other aspects of environmental influence. Therefore, they are not equitable in terms of their exposure to dangers. People are environmentally unequal, precisely because their inequality occurs in other ways, whether in politics, income, housing, education, and others.

The Federal Constitution of 1988 protected “environmental justice,” a legal good, listed as a fundamental right according to art. 225⁷. Among other perspective, this principle postulates that the vulnerable part of the population should not excessively bear the negative externalities resulting from the production of Brazilian wealth.

The constitutional rule aims to ensure that no portion of the population disproportionately assumes the unfavorable results of economic, political activities or even the failure of the State to carry out public policies that ensure the environmental protection of all, that is, that there is environmental justice.

Thus, environmental justice is defined as follows (ACSELRAD, HERCULANO and PÁDUA, 2004, p. 9-10):

Environmental justice is the condition of social existence through the pursuit of fair treatment and the meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of their race, color, origin, or income regarding the design, development, implementation and enforcement of policies, laws, and environmental regulations. Fair treatment means that no group of people, including ethnic, racial or class groups, should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, commercial, and municipal operations, from the implementation of federal policies and programs, state, local or tribal, as well as the consequences resulting from the absence or omission of these policies.

Environmental justice, therefore, since the first struggles that evoked such a notion in the early 1980s, became known as the set of principles that ensured that no group of people, whether ethnic, racial or class groups, bears a disproportionate amount of degradation of the collective space.

As defined by Ulrich Beck (2010 apud BOSCO; FERREIRA, 2016, p. 232-264), we currently live in a risk society, where we are constantly exposed, with pollution and its consequences without limits. However, in an unequal society, the most vulnerable part of the population bears such risks disproportionately, given that, at times, they do not even have the means to protect themselves from the resulting deficiencies of this process.

⁷ “Art. 225. Everyone has a right to an ecologically balanced environment, a good of common use for the people and essential to a healthy quality of life, imposing on the public power and the collective the duty to defend it and preserve it for the present and future generations” (BRASIL, 1988).

Environmental justice is part of the struggle to prevent these differences, as it aims that no group of people, not even ethnic, racial or social minorities, should bear the most damaging implications of the environmental recession that afflicts the country, either in the places where they live or even according to the conditions they have.

This phenomenon originated from two perspectives. First, the notorious fact that low-income families settle voluntarily in areas at risk or that already have environmental problems (family inequality), mainly because these places have a lower cost of living. According to the second perspective, institutional mechanisms generate inequality, given that waste disposal and polluting activities are commonly installed in places already inhabited by lower-income populations.

It is worth mentioning the residents of communities or places that do not even have adequate access to basic sanitation, as a result of State neglect, and eventually the pollution produced not only by the most vulnerable, but also by a chain that involves the whole of society.

Environmental justice seeks the concretization of art. 225 of the 1988 Federal Constitution, on an equal basis. It imposes that the vulnerable part of the population does not assume the undesirable fruits on the environment in which they live, resulting from the production of Brazilian wealth. On the other hand, environmental injustice comes as a result of the modes of production and of how the land is occupied, since a large part of the population lives on the margins of the cities, without adequate sewage treatment, and is then abandoned by the large development projects.

The struggle movement arose in favor of social justice in the United States, resulting from the search of the poorest citizens and ethnic groups discriminated against for a more equal environment, due to their great exposure to risks, as they live in places close to garbage dumps or to industries pollutants.

An emblematic case was the “Love Canal,” in Niagara Falls, New York. Residents discovered that their houses were under a canal where industrial and warlike wastes had been landfilled, left by companies such as Hooker Chemical Corporation (BARATA; KLIGERMAN; MINAYO-GOMEZ, 2007, p. 165).

After filling the entire canal with toxic waste, in the 1950s, the area started to be subdivided, and the problem was noticed after the emergence of diseases, especially in children. According to reports, children could not play outside, as they burned their feet, and dogs harmed their snouts when digging in the ground. Faced with this scenario, the locals joined forces

in search of answers and solutions by the authorities, founding the Love Canal Homeowners Association – LCHA.

LCHA sought the support of scientists and was able to prove the environmental degradation present in that space. As a result of this case and others of the same nature, in that decade, a new environmental law was created, in which a super fund would provide compensation to those affected by these environmental problems. In addition, a law that requires the neighborhood to know about the conditions of the place they are settling in – The Community Right-to-know Act⁸ was created; as well as a program to assist citizens to hire specialized assistance should they need it, to understand their situation and place of residence.

In Brazil, the movement for the fight for environmental justice is extremely important, given the intense social inequality experienced in the country. Thus, there are some organizations that call for environmental justice, such as those affected by dams, extractive workers fighting against the advance on forest frontiers, and various local actions against contamination and degradation of living and working spaces.

In Brazil, this thought started with the dissemination of the problem published by the *Central Única dos Trabalhadores* (CUT), with the Brazilian Institute for Social and Economic Analysis (Ibase) the Institute of Urban Planning and Research (Ippur), from UFRJ, and the support of the Heinrich Böll Foundation. Its main objective is to encourage the participation of workers, scientists, chemists, and researchers in the search for environmental justice, aiming at a socially balanced environment (LEAO, 2013)

Henri Acelrad explains the importance of environmental justice movements:

Environmental justice is, therefore, an emerging notion that integrates the historical process of subjective construction of the rights culture. In recent experience, this notion of justice arose from the strategic creativity of social movements that changed the structure of social forces involved in environmental struggles and, in certain circumstances, produced changes in the state and regulatory apparatus responsible for environmental protection. (ACSELRAD, 2010, p. 103-119).

In Brazil, during the “Launching Manifesto of the Brazilian Network of Environmental Justice,” “Environmental Justice” was defined as the set of principles that:

⁸ The Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act (EPCRA) of 1986 provides unprecedented access to information on toxic risks.

a – ensure that no social group, whether it is an ethnic, racial or class group, bears a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences of economic operations, political decisions and federal, state, local programs, as well as the absence or omission of such policies;

b – ensure fair and equitable access, direct and indirect, to the country's environmental resources;

c – ensure broad access to relevant information on the use of environmental resources and the disposal of wastes and the location of sources of environmental risks, as well as democratic and participatory processes in the definition of policies, plans, programs and projects that concern them;

d – favor the constitution of collective subjects of rights, social movements, and popular organizations as protagonists in the construction of alternative models of development, which ensure the democratization of access to environmental resources and the sustainability of their use (BRASIL, 2001).

In this context, the environmental issue is envisioned, but without social context. However, society and the environment are inseparable. Marginalized groups are the ones that bear the greatest burden of environmental degeneration, since, sometimes, the places they inhabit are used as landfills and garbage dumps; or impose natural risks, such as slopes, hills (landslides) and banks of rivers and streams (floods). Thus, the very form of organization of a class society favors this circumstance.

3 ASPECTS OF THE ABSENCE OF ADEQUATE SANITATION CONDITIONS

Basic sanitation has the capacity to induce social justice. On the one hand, the higher income classes are able, if necessary, to move to more environmentally friendly locations. Those with lower incomes, however, most of the time only adapt to what is provided by the State or remain in places of great risk (social marginalization).

Usually those with lower incomes live on lower value land, on more harmful conditions, without access to minimum conditions of adequate basic sanitation, a true facet of socio-environmental injustice.

Law no. 11,445, of January 5, 2007, provides for national guidelines for basic sanitation, in its Art. 2nd establishes:

I – basic sanitation: is the set of services, infrastructures, and operational facilities of:

a) drinking water supply: consisting of the activities, infrastructures, and facilities necessary for the public supply of drinking water, from collection to building connections and the respective measuring instruments;

b) sanitary sewage: constituted by the activities, infrastructures, and operational

facilities for the collection, transportation, treatment, and final disposal of sanitary sewage, from building connections to their final disposal into the environment;

c) urban cleaning and solid waste management: a set of activities, infrastructures, and operational facilities for the collection, transportation, transshipment, treatment, and final destination of domestic waste and waste originating from the sweeping and cleaning of public places and roads;

d) urban rainwater drainage and management: a set of activities, infrastructures and operational installations for urban rainwater drainage, transportation, detention or retention for the mitigation of flood flows, treatment and final disposal of rainwater drained in urban areas;

Basic sanitation aims to ensure healthy conditions for the population, with an adequate supply of water, sewage, pipes, and waste disposal. Therefore, its role has great social relevance, given that it aims to provide well-being to citizens, by adequately providing the elements mentioned above.

Sanitation is defined as:

A set of goods and services that exist in cities, for collective use, that constitute the material conditions for the functioning of the city as a space for production and consumption and that at the same time support state functions. Also, according to the same author, what defines these goods as collective goods are the following characteristics: the character of service, their spatial location (in urban space), their form of organization in networks, and the interdependence between them (COING, 1992 *apud* SOUZA, 2002, p. 44).

Thus, the lack of basic sanitation is shown as one of the current factors in Brazil that exposes socio-environmental injustice to the public, since the environment has been considered essential for man to enjoy fundamental human rights, and among them, the own right to life.

The existential minimum aims to guarantee conditions and elements for a dignified existence and not just survival. Access to basic sanitary conditions is one of the factors that represent the concretization of this right.

In this regard, it is important to emphasize that the guarantee of a healthy environment for human beings arises from two aspects: “the physical existence and health of human beings, and the dignity of that existence, the quality of life that makes it worth living. The right to a healthy environment, therefore, comprises and extends the right to health and the right to an adequate or sufficient standard of living” (TRINDADE, 1993, p. 76).

However, homogeneity regarding the provision of these adequate water and sewage conditions is not the Brazilian reality. The lack shows the denial of dignity to those of lower-income. This niche is affected, in

addition to the neglect by the government, by the disorderly increase in population density. To solve the problem, besides money investments, the goodwill of the State is necessary.

This scenario leads to an unhealthy life for part of the population, with historically marginalized groups, such as the rural, populations living in settlements, unemployed, who are the biggest victims.

Thus, “the historical trajectory of sanitation in the country is inseparable from other aspects of development, especially the economic, social, political, and cultural aspects” (REZENDE; HELLER, 2008, p. 41).

The National Assembly for Human Rights recognized the provision of water and adequate basic sanitation as a human right (ZORZI; TURATI; MAZZARINO, 2016), which although not expressly provided for in terms of the Law, stems directly from the constitutional principles and preamble to the guarantee human dignity and access to a healthy environment, under the terms of art. 225, of the 1988 Federal Constitution.

From the statistics, we can identify the disparity between the regions considered to be wealthier and less favored locations, especially regarding the water supply. The states of the North and Northeast, and Rondônia (43.6% of the population without access to adequate basic sanitation) have the worst situation, while the South, Southeast, and Midwest Regions have states with more than 90% of the population with access to this public service (TRATA BRASIL; BRK AMBIENTAL, 2018).

The issue of sewage collection is even worse. According to the Report of the *Instituto Trata Brasil*, with BRK Ambiental, several cities, especially in the North and Northeast regions, have a treatment rate below 15%. For instance, the city of Porto Velho has a rate of 3.38%, according to the 2018 survey (TRATA BRASIL; BRK AMBIENTAL, 2018).

In this context, the regions considered to have the lowest purchasing power are the most affected, in addition to being exposed to a greater transmission of diseases caused by degrading conditions.

Access to goods and services by the citizen directly reflects on the individual practice mechanisms that will foster society. The practice of environmental equality permeates social justice, which represents thinking about individuals who have not often had access to basic elements resulting from the collective’s inventive and productive capacity.

Therefore, it is necessary to reflect upon how to plan basic sanitation, analyzing and facing the environmental inequality issue, promoting material equality and environmental justice, and equalizing the effects of negative externalities.

A study called “Sanitation and the life of Brazilian women,” by Instituto Trata Brasil, in partnership with BRK Ambiental, launched in 2019, showed that there are 27 million women in the country – one in four, out of a total of 104.772 million of the female population – who do not have adequate access to health infrastructure, most of whom are black and poor (TRATA BRASIL; BRK AMBIENTAL, 2019).

It is also worth mentioning that the lack of provision of adequate basic sanitation conditions proves to be the cause of the most diverse diseases, which directly affect those with fewer resources to treat them and already more vulnerable to contamination. “Avoiding the spread of diseases carried by detritus in the form of sewage and garbage is one of the main functions of basic sanitation” (CAVINATTO, 1992, p. 50). Furthermore, the public officers that work in these areas are also “responsible for the supply and quality of the water that supplies the population” (CAVINATTO, 1992, p. 50).

From a historical perspective, an important example is Egypt, where its population had the custom of storing water so that eventual impurities were deposited at the bottom of the container. At that time, there was no knowledge about microorganisms and their diseases, but the dirt was eliminated in the process. Based on this procedure, the Japanese and Chinese used as a method the passage of water between vessels, through fabrics, with the removal of impurities (CAVINATTO, 1992, p. 19).

In Brazil, at the beginning of colonization, the colonists were amazed at the excellent state of health of the indigenous people. However, their arrival caused the spread of several diseases, and the indigenous peoples had no defense in their organisms against them. On the other hand, following this episode they brought sanitary concerns with water and cleaning, resulting in the construction of fountains in public squares for the distribution of water to the population (CAVINATTO, 1992, p. 19).

However, with the evolution of society and demographic growth, public health and pollution problems forced the population to find sanitation solutions for the collection and treatment of sewage, safe water supply for human consumption, collection and treatment of solid waste, and drainage of rainwater.

It is worth mentioning that along with the development of public basic sanitation devices and services, the issue of access to this infrastructure and portfolio by the wealthier classes, located in places that are most benefited by the State, is also presented. New sanitation solutions, therefore, do

not necessarily imply less socio-environmental inequality, since the lower-income population, due to real estate speculation and poverty, ends up on the margins of this reality.

The inclusion of environmental issues in sanitation actions represents a significant advance, in terms of legislation, but we need to go further, aiming at universal access to these services, as the principle that governs the regulatory framework for basic sanitation in Brazil, the Law 11,445/2007. However, this is not a reality:

Finally, it is important to note that the evidence in this study indicated that inequality due to the income of consumers (households) does not reflect only their unequal ability to pay for services, but deficiencies in the provision of services. As they are predominantly provided by public service providers, political factors influence the problem, which is perceived by the existence of hierarchical selectivity – the increase in access starts with the most economically favored segments of the population. However, it must be taken into account that they are essential services that, if offered inappropriately, generate externalities on the environment, public health and, consequently, economic development (SAIANI; TONETO; DOURADO, 2013, p. 657-692).

The consequences are absurd, where scenarios of disease proliferation emerge, further contributing to the distancing of the poorest social class from decent living conditions.

Basic sanitation is an activity linked to the supply of drinking water, the management of rainwater, the collection and treatment of sewage, urban cleaning, the management of solid waste and the control of pests and any type of pathogenic agent, aimed at the health of communities.

The most economically vulnerable population moves and settles in places that are not prioritized by public policies. Areas that are less valued and do not have the best conditions for basic sanitation, demonstrating its close relationship with the country's social inequality.

Many houses in these conditions do not have land tenure regularization, which makes the health issue even more difficult. Information collected by IPEA in 2011 shows that in the white population 77.1% of households have adequate sanitation, while in the black population, this number drops to 60%. The ethnic question is yet another aspect that must be considered in public sanitation policies, as it is strongly related to income distribution and Brazilian racial history (IPEA, 2011). Life with the lack of adequate basic sanitation conditions for poor black families, therefore, can also be considered as a matter of social exclusion.

Basic sanitation, an essential state public policy, is directly related to the ecologically balanced environment as a fundamental right, essential to a healthy quality of life. This relationship is intrinsic and inseparable and must be thought of in a universal and isonomic way, evidently favoring the neediest groups of the population, in terms of access and low taxes.

CONCLUSION

This article aimed to address the environmental issue in today's society, characterized by excessive consumption, inequality and, at times, as a promoter of great environmental injustice.

The Cold War brought the ideological polarization of the planet, with the consequent division of countries according to their conceptions of capitalist or socialist. With the end of the conflict, most of these countries adopted the capitalist economic system. Thus, the phase of neoliberalism began.

This economic system, with a focus on private property, production, and exacerbated consumption, resulted in a greater exploitation of nature to obtain raw materials, to manufacture goods, and, in this scenario, consumption feeds back itself.

This is how the environmental crisis intensifies itself, as the withdrawal of resources and environmental exploitation exceed the limits of recovery and natural preservation of the environment, generating harmful consequences for ecological aspects.

We also showed that the populations most affected by these environmental problems are those with lower incomes, either due to the living conditions that they may be exposed to or due to the neglect of the public authorities. Hence the concept of environmental injustice, in which it is shown that those who consume less are the majority affected by environmental issues generated, in large part, by consumption.

Data from several agencies prove that regions considered to have less economic power have less access to adequate basic sanitation. Thus, sometimes, individuals in these places fall ill due to poor water and sewage conditions, acquiring diseases such as typhoid fever, schistosomiasis, diarrhea, leptospirosis, and others.

We conclude that the concept of environmental injustice is present in our society, with the inhabitants of lower income sometimes being the most affected by the negative externalities of the environmental crisis, and

the issue of basic sanitation is pointed out as an important factor.

We conclude that the concept of environmental injustice is present in our society, with the inhabitants of lower income sometimes being the most affected by the negative externalities of the environmental crisis, and basic sanitation is an important factor.

Although not unique, this factor is of great relevance for improving the living conditions of the population, requiring that its development also include social issues.

Accessing quality sanitary conditions is a necessary condition in the fight against injustice and poverty eradication, surpassing sickness rates, including children, as well as for environmental sustainability. Therefore, a health reform is an urgent element for the integration and de-marginalization of part of the Brazilian people.

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