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Course

ILLICIT MARKETS AND ORGANIZED CRIME IN THE AMERICAS



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Class

Organized Environmental Crime in the Amazon

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Introduction

This class addresses environmental crime in the Amazon, presenting various illegal activities that occur in the region.

Among the main topics are deforestation and intentional fires, land grabbing, gold and cassiterite mining, invasion of indigenous territories, predatory hunting and fishing, corruption and illegal recruitment of workers. This class also highlights the importance of economic incentives to combat these practices and addresses environmental crime in other regions of Brazil.



Concepts

“Savanization” of the Amazon: the process of transforming forest areas into partial desert areas or *cerrados* in the Amazon region, whose main agent is illegal deforestation.

Institutions

Ibama: The Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources was created in 1989 and is the federal agency dedicated to environmental preservation issues linked to the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change.

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Environmental legislation in Brazil is one of the most strict in Latin America and delineates that 80% of private properties shall be preserved and the remaining 20% shall be under evaluation of Ibama's rigorous management plan. However, **its implementation is limited, especially in the Amazon, where approximately 95% of deforestation is illegal.**

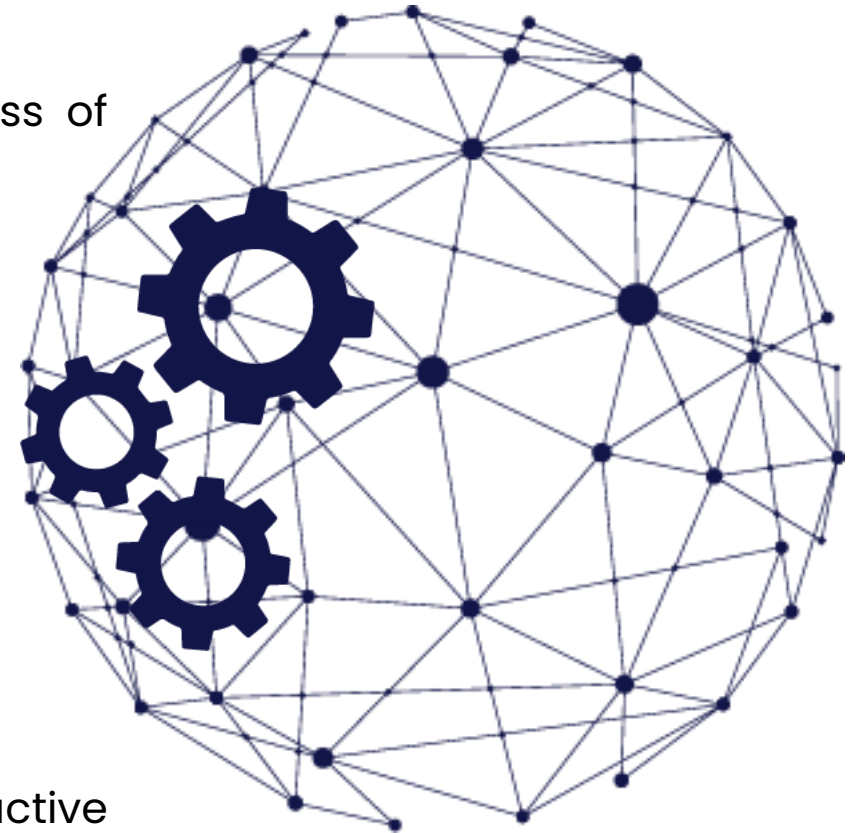
The main illegal environmental activities operated in the Amazon are: deforestation and intentional fires, illegal logging, land grabbing, gold and cassiterite mining, invasion of indigenous territories, predatory hunting and fishing, corruption and illegal recruitment of workers.



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Deforestation and illegal intentional fires are part of the same process of illegal deforestation, which is divided according to the following phases :

- 1) cutting down of hardwood;
- 2) followed by indiscriminate intentional fires;
- 3) and by placing cattle on pasture;
- 4) Once the land is exhausted by exploitation, that is, after the “savannation” process has been completed, the area is abandoned;
- 5) and then spontaneously restored by the forest;
- 6) finally, the last stage is annual agriculture, which would be a “constructive phase”, in quotes, if compared to previous cycles.



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Land grabbing originates from the military regime, when properties were delivered to settlers from South and Northeast to be occupied. Abolished in the 1990s, the practice continues nowadays through illegal entrepreneurs or settlers who fraudulently legalize properties (kickback) at notary offices.

The activity also uses a network of corruption and organized crime existing in municipal and state governments, which generates massive overlapping of property rights. This process is commonly called the “several floors” of properties in the Amazon and the land issue in the Amazon is a very serious problem to solve .



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Another prominent illegal activity in the region is gold, diamond and cassiterite mining, which has expanded in the Cerrado and the Amazon over the last 70 years. It is, today, a largely professional activity, that uses boats and equipment on an industrial scale and it is promoted by various municipal and state governments. It opposes legal mining performed by companies in authorized territories.

The largest concentration of mining until January 2023 was in the Yanomami Indigenous Territory in Roraima and Amazonas, generating heavy mercury contamination and several types of diseases, in addition to foster prostitution and promoting massacres among this population.



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This activity is directly related to the **invasion of indigenous territories**, which is carried out by loggers and miners. Indigenous territories correspond to 1/3 of the Brazilian Amazon territory and are classified as preservation areas, along with national and state parks and forests. In some cases, miners seek to divide the tribes in order to gain or co-opt the support of an allied sector.

It is also connected to **predatory hunting and fishing**, which has the purpose of exporting flora and fauna species to internal and external markets and is done mainly by boats that circulate through the western Amazon. In particular, fish illegally exploited in Amazonian rivers are a risk for consumption due to mercury contamination from mining.



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Finally, **corruption and illegal recruitment of workers** are widespread problems in the Amazon, as it takes advantage of the strong deficit of formal work and the level of poverty in the region. These workers form a mass of maneuver to support illegal environmental acts in the Amazon.

The solution lies in offering subsistence conditions through a social salary and converting them into the so-called “guardians of the forest”, a term used to describe forest protection communities such as scientific communities and environmental movements. The major recruitment factor for this strategy is not repression, but the development of the bioeconomy, particularly in relation to cupuassu and cocoa.



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In the rest of Brazil, environmental crime is impacted by the **heterogeneity of access to air pollution control equipment** across states. Another fundamental problem is the **inappropriate discharge of sewage** into rivers, a symptom of the lack of access to the sewage treatment network by half the population. In addition, **the excessive use of pesticides** is a recurring problem, as Brazil has one of the highest per capita rates of pesticides use. Finally, **discrepancies in environmental licensing** are recurrent in Brazil, being relatively consistent in the states of the South and Southeast, but not in the rest of the country.

In conclusion, it is important to emphasize that all public policy is a "trade-off" between the development and construction of necessary infrastructures and the preservation of the environment.



Summary

- It contextualizes environmental legislation in Brazil and its implementation in the Amazon;
- It describes the main activities of environmental crime in the Amazon and its characteristics;
- It presents the need for economic incentive policies to combat environmental crime;
- It introduces practices of environmental crime in other regions of Brazil.





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