

# *Opinion leaders' conceptions about citizenship and the right to health on the trinational border*

Carlos Guilherme Meister Arenhart<sup>1</sup> (ORCID: 0000-0003-1937-2050) (carlosmeistera@gmail.com)

Maria Lucia Frizon Rizzotto<sup>2</sup> (ORCID: 0000-0003-3152-1362) (frizon@uol.com.br)

Alessandra Rosa Carrijo<sup>2</sup> (ORCID: 0000-0002-1691-4240) (carrijo.alessandra@gmail.com)

<sup>1</sup> Universidade Estadual de Londrina. Londrina-PR, Brazil.

<sup>2</sup> Universidade Estadual do Oeste do Paraná. Foz do Iguaçu-PR, Brazil.

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**Abstract:** Research with a qualitative approach, which sought to understand the meanings attributed by opinion leaders - collective health workers, representatives of social movements, university professors and journalists - about citizenship, in the field of health, and its exercise on the border between Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay. Data collection took place through an open interview based on two guiding questions: What is citizenship for you? What does it represent in border territories? The results indicate that the exercise of fundamental and social rights has its own contradictions for those who live in border territories, different conceptions of citizenship and its exercise at the border coexist and the notion of citizenship as an attribute of nationals is not enough for the dynamics that are established in these territories. It is concluded that the understanding of the border as a space of integration, and not of division, can break with the reality built by a local sub-citizenship, strengthening humanitarian and solidarity ties between border communities, which can contribute to the enjoyment of rights in this territoriality, as the right to health. We understand that opinion leaders should be summoned to the debate with a view to building a public agenda that discusses the construction of international citizenship.

► **Keywords:** Citizenship. International borders. Right to Health. Social policies.

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## Introduction

Sociopolitical contradictions that emerge from the modern capitalism State are a great challenge for the runnability of full democracy and citizenship, especially in peripheral economic and social formation with a long history of slavery, patrimonialism, patronage and dictatorial regimes, as it is observed in Brazil and other Latin American countries.

Regional integration processes, as in Mercosur, arouse new approaches on citizenship, especially in international borders territories, aiming to overcome the citizenship nationalism viewpoint as an attribute of a nationals of a certain country as consequence of blood ties (*jus sanguinis*) or surface right (*jus soli*). In Brazil the citizen status is based on *jus soli* that guarantee access to the social politics by the foreign immigrants' residents in the country (DAL PRÁ; MENDES; MIOTO, 2007).

Draibe (2007) identify several citizenship notions as she analyzes the social agenda of Mercosur as: “community social citizenship” based on rights and common systems of social protection; “social citizenship” linked to unified social politics notion; “work citizenship” with the minimal protection of the workers based on the international labor norms; “supranational citizenship” as a second citizenship that do not cancel the national one and it is related to free circulation of people and their rights.

Even though such conceptions are in the discourse level, given to the lack of institutionality that assure such practices, they contribute to the discussions and analysis of concrete situations lived by border cities' residents with high or low level of integration and people's flow. Considering that social practices are guided by the perceptions of reality that one has, it is paramount important to break up with the conservative law and political reading about the citizenship in order to overcome obstacles to the effectiveness of rights in international border territories (SCHWARZ, 2013).

As citizenship arise discussions on Human and Social Sciences in the Collective Health field such analysis is essential to the full command of citizenship associated to the right of health. In Brazil the full and equal universal health care has been assured by the Federal Constitution of 1988 (Article 196), as everyone's right and State duty and from the viewpoint of Human's Right no one can be excluded. However, based on the 5th Article of the same Constitution the foreign (nonresidents) assistance has been restricted to the medical emergency only. (BRASIL, 1988)

In the Collective Health field various authors, among them Giovanella *et al.* (2007), have been defending that health care, especially in the case of the population of nations that belong to regional blocks such as Mercosur, should be fully granted. This fact demands that the comprehension of citizenship should overcome the notion of national citizenship.

Fleury (2018) says that the way citizenship has been lived in Latin America proves that we are far from a solid full democracy that can only happen through social fights aiming equality. There are several complex factors when we debate full citizenship and fruition of right in border territories that collide with the naturalized idea of borders as a discontinuous limit. Far from being empty spaces the borders are territories full of political, cultural, economic, legal and symbolic meanings (ALBUQUERQUE, 2012).

Several research works have been analyzing the right to health in the border regions as a full expression of citizenship (AIKES; RIZZOTTO, 2018; GIOVANELLA *et al.*, 2007; DAL PRÁ; MENDES; MIOTO, 2007; MEDEIROS *et al.*, 2019). The focus of this paper is the understanding of meaning attributed by the opinion makers – health workers, social movements representatives, scholars and journalists – about citizenship circumscribed to the health care rights in the border of Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay. The hypothesis is that the local opinion makers may contribute to the understanding of health care rights that include the cross-borders based on a larger view of citizenship.

This framework analysis from the viewpoint of the opinion makers that have an important role in the construction of the public opinion, collective consensus and public agenda shows very relevant to the field of collective health.

## Methodology

Qualitative study based on hermeneutics-dialectic that consists more in reflection than in the reproduction of methodological procedures. Hermeneutics raises the identity debate and dialectics accentuates critical discussion. In the meeting of the two, the consensual meanings and the dissensions of the individuals' statements are sought in view of the context in which they are inserted (MINAYO, 2006).

The combination of hermeneutics with dialectics made it possible to broaden the understanding of the results as a result of multiple social, political and economic determinations, presenting itself as a reality tensioned by discursive consensus and

contradictions. Hermeneutics as an auxiliary discipline of dialectics allows making sense of something, revealing the hidden meanings in human language, allowing language and its existence to make methodological and conceptual connections with what is presented in discourses and narratives (GONZALEZ, 2012).

The field for carrying out the research was the municipality of Foz do Iguaçu/PR, a trinational border region between Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina. The study had twelve opinion makers as participants: collective health workers (n=08), leader of social movements (n=01), journalist (n=01) and university professors (n=02). The criteria for choosing these individuals were to act in spaces of institutional, academic or social power with accumulation of symbolic power.

Data collection took place between September and December 2019, through an open interview, based on two guiding questions: “What is citizenship for you? What does it represent in frontier territory?” The interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes, were audio recorded and fully transcribed. The empirical corpus was submitted to successive readings to understand the meanings of the narratives, whose results are presented in three thematic cluster: I) Border territories and the emergence of different notions of citizenship; II) Tensions on the trinational border: from individualism to the construction of solidarity and III) Citizenship in a sociocultural context in a cross-border territory.

The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee under registration CAAE nº 02513318.3.0000.0107, respecting all ethical procedures provided for in resolution 510 of April 7, 2016. In order to maintain anonymity, the interviewees' statements were coded by the letter E followed by of a sequential Arabic number.

## Results and Discussion

The opinion makers participating in the research are men and women over 30 years of age, with training ranging from incomplete elementary school to *stricto sensu* postgraduate studies, working in municipal public health, journalism, militancy in social movements or university teaching.

Representations, interests and behaviors are socially constructed, contributing to the way opinion makers give meaning to the reality they know, experience and understand. The sense of citizenship attributed by the research individuals evidences the emergence of solidarity and the formation of an international citizenship.

## **Border territories and the emergence of different notions of citizenship**

History, as an area of knowledge of the human sciences, helps our human kind to understand our own reality, locate ourselves in time and space and perceive the non-linear movements that compose it. The historical context of Foz do Iguaçu within the border area is configured from multiple social, economic and political determinations, which show different moments and cycles. According to Nava (2018, p. 16), such cycles begin with “the exploration of *yerba mate* in the region, the attraction of immigrants to the nationalization project of the border and the construction of major works, such as, for example, the Friendship International Bridge between Brazil and Paraguay and the Itaipu Hydroelectric Power Plant”.

Understanding the geolocation of Foz do Iguaçu and the border not as a dividing line, but as “permeable spaces existing between two societies facing each other” (KERN, 2016, p. 15), characterized not by their spatial organization, but by the particularities of the social actors that work there, that is, the border as a social construction, in which the actors are considered more important than the geographic space organization is an essential starting point when studying border themes and its objects.

Lima and Yasui (2014) show that it is necessary to understand the territory as a space permeated by many interrelationships, flows and fixed items, so that for an understanding that seeks totality, the notion of cross-border territory must overcome the geographical delimitation of the border.

The way of living and moving though the border territory is not a fact without tensions, especially for those who do not formally qualify for national citizenship status. “For me, citizenship means being able to come and go and stay without risk, without vulnerabilities. Having access and human dignity, a dignified existence on the border” (E11). As much as citizenship is identified as access to rights, these are not guaranteed to everyone in the same way over the trinational border region. Conflicts and conciliations between consumer power and fundamental rights generate discussions about citizenship that relate the right to it as an active posture of citizens in society, that is, “Having an understanding of their rights and duties and actively participating in the life on the border to improve society” (E04).

Benevides (1994, p. 9) differentiates the active and passive kind of citizenship in Brazil, stating that the passive kind is “the one given by the State, with the idea of favor and guardianship; and active citizenship – the one that establishes

the citizen as a bearer of rights, and also essentially creator of rights to open new spaces for political participation”.

With regard to the right to come and go, it is part of the fundamental rights and guarantees, based on freedom, equity and dignity of the human person (art. 5, item XV, of the Federal Constitution of 1988). In a border region, these rights must be problematized since they do not constitute universal human rights, that is, the right to come and go is limited to the legal norms of each State. In the context of Mercosur the members of the bloc signed an agreement that guaranteed the “free movement of people” in 2002, it is important to highlight that since its creation (1991) only the “free movement of goods, services and productive factors” were assured (MERCOSUR, 1991, p. 2).

However, the 2002 agreement has not been enough to fully guarantee the right to come and go at the border, as an example we can take what happened on the International Friendship Bridge between Brazil and Paraguay. During the Covid-19 pandemic sanitary barriers were made by the municipality of Foz do Iguaçu in order to prevent the flow of cross-border people. Even after the Bridge was opened many of them were held back on either side of the border (G1, 2021). On the other hand, the rulers of the four member countries of Mercosur met in videoconference and “coincided on the need to continue with the free transit of goods and services to maintain the regional economy” (MERCOSUR, 2021, p. 1). As can be seen government decisions often disregard the reality of those who live on the border, putting commercial aspects above human and social relations established in the territory.

Munhoz Cardoso (2014) states that the fundamental rights that make up citizenship should not be reduced to the recognition of status or a legal interpretation of the protection and security of nationals, nor should they be exclusive to one culture rather than others, because there is no such thing as a better set of individuals.

The concept of citizenship related to level of income and the possibility for consumers refers to the logic of capitalist accumulation, which has in the expansion of consumerism one of the pillars of its support. Historically, Capitalism accentuates inequities between and within the population and subsidizes the construction of first-, second- and third-class citizens. Globalized capitalist accumulation has privileged spaces in border territories for the super-exploitation of work, generating and transferring inequities from one country to another. On the other hand, the notion that articulates citizenship with participation, according to Serapione (2014),

results from a progression of participatory citizenship theoretically interpreted as opposed to the individualism promoted by the liberal logic of citizenship. As a conclusion the author says, “the State must redefine the relationship with civil society by creating permanent channels of negotiation that promote active citizenship through the institutionalization of citizen participation in government decisions” (SERAPIONE, 2014, p. 4836). This notion of citizenship was also highlighted by one of the interviewees.

About three meanings. The first has to do with rights and duties within a political community. The second has to do with documentation, with access to documentation thus the possibility of entering the different services that each State offers. Finally, it has a sense of political participation, of action (E01).

Understanding citizenship as a category of action may indicate that actively participating in the way of living on the border qualifies and improves social relations to the extent that decision-making would not be taken only by State agents. And yet, access to documentation as a requirement for entitlement to social policies has implications both at a microsocial and macrosocial level. In the micro sense, a study carried out by Dorfman and Cardin (2014) analyze how inhabitants in border regions claim their citizenship, based on theories such as human territoriality and power networks on the physical margins of the State. Human territoriality is the spatial expression of the social, to define the attempt of individuals or groups to interfere, through the delimitation of their control over a geographic area, in the domination of phenomena and relationships.

It is in this place that the materializations of the limits of the State's territory meet with the daily lives of people, posing obstacles, but also possibilities for cross-border citizenship through social struggle. Thus, it can be said that this territoriality also includes the notion of an active citizenship, represented through historical social struggles for the expansion of rights in the border limits.

In the context of the territory when we relate to the local and the global, the trinational border elucidates a territorial conjuncture that oppose the imaginary lines of national states division to the premise that the territory must be seen as a living agent in the co-construction of citizenship (SANTOS, 2000). The same author states that “the territory is neither a neutral datum nor a passive actor and a true schizophrenia is produced, since the places welcome and benefit the vectors of the dominant rationality, but also allow the emergence of other forms of life”

(SANTOS, 2000, p. 39). The author recognizes in a later work that it is difficult to think of a concrete citizenship that does not take into consideration the territorial component (SANTOS, 2014).

The following part addresses the issue of citizenship as an experience lived by opinion makers on the trinational border, contextualizing characteristics of the city and the local social body.

### **Tensions on the trinational border: from individualism to the construction of solidarity**

The municipality of Foz do Iguaçu has empirical characteristics strained by epidemiological and social realities. Rocha *et al* (2016) demonstrated that the city is characterized by the empirical context of high mortality rates from external causes, with homicides and automobile accidents being the second largest cause of mortality in the city. Tourism is also part of this characterization as a city's founding element as well as being part of a trinational border region. When approaching this subject, authors such as Clemente de Souza (2017) claim that the Iguaçu Falls, the Itaipu Binational Power Plant, the Jesuit ruins, among others, give identity to the empirical context of the city.

The network of meanings that emerged in this thematic cluster translates the perceptions, consensual and contradictory, from empirical contextualization about the city, such as individualism: “There is a lot of individualism on our border, I could be wrong, but groups are formed to aim profit and they don't think about improving the community” (E02) and the deficiencies of public devices that guarantee social rights and memory of the city. “Foz do Iguaçu is a very precarious city in terms of collective public goods. There are also problems, a very fragile memory, there are no museums” (E12).

The individualism critique can be associated with the capitalist mode of production, whose transformations impact societies' ways of living. Neoliberal regulation is not limited to traditional economic sectors, it is firmly aimed at the commodification of all dimensions of social life. Culture in general and community property have been subject to increasing commodification and individualization (ABDALLA; PUELLO-SOCARRAS, 2019).

Following this line of thought, where profit takes precedence over life, we can affirm that the relationship between capitalism and the modern State stems from

the insertion of economic interests of the bourgeoisie, whether local, national or international, in the political apparatus. This relationship is not direct and automatic and there are several disputes that occur in production processes (MASCARO, 2013).

An important representation in the narratives refers to a dignified existence in the social grouping on the triple border, which may be related to the number of ethnicities (more than 70 identified in Foz do Iguaçu). Foreigners group together to protect and strengthen themselves facing economic disputes and cultural diversity. In this aspect, both due to the lack of public spaces and the ethnic groups, the neoliberal advance in the municipality means that the individual is no longer seen as a citizen with rights, but as a client who seeks to satisfy his needs, not by the State, but by mechanisms of the market (ABDALA; PUELO-SOCARRÁS, 2019).

Guy Debord (1997, p. 31) states that “political economy only sees the worker in the proletariat, it never considers him in his leisure and in his humanity [...] the humanism of the commodity takes care of the leisure and humanity of the worker”.

Research carried out by Hino et al. (2019) found that the presence of public leisure spaces in urban areas has been associated with socioeconomic, physical and cognitive benefits and conclude that there is a potential in public spaces to impact and mitigate or reduce social inequalities.

The criticism of ways of living in the city may be related to previous experiences, to sociocultural expectations and to the degree of knowledge of other realities. “Foz do Iguaçu is no different from the rest of the country. The level of awareness is very low, there are few schools that have education geared towards citizen awareness. It's hard, we know that. Therefore, for being such a backward country, we are denied a series of rights”. (E09).

The absence of a citizen awareness can impact on the political rights flow especially on their social element, since political and human training for the world must also be present in the construction of a more equal society. Strengthening citizen participation in everyday life requires people to be political subjects, with consistency between the practices carried out in their private and public lives, where their integrity is evident (AGUDELO-RAMIREZ *et al.*, 2013).

Focusing on the exercise of citizenship on the trinational border, the perception is that “...it is not exercised equally by all. No way! Because in capitalism, your space in society is linked firstly to your financial capacity and secondly to other things like living in a patriarchal, slave-holding and racist society” (E12).

Although there is a legal framework that guarantees the exercise of citizenship in an egalitarian way for all, when it comes to the female population this achievement is still far away. The concept of liberal citizenship reinforces the model of women's non-citizenship, "since such citizenship encourages individualism in the search for its own interests, without a political and collective connotation of the concept, restricting women's actions to the private space" (SCHMIDT; ANHUCCI; CARLOTO, 2005, p. 1).

We also find narratives that reflect positive experiences of living on the border and accessing the public services by all, including the cross-border.

I think Foz do Iguçu reflects the mirror of all of Latin America and Brazil. But we have some things that are different from other places and other borders, people [foreigners] still have access to health care without much bureaucracy, access to public services, reception, food. Here, the issues of human rights and citizenship have not yet been lost (E11).

Despite the existence of cultural differences, the structural problems common to Latin American countries both in the economic and social fields contribute to the construction of a common sense for the region and a certain regional identity. In twin cities like the trinational border where the potential for economic, social and cultural integration is intensified, feelings of solidarity and understandings about social rights are created that break with the idea of citizenship of a national character.

However, the processes of integration in Latin America, like Mercosur, are making great strides in terms of economic integration and very little in terms of social and cultural integration. They are closer to what Galeano (1988, p. 280) denounced: "The current integration process does not lead us to rediscover our origins nor brings us closer to our goals", than Draibe (2007) pointed out when analyzing the challenges of Mercosur's social agenda in the construction of a "community social citizenship", based on common rights and systems of social protection with unified social policies.

In the next part we analyze the meanings attributed by opinion makers about citizenship in the sociocultural context of the border, seeking to highlight the dialectic of a contradictory reality, expressed in discursive consensus and contradictions.

### **Citizenship in a sociocultural context in the cross-border territory**

The social and cultural context in the cross-border territory of Foz do Iguçu is characterized by a reality in which market forces, supported by fractions of the economically favored bourgeois class, seek to hegemonize worldviews that hide

the contradictions and disputes of happiness projects of those who live in the cross-border territory.

The hybridism and cultural syncretism of this place enhance the dynamics of acting and living on the border. Silva (2008, p. 364) when analyzing the reordering of the identity of Arab immigrants in the city of Foz do Iguaçu observed an effort to constitute an “atypical city”, as a “space for coexistence of alterities”, exemplified “in the public appeal and official of the City Hall, aimed at residents to participate in the civic and legal life of the city, through the emblem 'Foz is for all of us'”.

On the one hand, sectors of society want Foz do Iguaçu to be a city for everyone, on the other hand, narratives show latent prejudices: “It is very complicated to live on the border. Not even the federal police can handle it, create laws, strategies, to stop this flow that ends up becoming a mixture” (E04); “You have to have some control because we don't have the maturity of the peace culture” (E05).

Santos (2000, p. 18) states that we must consider the existence of at least three worlds in one. “The first would be the world as they make us see it: globalization as a fable; the second would be the world as it is: globalization as perversity; and the third, the world as it can be: another globalization”. At the border, globalization as a fable and as a perversity are experienced by cross-border people, leading them to movements of preservation and distancing between “us and them”. But the border can also be a space for the construction of the “other globalization” that emerges from the dynamics of life on the border, cultural exchanges, solidarity and affective interaction that occurs between cross-border people, whether through work, leisure or activities and also affective relationships that go beyond the territorial limits of national states.

The recognition by opinion makers that “Here is a racist border, racism not only because of social and cultural differences [...] has a lot of homophobia” (E03), reveals sociocultural contexts that make it difficult to build meanings of citizenship that include the cross-border in the fruition of rights.

In addition to social class differences characterized by consumer power, there are differences related to minorities who find it difficult to access citizenship rights. Prejudice can be found in different sectors of society. For Silva (2010) “[...] over the last few years, sexual, racial or gender minorities have suffered more than those who belong to the large portion of those included in the same patriarchal, sexist,

capitalist, neoliberal and globalized world”. “There are several groups that constitute themselves as groups of sub-citizens here on the border. Within the modes of urbanity, we cannot resort to the different networks of social protection and support” (E01).

The values based on the notion of “subcitizens” configure the thesis that there are hierarchical relations of citizenship on the trinational border, revealing an instrumental paroxysm of this category. The notion of sub-citizenship implies an evaluative hierarchy of people, implicit and institutionally rooted in an invisible way, which determines who is or is not people, and, consequently, who is or is not a citizen (SOUZA, 2003).

Elements highlighting approaches that break with epistemic paradigms of separation and exclusion were also identified: “I am against the border. The border makes no sense. [National] States were created, they protect themselves, they have control. But the Great *Patria* will still arrive and if we don't unite, we will always be dominated, our continent will only be free if we unite” (E08).

For the frontiersman, the dividing line of the nation-state does not represent separation but can motivate a call to unity. The idea of a Latin American identity has been recurrent since the struggles for independence. Simón Bolívar (2018, p.01) at the Angostura Congress, exhorted legislators: “Let us bear in mind that our people are neither European nor North American, they are rather a composition of Africa and America...”. Darcy Ribeiro (2010, p.34) analyzing the sociocultural differences and similarities existing in Latin America concludes that here “ethnic-national societies were built in which populations are the product of crossing and want to continue merging [...]”.

Finally, it is important to analyze the interests of the dominant groups and institutions on the trinational border, the values disseminated and the mechanisms used to maintain an order of understanding the problem of citizen inequality, since the marginalization of ethnic groups, sexual minorities and of women point to the loss of the exercise of citizenship in the classes most weakened by the capitalist State (SANTOS; MOTA; SILVA, 2013).

The limitations of the present study are those related to qualitative studies, such as the reduced number of interviewees and also the symbolic capital of the speech space of each of them. Such obstacles can be an important restriction for the generalization of the results found.

## Conclusion

Hermeneutically, even though the triple international border territory of Foz do Iguaçu has its own particularities and singularities it should not be seen as a neutral place nor as an allegory detached from the tension between the contexts of the limits of national States' construction, the market and its interests.

In general, the opinion makers narratives about citizenship in border territory reveal viewpoints that reproduce the notion of citizenship limited to the idea of national citizenship, although elements emerged that point to an understanding of full, inclusive citizenship that has the idea of equality and unity among people. It was evident, dialectically speaking, that citizenship rights are not guaranteed equally to all who reside in the territory, coexisting hierarchical citizenship relations in the city and in the region, especially if the citizen is national or foreign.

The hypothesis that opinion makers can contribute to the understanding of the right to health at the border is reaffirmed, based on an expanded view of citizenship. It also elucidates the importance of this debate for a strategic alignment in the formulation of alternatives to expand the notion and praxis of local and regional citizenship, especially regarding to the exercise of citizenship in the context of social rights, including the right to health and the protection of a dignified existence that public systems and services must guarantee.

The experiences lived in the territory show the need for society to strengthen and promote values of solidarity and respect between social groups, guaranteeing quality public and leisure spaces, managing the tensions of collective and private interests on the structures that commodify the ways of living in the municipality, considering its flows and fixed lines.

In the social sphere, integration and the construction of "another globalization" can break with sub-citizenship idea up among cross-border subjects and seek to strengthen humanitarian ties between countries to strengthen proper, dignified and resolute access to social policies.

Finally, there is an indication of the opinion makers importance in the construction of public opinion and, consequently, the public agenda on citizenship in the triple border territory of Foz do Iguaçu.<sup>1</sup>

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## Note

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## Resumo

### *Concepções de formadores de opinião sobre cidadania e direito à saúde na fronteira trinacional*

Pesquisa de abordagem qualitativa, que procurou compreender os sentidos atribuídos por formadores de opinião – trabalhadores da saúde coletiva, representantes de movimentos sociais, docentes universitários e jornalistas – acerca da cidadania, no âmbito da saúde, e de seu exercício na fronteira entre Brasil, Argentina e Paraguai. A coleta de dados se deu por meio de entrevista aberta a partir de duas perguntas norteadoras: O que é cidadania para você? O que ela representa em territórios de fronteira? Os resultados indicam que o exercício dos direitos fundamentais e sociais apresentam contradições próprias para quem vive em territórios fronteiriços, coexistem distintas concepções de cidadania e do seu exercício na fronteira e a noção de cidadania como atributo dos nacionais não é suficiente para a dinâmica que se estabelece nestes territórios. Conclui-se que a compreensão da fronteira como espaço de integração, e não de divisão, pode romper com a realidade edificada por uma subcidadania local, estreitando os laços humanitários e de solidariedade entre as comunidades fronteiriças, o que pode contribuir para a fruição dos direitos sociais nesta territorialidade, como o direito à saúde. Entende-se que formadores de opinião devem ser convocados ao debate visando à construção de uma agenda pública que discuta a edificação de uma cidadania internacional.

► **Palavras-chave:** Cidadania. Fronteiras internacionais. Direito à saúde. Políticas sociais.

