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Afonso, R.D.C.M., Kleine, D. and Orsi-Tinoco, G. (2022) Theory and practice in social innovations in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. *Revista de Administração da UFSM*, 15 (1). pp. 123-136. ISSN: 1983-4659

<https://doi.org/10.5902/1983465965071>

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# THEORY AND PRACTICE IN SOCIAL INNOVATIONS IN THE CITY OF RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL

## *TEORIA E PRÁTICA EM INOVAÇÕES SOCIAIS NA CIDADE DO RIO DE JANEIRO, BRASIL*

Submission: 01/04/2021

Accept: 17/12/2021

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This article reviews the literature on social innovation, also focusing on Latin American production, identifying how the contents dialogue with the reality of initiatives in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

**Design/methodology/approach:** Qualitative research mapped 53 social innovation initiatives with some digital use and analyzed 20 of these initiatives. Using a descriptive exploratory methodology, the study was conducted in five stages: (1) review of the literature, (2) mapping of the initiatives, (3) the selection of 20 initiatives, (4) interviews and analysis, (5) a discussion workshop on the results.

**Findings:** The results indicate that the researched initiatives differ a little in relation to the literature. More specifically, this analysis helped perceive that in the city, (1) social innovations occur almost exclusively through the movement of civil society actors, (2) there is little to none, or only indirect articulation with governments and public policies, and (3) digital use and management remain reactive rather than strategic and are almost exclusively centered on social networks, both as a communication and management tool.

**Research limitations/implications:** This study cannot be generalized for the city since the sample was identified by voluntary adherence of the initiatives to an internet call.

**Originality/value:** This study contributes to knowledge on social innovations in the city of Rio de Janeiro, providing elements for debate by public and private decision makers, in addition to academic interest and shows the need for knowledge production for management rooted in the local context and reality.

**Keywords** – Social innovation, administration, actors, public policies.

## RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Este artigo realiza revisão de literatura sobre inovação social, com foco também na produção da América Latina, identificando como os conteúdos dialogam com a realidade de iniciativas na cidade do Rio de Janeiro, Brasil.

**Design/metodologia/abordagem:** A pesquisa qualitativa mapeou 53 iniciativas de inovação social com algum uso digital e analisou 20 destas iniciativas. Utilizando uma metodologia descritiva e exploratória, o estudo foi realizado em cinco etapas: (1) revisão de literatura, (2) mapeamento de iniciativas, (3) seleção de 20 iniciativas, (4) entrevistas e análise, (5) oficina de discussão dos resultados.

**Resultados:** Os resultados mostraram que as iniciativas diferem um pouco em relação a literatura. Mais especificamente, percebeu-se nesta análise que na cidade (1) as inovações sociais ocorrem quase que exclusivamente por movimento de atores da sociedade civil, (2) há pouca, nenhuma, ou articulação indireta com governos e políticas públicas, e (3) o uso do digital e a gestão ainda são reativos e não estratégicos, centrados, quase que exclusivamente, nas redes sociais tanto como ferramenta de comunicação, quanto de gestão.

**Limitações/implicações da pesquisa:** Este estudo não pode ser generalizado para a cidade uma vez que a amostra foi identificada por adesão voluntária das iniciativas a um chamado na internet.

**Originalidade:** Este estudo contribui com o conhecimento das inovações sociais na cidade do Rio de Janeiro, fornecendo elementos para debate de decisores públicos e privados, além da academia e mostra a necessidade de produção de conhecimento para gestão de inovações sociais enraizado no contexto e na realidade local.

**Palavras-chave** – Inovação social, gestão, atores, políticas públicas.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This research consists of an exploratory mapping, conducted in 2019, which aimed to identify and learn about social and environmental innovations using some element of technology in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil<sup>1</sup>. The intention was that this knowledge could orient a joint research agenda on the theme among Brazilian and British researchers. Thus, we opted for a literature review, also focusing on Latin America, emphasizing concepts and cases with subsequent mapping of social innovations in the city. It was also, with the same purpose, applied an interview script that could compare the findings of the literature review with the practices of these innovations in the city. In addition to a report on the results, a website and a digital map of innovations were produced.

This article proposes the expansion of our view on social innovations, considering the thematic literature and establishing a bridge between this and that found in the field. The work reviews the literature produced on social innovation and seeks to understand the relationship between the literature and the actuation of Rio de Janeiro's innovations in practice. Thus, aspects were identified in which the practice of social innovations in the city does not correspond to the findings in the literature, enabling the identification of areas to be deepened in future studies.

It is understood that such differences mirror the local contexts and structures, to some extent translating the reality from where the phenomenon is looked at.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

This qualitative, descriptive, exploratory research was conducted between June and November 2019, in five stages: (1) a literature review, (2) a public call for experiences through social networks by filling out a digital form; (3) the selection of 20 initiatives; (4) the elaboration of a semi-structured

<sup>1</sup> This project was funded through a GCRF Sustainable Partnership Award from the University of Sheffield.



script based on the literature review, conducting and analyzing 20 interviews; (5) a workshop to present and discuss the results with researchers, public managers and leaders of the researched initiatives.

Stage 1, a review of the literature, was constructed by identifying the main concepts and cases of social innovation. To achieve this, the *Scielo*, *Web of Science*, *Scopus*, *Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)*, *CAPES* and *Google Scholar* databases were used. The search keywords were “*inovação social*” for articles in Portuguese, while for international articles, “*social innovation*” associated with “*digital*” was used, due to the large number of publications on the topic compared with those in the Portuguese language. Brazilian articles were also searched for in the annals of Latin American events on related topics, given the small number found in the databases mentioned above.

Articles that reported on practical cases of innovation were identified, including the role of public and state policies, the use of technology, the management of innovations and the engagement of actors, in addition to the review of the literature on social innovation. These data were compiled using the Zotero reference manager software.

Stage 2, the public call, was organized over the internet on social networks: Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, through personal accounts of teachers, students and leaders of social innovations who are partners in the research. This stage mapped 53 initiatives in 16 days, in September 2019. To respond to the mapping, those responsible for the initiatives filled out a descriptive online form: objectives, actors involved, location of the action, and its main characteristics.

In stage 3, 20 initiatives were selected according to the diversity criterion (duration since founding; its focus on the type of innovation - social, environmental, and/or digital; legal constitution; gender and age of the leaders; size of the initiative) and by categorization elaborated *a priori* in relation to the UN Sustainable Development Goals - orientation of the research funding provider: income generation and inclusion; sustainable cities and communities; sustainable production and consumption; reducing poverty and inequality (including gender); combating violence; access to health and citizenship.

In stage 4, a semi-structured interview script was developed, which was applied to spokespersons from the 20 initiatives selected. The script was based on a literature review and addressed the following topics: sociodemographic profile; functioning of innovation, this is, its objectives and results, engagement, relationship with other actors, relationship with public policies, use of technology; perception of social innovation and its relationship with sustainability; management, finances, and funding. Data on these 20 initiatives was collected through an interview lasting an average of one hour, which was recorded, transcribed and analyzed.

A one-day workshop, held in November 2019, presented and discussed the main findings and involved 30 participants, including teachers, students, public managers and representatives of the initiatives mapped in stage 3.

### 3 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

As a matter of ordering the readings, the articles were separated, identifying them as productions from developed or developing (Latin America) countries. This is reflected in the way they are presented in this section and is justified by the length of experience and publications on the subject in developed and developing countries, which offer different contexts and structures for the performance of social innovators, whether through research, programs or various supports, as shown below.

In general, the literature on social innovation highlights different perspectives and shows how the theme articulates its principal elements differently in diversified contexts (BEPA, 2011; Bignetti, 2011; Juliani, 2014; Lopes *et al.*, 2015; Afonso, Cipolla, Joly & Bartholo, 2015).



For the Bureau of European Policy Advisers (BEPA, 2011), the academic literature on social innovation lists authors from the European Union, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, as the first to reflect on the relationship between innovation and its social impacts. This theme was placed on the agenda, however, from the perspective of work innovation and the possibility of considering the development of social and community structures through the reformulation of the logic implicit within it. Moreover, it illuminated the key role of the entrepreneur in the process of social innovation, that of seeking to analyze forms of interaction, relationships, and social organizations (BEPA, 2011; Lopes *et al.*, 2015). It is also stated that “(...) many of the organisations concerned are solely dependent on public funding” (BEPA, 2011, p.26), and that “social enterprises, independently of their business form, fall under the Commission’s enterprise policy to promote entrepreneurship” (BEPA, 2011, p.93).

BEPA (2011) defines the concept of social innovation, based on the ideas of Cloutier (2003), as being new responses to social demands that affect the processes of social interactions and are intended to improve human well-being. This concept reinforces a lesser concern with profit generation and a greater concern with the generation of value and social impact.

The same document emphasized that social innovations happen in various ways and can be of macro or micro dimensions, proposed by structural or local initiatives, and with differing levels of articulation. Mulgan, Tucker, Ali and Sanders (2007) also portray that social innovations presuppose the critical role of three main actors: individuals, organizations and social movements, whose articulation guarantees resources for long-term structural changes.

Mostly, the perspective on social innovation transmits constructions on the concept based on large research centers, official documents, and practices promoted through public policies associated with government stimuli (Bignetti, 2011; Fougère, Segercrantz & Seeck, 2017; Jessop, Hamdouch & Moulaert, 2013; Schubert, 2019).

The development of the theme and approaches to social innovation is strengthened in the context of the global north in countries like Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Switzerland. In these countries, social innovation has surpassed the academic sphere. It has also been the object of studies and practices in research centers, public institutions, foundations, and civil society organizations (BEPA, 2011; Bignetti, 2011; Juliani, 2014; Parente, Marcos & Diogo, 2014).

Bignetti (2011) provides examples of focus on the subject in the context of the global north, such as the universities of Harvard, Stanford, and Brown in the United States; the *Centre de Recherche sur les Innovations Sociales* (CRISES) in Canada; The Business School for the World (INSEAD) in France, and the University of Cambridge in England. The author describes the emergence of government projects in Europe like the Emerging User Demands for Sustainable Solutions (EMUDE), Consumer Citizenship Network (CNN), Creative Communities for Sustainable Lifestyles, and Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship in Social Services (ISESS). In the same vein, Parente *et al.* (2014) show the emergence of institutions like Ashoka in 1980, Echoing Green in 1987, the Skoll Foundation in 1999, all in the US, and the Schwab Foundation in Switzerland in 1998.

Regarding European public policies, Ludvig, Zivojinovic and Hujala (2019) presented programs that support and articulate different sectors in favor of social innovation: the European Social Fund (ESF), for generating income and jobs; the *Liaison entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale* (LEADER) program, which seeks to promote local actors for the development of rural areas; the European Forum on Urban Forestry (EFUF), to promote sustainable development of forests; the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), which seeks to improve social, economic and environmental conditions in rural areas; the Social Innovation Fund (SIF), aimed at social innovation and entrepreneurship initiatives; and the Social Investment Package (SIP), in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.



In the academic field, one study by Damke, Motke, Gomes and Perlim (2016) showed the countries that most published on social innovation in the preceding 20 years. Among the 464 articles analyzed, more than 70% were published in the global north. The list of the top 10 countries resulting from the study is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1 – Global scientific production on social innovation from 1996 to 2015**

Countries/Territories	Publications	% of 464
United States	73	15.73
United Kingdom	59	12.71
Italy	47	10.12
Canada	39	8.40
Spain	34	7.32
China	34	7.32
Germany	30	6.46
Holland	25	5.38
Australia	23	4.95
Romania	21	4.52

Translated from: Damke *et al.* (2016)

In this study, Brazil appears in sixteenth place with seven publications (1.51% of 464).

According to BEPA (2011), the management, promotion, and technologies of social innovations in the global north are based on practical articulations between different sectors – public, private, non-profit organizations and the informal economy – that contribute to and favor the success of these initiatives in this context. The document provides an example of social innovations in the areas of health, education, social integration, and the environment. As examples, we can mention the *Projeto Geração* [Generation Project] in Portugal, which works to prevent school dropout in the suburb of Lisbon, promoting activities by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation associated with the city hall of Amadora and the company L’Oreal, in addition to the support of local schools, churches and other organizations in the community. Another social innovation, in the same document, which deals with school dropout, is the Second-chance schools project, supported by local organizations and authorities related to the European Commission. All the aforementioned initiatives received support in the management, promotion, use of technology, and financial sustainability from different sectors of the economy and social actors. Thus, in practice, we discern structures forged to foster and provide support for social innovation in these countries.

In the context of the global south, the discussion on social innovation and its practices is only initiated in academic circles in the early 2000s. There is a low academic production on the subject observed and the use of authors from the south in these productions is virtually zero (Afonso *et al.*, 2015; Da Silva, 2012). Specifically in Brazil, Afonso *et al.* (2015) and Teodósio and Comini (2012) portray that the theme emerges only at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

There are also the reviews of the literature published by Bignetti (2011) and Juliani (2014), who examine academic papers on the theme, Lopes *et al.* (2015) who discuss social innovation and managerial innovation, Bittencourt, Marconatto, Cruz and Raufflet (2016), who conceptualize social innovation, Damke *et al.* (2016) who identify the main authors, countries, languages of publication



and most relevant topics on the theme, and Bolzan, Bittencourt and Martins (2019) who discuss the question of the scale of social innovations, through a bibliometric analysis, whose objective was map studies on the scalability of social innovation, conducted on the CAPES and EBSCOHost portals.

Faced with the perspective of developing countries, Caron (2007) stated that social innovation is related to development alternatives for communities and individuals, focused on the search for the realization of individual potential and an improved level of quality of life and well-being. Afonso *et al.* (2015) indicates the authors who conceptualize and discuss social innovation in Latin America: Cruz Filho, 2006; Otero, 2006; Finkelievich, 2007; Caron, 2007; Herrera, 2008; Bartholo, Cipolla and Bursztyn, 2009; Rover, 2011; França Filho, 2012; Cajaiba-Santana, 2014; Joly, 2015; Cipolla and Bartholo, 2014; Pereira, 2014; Baker Botelho, Egrejas and Bartholo, 2014; Churches, Bursztyn and Bartholo, 2013.

Based on a section of Brazilian authors, Afonso *et al.* (2015) assume that in this reality social innovations present the following characteristics: a) they establish new relational standards; b) present ways to solve problems in everyday life; c) they are references to new lifestyles and more sustainable ways of life; d) may or may not be based on new technologies; e) emerge from community-based initiatives; f) they are unstable and spread by contagion and not by imposition; g) they can be born and die without ever becoming institutionalized; h) they establish new operating models based on actors and their interrelationships as social resources.

Bignetti (2011) relates social innovations to the fight against problems and inequalities established in Brazil and highlights that these are small-scale movements given the size of the accumulation and the complexity of socioeconomic and environmental problems, fruits of the absence or negligence of the state and even the market, as seen below:

“Examples of initiatives to support needy communities are countless, but the results, given the scarcity of resources and given the magnitude of the problem, they are still modest. Voluntary actions, social action groups, solidarity economy initiatives, NGOs, and many others proliferate, and success stories, mostly on a small scale, are reported in the media. Official programs to combat illiteracy, hunger, drugs and chronic diseases have alleviated the suffering of needy populations. Social movements seek to fill gaps left by the state’s retraction or inaction. Evidently, the complexity of the problems accumulated by decades of marginalization has countless causes and few solutions. Social innovation emerges as one of the ways to seek viable alternatives for the future of human society” (BIGNETTI, 2011, p. 4).

In this scenario, the author understands social innovation as the result of knowledge applied to social needs, through the participation and cooperation of the local actors involved, generating new and lasting solutions for social groups, communities, or society in general. Bolzan *et al.* (2019) further add that social innovation can arise from unpretentious initiatives, but that improve the quality of life and transform reality. In addition to these, Lopes *et al.* (2015) discuss how social innovation is composed of values specific to a context or need, and Parente *et al.* (2014) reinforce that social innovations empower the individual and upset the balance of power relations as social innovation “is understood as a process of transforming the patterns of response to social needs (...) as well as with the power and resource distribution structure” (Parente, Marcos & Diogo. 2014, p.250).

In the context of developing countries, many authors - Latin authors - (Caron, 2007; Bignetti, 2011; Cajaiba-Santana, 2014; Afonso *et al.*, 2015; Juliani, 2014; Bolzan *et al.*, 2019), address how social innovation brings prominence to the articulations of civil society and discern the absence of public and state policies in the context of social innovation, unlike other authors, that show an important role in the state and in public policies promoting social innovation (BEPA, 2011; Jessop *et al.* 2013; Fougère *et al.*, 2017; Ludvig *et al.*, 2019; Schubert, 2019).



In Latin America, as a consequence of the absence of the state and public policies (Bignetti, 2011), management, the use of technology, and the longevity of these social innovations are exclusively dependent on the articulations of civil society and their actuation over time, which are impaired due to the lack of necessary resources and technologies that social innovation actions cannot provide alone (Caron, 2007; Bignetti, 2011; Cajaiba-Santana, 2014; Afonso *et al.*, 2015; Juliani, 2014; Bolzan *et al.*, 2019). Bolzan *et al.* (2019) identify the management and organization capacity of the actors, the training and qualification of the actors, internal and external communication, and process and strategy planning and financial viability as fundamental resources for the scale and full actuation of social innovations. For the authors, government support and articulation with partners is extremely important in this process, since they enable a multisectoral articulation, which the authors indicate as the basis for the success, durability, and growth of these social innovations (BEPA, 2011; Bignetti, 2011; Juliani, 2014; Bolzan *et al.* 2019), while their absence can create barriers and difficulties in actuation.

## 4 FIELD RESULTS

This article presents field results subdivided into three aspects that most drew our attention when viewed from the perspective of the review of the literature: (1) actors and engagement; (2) the relationship with public policies; (3) management and technology. Although policies are derived from the state, the field research revealed that the relationship with the state and public policies is indirect, when it exists. There is even a desire by social innovations to influence these (or press for measures to be taken). Therefore, in the results, we separated the actors (prominent civil society and the government) from public policies.

### 4.1 Actors and engagement

According to the field research, in the context of Rio de Janeiro, social innovations are guided by local spheres through articulations that mostly involve civil society, emerging in a community-based context, which is explained by Afonso *et al.* (2015) as one of the characteristics of social innovations in Brazil. Furthermore, it is also observed that they are small-scale initiatives, arising out of a need or an absence, which is highlighted by Bignetti (2011) and justified by the accumulation and complexity of the social, economic, and environmental problems that affect their actors and territories.

This context is described in the interviews of social innovations in Rio de Janeiro, and it is quite different from the context pointed out by BEPA (2011), in which there is the presence of civil society organizations in the innovations, but there is state funding and public policies to foster social innovations. In Rio de Janeiro, the main actors who engage in these innovations are members of civil society articulated in the territories of the actions with the aim of minimizing latent local problems, including homophobia, xenophobia, a lack of sanitation, social vulnerability, and racism, as explained by interviewees 1, 2, 4 and 9, below:

*(...) our greatest audience for interaction is civil society (I1).*

*Yes. We have a lot of relationships with civil society (I2).*

*Civil society is our greatest relationship (I4).*

*(...) I'm deeply moved when I follow the stories of the women who get involved in our project: it's what drives me (I9).*

The articulation of civil society in social innovation is central for these projects to take place



and pursue their objectives. It is in the relationship between the people who participate in the projects – new relational patterns (Afonso *et al.*, 2015) – that these actors empower themselves and believe in changes and the possibility that they can make them (Lopes *et al.*, 2015; Parente, Marcos & Diogo, 2014), surpassing a possible barrier in the absence of the state (Bignetti, 2011). Contrary to that described in the literature, the presence of the state is not an essential element for achieving these actions, although it is desirable. If, on the one hand, the actors resent the absence of the state, on the other, they feel empowered to work without it. In fact, the empowerment of these actors can, at least in their perceptions, upset the balance of power relations (Lopes *et al.*, 2015; Bignetti, 2011), given that some projects claim they aspire to pressure the state with their actions.

It is worth noting that in most initiatives the state is seen as an absent and/or negligent actor, therefore, initiatives emerge to mitigate problems arising from this situation. This content dialogues with the studies by Bignetti (2011) that pinpoint the absence of the state as a reality of social innovations and one of the causes of their emergence, as mentioned by interviewees 2, 3, 9 and 14:

*We have no relationship with public authorities (I2).  
From the moment that it [the state] is unable to give me an education, I have to provide this for my community (I3).  
It's a relationship of pressuring, of demoralizing. Anything goes (I9).  
It's a relationship of demanding improvements in the quality of life, out of respect for basic rights with regard to the citizen. A small part of our mission is bringing the public authorities into the dialogue and making them see what the favela looks like beyond the stereotypes of what is put out in mainstream media, beyond the stereotype of what it's like to be a 'favelado' (I14).*

This reality differs from studies in developed countries, which pinpoint the state as a preponderant actor in the development of social innovations (BEPA, 2011; Fougère *et al.*, 2017; Jessop *et al.*, 2013; Schubert, 2019).

Some of the initiatives also mention relationships with private organizations, mostly through the provision of services, awareness of their causes in companies and, sometimes, fundraising for specific projects, like those mentioned, for example, by interviewees 2, 6, 14 and 15:

*We dialogue a lot with private institutions (...) we're starting to dialogue with private universities (...) there's a lot of demand by private schools (...) in general, it's really a client relationship (I2).  
Sometimes we do things together with companies, in the sense of providing services to companies (I6).  
The Jornal has a supporter, a [private] financier (I14).  
There are initiatives to talk with [private] companies in order to work on sensitivity, training, to work on information campaigns, which raise awareness in these companies so that the formal job market changes their manner of recruiting people, considering LGBT people, especially transsexuals and transvestites, as apt and professional, and incorporate these people into their staff (...) (I15).*

## 4.2 Public policies for social innovation

From the reality of the social innovations analyzed in this work, no direct benefits from public policies were perceived. On the contrary, as described in Actors and engagement (4.1), they understand their work as empowerment to create and promote pressure for policy-making. The quotes from interviewees 1 and 4, provide evidence of this fact.

*(...) from public policy, for us there's no interference. We have people for public policy (...) the intention is to construct a database with which we can interfere in public sanitation policies*



*in the city (I1).*

*We also think of the reach of influence, somehow, so that these policies are created (I4).*

The absence of a state (both for innovations and the lives of vulnerable Brazilians) is, precisely, the engine for actors to articulate themselves, engaged, in the sense of creating solutions that they see as necessary in their contexts. In other words, the absence of state and policies (Bignetti, 2011) is precisely the impetus for these social innovations, where the process is the exact opposite of the logic used by other authors.

Furthermore, as mentioned in Actors and engagement (4.1), this absence empowers them.

Despite this, when questioned further concerning the relationship, even when indirect, with broader public policies and remarks about affirmative policies by the interviewer, (such as quotas in universities, for example), some interviewees cited influences – stressing that these were indirect. They referred to affirmative action policies, stimulus policies for basic education and culture, and the attempt to make abortion prohibition unconstitutional. Interviewees 2, 4, 5 and 8 show this influence in their discourses:

*For the time being, indirectly, we have some relationship with public policies in the strong rise of financial education within basic education (I2).*

*At the end of 2017, an allegation of non-compliance with fundamental precept 442 was brought to the Federal Supreme Court, it's actually a legal document that declares to the Supreme Court that criminalizing abortion is unconstitutional (I4).*

*Public policies on affirmative action are fully associated. I think it's, perhaps, the main one. There are also those on culture (I5).*

*Affirmative actions. The university was fundamental. Based on the university is how we sanction our work (I8).*

Public policies and government incentives are perceived as far removed and as an indirect influence. In addition, the actions of social innovation initiatives that involve the need for dialogue with the state, directly or indirectly, are seen as aversively, bureaucratically or as difficult, as expressed in the quotes in section 4.1, Actors and engagement.

When establishing a parallel between literature and practice in the city of Rio de Janeiro, we realize that in practice there is an absence of the state and public policies directly linked to the theme, unlike what is shown in a part of the literature, in which it is stated that there are structural bases in public policies to promote social innovation, policies that are portrayed in some studies, such as those by Fougère *et al.* (2017) and Ludvig *et al.* (2019), in addition to counting on the support of actions established by public and private organizations (Mulgan *et al.*, 2007; BEPA, 2011) and large research and academic development centers (Bignetti, 2011; Juliani, 2014; Damke *et al.*, 2016).

### **4.3 Management and technology**

The absence of the state (Bignetti, 2011), of research (Afonso *et al.*, 2015) and of direct public policies, may be the reason for the lack of resources and structure in the exercise of social innovations in the context of Rio de Janeiro. In the city, these actions are like forms of resistance, almost exclusively involving civil society and with no formal knowledge of management techniques and tools that favor them, as evidenced by the interviewee 1:

*We do things without knowing whether they'll work and that there's no reference for, with no previous experience (I1).*



In this scenario, these initiatives are limited in their growth and/or densification (Bolzan *et al.*, 2019). The research shows that training for the actors is almost nonexistent, the planning of processes and strategies is limited, and external communication is restricted, as shown in the examples of statements by interviewees 1, 2, 6, 10 and 11:

*(...) we chose these tools because, first, they have limitations that are known to people (I1). We currently use Excel. It's all done manually in Excel (I2).  
(...) the training is intuitive, by trial and error (I6).  
My schedule is all on the wall, we do it by Trello offline (I6).  
Our external communication is solely transmitted by WhatsApp (I10).  
I'm a normal person, who had an idea and decided to put it into practice without a financial structure for it. Not having structure is what bothers me the most (I11).*

Regarding technology, most respondents use social networks, software, apps, and tools that are free and widely accepted. The main reasons are cost-benefit, practicality, and reach. Some interviewees, like 18 and 20, describe how they depend on technology, through social networks and the internet, for communication and business development.

*On the website it is a common sale, like on any other website. It is self-explanatory. Through Instagram I can maintain direct communication with the customers (...) They send an email asking about sizes, asking if there are other items. The internet's a very important tool (I18).  
All my women friends were on Facebook. I thought it was simpler, for me, to set up this group on Facebook, since they all already had accounts on Facebook. For the sake of practicality. There are women from other parts of the world on Facebook, who are my friends, people I've met, who I became friends with and who were already on my Facebook. I find it very practical (I20).*

Many initiatives are limited to social networks and/or superficial use of the internet and do not seek to expand their technological capacity due to lack of time or interest, as explained in statements by interviewees 4, 9 and 20:

*We have a lot of resistance to technology because it means more time and more work. At the moment, we have many demands (I4).  
(...) [I don't use it] I'm from another generation. We don't come from this world. I'm a filmmaker. I'm here on an impulse (I9).  
Only Facebook, for now. As I told you, I don't have much time. I'm finishing my thesis. As soon as I finish this thesis, I intend to dedicate more time to this group, because I think it's a very important group from the point of view of the integrity of women today (I20).*

Limited knowledge and use of management tools and outdated technology cause difficulties in the durability and development of these initiatives, since these are essential factors according to Bolzan *et al.* (2019). This creates constraints on growth, scale, and even on the emergence of new initiatives (Bolzan *et al.*, 2019).

## 5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Based on the literature review, this work sought to analyze how the aspects highlighted in the studies reverberate within the 20 social innovations selected from a mapping of 53 initiatives in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Differences in the perception of the concept, context and performance of social innovation can be identified. Interviews in the field allow us to affirm that initiatives in Rio de Janeiro cannot be viewed exclusively from the perspective of knowledge generated in developed countries, under



penalty of disqualifying them, and that, on the contrary, they are rich, powerful, and aligned with the context where they originate.

The main findings of this exploratory research were related to Actors and engagement, Public policies for social innovation and Management and technology. According to the field research, in the context of Rio de Janeiro, social innovations are guided by local spheres through articulations that mostly involve civil society, emerging in a community-based context. The actors interviewed needed to be encouraged to realize the indirect influence of public policies on their actions. Prior to the researchers' encouragement, they claimed to have no influence from public policies on what they do, but, on the contrary, their absence was what made them idealize and develop their projects. The third finding is the little or no use of management tools and technology beyond social networks, little management knowledge and the constant choice for what they already know or, concerning technology, what is available for free.

Although we worked within a research universe of only 20 initiatives, as an exploratory research, it is possible to perceive the influence of the different scenarios, possibilities of access to resources and scientifically produced knowledge from their different perspectives. In Rio de Janeiro, public policies and the state are removed from this local reality (Bignetti, 2011) and are viewed negatively by social innovators. Thus, the basis of social innovation is guided by the articulations of civil society, which has the motivation and need to solve local problems (Bignetti, 2011), leveraged on the desire to improve reality and, often, to do even what the state or the market has no interest in, but which they deem necessary to improve the quality of life of the population. Thus, they become stronger and, through their actions, try to interfere in power relations and to confront the state itself (Bignetti, 2011; Lopes, 2015; Afonso, 2015). Still, it is noteworthy that, although they are rich and powerful, as they arise in a context of absence and scarcity of resources, they can be harmed in the spectrum of their performance and in some intention of growth.

Importantly, most academic production on the subject, as shown in the article, is built on the reality of developed countries, which influences and differs them from the context found in the city of Rio de Janeiro in relation to government structure, public policies, large research centers, as well as access to education, knowledge about management and technological tools that can provide them with the necessary support for better performance.

Thus, research is suggested that specifically addresses the concept, understanding and practice of social innovation in their contexts in developing countries, contextualized in the local reality. Specific studies on the use of technology, training and management in social innovations in these contexts are also important to enrich the thematic literature, considering the structural differences in different contexts.



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1. Definition of research problem	√	√	
2. Development of hypotheses or research questions (empirical studies)	√	√	√
3. Development of theoretical propositions (theoretical work)	√		√
4. Theoretical foundation / Literature review	√		√
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8. Analysis and interpretation of data	√	√	√
9. Critical revision of the manuscript	√		√
10. Manuscript writing	√		√
11. Other (please specify)			

### Conflict of Interest

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