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# Social innovation and the promotion of local economic development

Local  
economic  
development

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this study is to propose a multidimensional view of social innovation.

**Design/methodology/approach** – It offers a detailed analysis of the activities performed by ADEL (Agência de Desenvolvimento Econômico Local) – a regional non-governmental organization located in one of the poorest regions of Brazil – which is succeeding in engaging young people in the promotion of local development. The case was analysed drawing on the dimensions structured by researchers of one of the main centres of social innovation in the world, the Centre de Recherche sur Les Innovations Sociales (CRISES) based in Canada.

**Findings** – The results found characterize ADEL as a social innovation based on the dimensions of social innovation described in the CRISES' conceptual encyclopaedia (Tardif and Harrison, 2005). The results highlight the singularities of the case studied, which allowed the elaboration of a revisited table of dimensions proposed by the CRISES' researchers.

**Research limitations/implications** – For future studies, using the CRISES' table as reference of analysis for other social innovations, the possibility suggested is the quantitative exploration of these dimensions.

**Originality/value** – The originality of this article lies in the fact that it presents a representative social innovation for the Brazilian semi-arid.

**Keywords** Local development, Dimensions, Social innovation

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

Developing actions to generate alternatives that contribute with the improvement in well-being for low-income individuals is essential for reducing social disparities. Social innovation emerges as the result of knowledge applied to social needs, through the participation and cooperation of the actors involved, resulting in new and long-lasting solutions for social groups, communities or society as a whole, according to Bignetti (2011). To Butkevičiene (2009), social innovations might be considered means to create social change, fostering mechanisms to deal with different sorts of problems.



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Cajaíba-Santana (2012) affirmed that the specific creative process for this kind of innovation lies in the way new ideas manifested within social actions lead to change and convey new alternatives as well as practices for social groups. Tidd *et al.* (2008) reinforce that opportunities for innovation appear in as much as we rethink the way we observe reality.

In this sense, it is understood that as particularities in the Brazilian northeast, in its semiarid region and in the state of Ceará are observed, it is possible to identify opportunities that enable life-changing conditions for its inhabitants.

According to Mattos (2011), the rural space in Brazil undergoes significant and incontestable transformations, which reveal new forms of sociability led by a network of social actors. These changes contribute for the area to be no longer understood through the homogenizing view, as the counterpoint of the urban space and exclusively related to agricultural production. The author highlighted that the academic interest and further increase in the value of rural environment occurs because of the search for ways to address to the urban and environmental crises as well as to regional and social inequalities, given the exhaustion of big metropolises, which bring about the degradation of life quality.

Concerning this context, Andrew and Klein (2010) pointed out to the persistence of “perverse problems” in society that seem to be untreatable by simple public policies as the main drivers for social innovation. In this sense, alternatives on social innovation in communities in the semiarid region of Ceará would present new opportunities to reach the improvement of life quality, and to enable the establishment of new relationships among its inhabitants.

Based on the perspective of change introduced, this study proposes, holding as reference the table presented by Tardif and Harrisson (2005), to identify the existing and emerging dimensions of social innovation by studying the *Agência de Desenvolvimento Local* (ADEL – Agency of Local Development in Portuguese) and its main programmes. Moreover, the table is built on five analytical dimensions used for identifying social innovations (transformation, innovative character, innovation, actors and processes).

The table was chosen as a tool to investigate the dimensions of social innovation because of its analytical range regarding many previous studies. Moreover, the work comes from the *Centre de Recherche sur Les Innovations Sociales* (CRISES), a Canadian institution renowned worldwide for its efforts on social innovation. Besides that, from the defined reference, it was possible to visualize emerging dimensions coming from a very different context. In addition, the Tardif and Harrisson's (2005) table was used in Brazil as an instrument in the study conducted by Maurer (2011) in which she analysed social innovations in the craftwork sector in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul.

Regarding what has been presented, this study proposes to answer the following research question:

*RQ1.* Which dimensions and variables for social innovation emerge from the study of the activities conducted by the ADEL in the semiarid region of Ceará?

This research contributes for the academic debate, as it takes into account the dimensions of social innovation by analysing closely an intrinsic case (STAKE, 1998). The relevance of such case is justified by the representativity it has in its region. Moreover, the identification effort enabled a dense, contextual and dimensional analysis of this social innovation.

The case study was used as research strategy, through in-field data collection (semistructured interviews) and using other sources to corroborate with the information obtained. Finally, data were treated with the content analysis technique using resources from the NVIVO 10 software for qualitative research.

This article is structured in five sections. After this introduction, the second section explains the theoretical backgrounds, where discussions related to the field of social innovation and the table that served as basis for this study are introduced. The third section shows the methodological procedures that guided the research execution, besides the steps for data collection and analysis. The fourth section evidences the study's results and, in the fifth section, the concluding remarks are presented.

## 2. Social innovation

Social innovation has arisen as a new theme in the study of innovation. It has been considered an emerging research field in which there has been no consensual definition. Such fact contributes to widen discussions between scholars and practitioners about how the concept should be defined and which terms should be used, once it is commonly, but not consistently used in the literature (Moulaert *et al.*, 2005; Bignetti, 2011; Ferreira, 2012). According to Moulaert *et al.* (2005), Schumpeter was the first who underlined the necessity for social innovation in parallel with technological innovation to ensure economic efficiency.

André and Abreu (2006) affirmed that recent research keeps social innovations away from technological ones, attributing to the former non-commercial nature and collective character, besides the intention to transform social relations.

Social innovation, whether it be a policy, product or process might be situated in different realms of society. Innovating social relations does not exclude the existence of market-related relationships, but it has the objective to regulate and oversee these relationships to satisfy social needs and not only to develop commercial capital. Thus, it is in social innovation, and in its relationship with different forms of capital, where wealth expansion occurs (Hillier *et al.*, 2004).

Analysing the definitions of social innovation offered by several scholars, Cloutier (2003) concluded that, in general, social innovation is a “new response” to an unsatisfactory social situation. The author stresses that social innovation holds this title because it regards people and/or communities' well-being, defining itself as a long-lasting action or change destined to develop individuals, territories or businesses. Social innovation does not assume a particular shape; it might be procedural, organizational or institutional. According to Neumeier (2012), social innovations have characteristics that, when compared with previous practices, hold distinct forms of diffusion and stabilization, going beyond temporary trends, and with effects influencing future development of society.

Moulaert (2009) affirmed that social innovation means not only the reproduction of social capital considering the implementation of development programmes but also implies in protection against fragmentation/segmentation and the increase in value of territorial and community specificities by organizing and mobilizing excluded or disadvantaged groups and territories. Complementing this affirmation, Cajiaba-Santana (2012) emphasized that results of social innovation might be multiple, to be revealed as new institutions, new social movements, new social practices or different structures of collaborative work.

Neumeier (2012) stated that social innovation takes place when a network of actors decides to revamp the way things are performed in a determined context, resulting in tangible improvements for the actors involved. As an example, the author points out to the rural development context where tangible improvements might occur in the economy of a determined region, in general life conditions or in public goods.

Moulaert *et al.* (2013) understood that social innovations are presented as progressive acceptable solutions to problems related to exclusion, deprivation, alienation, lack of welfare and to actions that contribute positively and meaningfully for human progress.

Regarding the importance of reapplying social innovations, Pozzebon and Van Heck (2006) verified three main propositions to deal with the transference of global technologies: the first of them highlights the relevance of paying attention to differences between the context where a technology or methodology was created and developed and to the context in which it is intended to be applied. The smaller the gap, the easier will be the local adaptation. The second proposition considers the relationships of mutual influence, where contextual and sociocultural aspects are taken into account, not neglecting the generic knowledge of the ones involved in the process. The third and last proposition brings forward that the nature of local adaptations varies according to each culture, as people get involved in local adaptations in different ways. Pozzebon (2014) believes that these propositions also apply to local adaptations of social innovation initiatives.

In this sense, Pozzebon (2014) suggests the adaption, to the field of social innovation, of a previous framework, from Pozzebon and Van Heck (2006), inspired in the work developed by Kambil and Van Heck (2002) called process/stakeholder framework. This proposal was developed in the context of auctions of Dutch flowers, but it was later adapted to other scenarios.

According to Pozzebon (2014), this new framework aimed to assist researchers, social entrepreneurs and managers of social projects to deal with the reapplication of social innovations in different contexts, focusing on providing identifications that could contribute to increase their chances of success. The author highlights that the underlying logic of the framework lies in the fact that any social innovation is an activity that comprises different groups hoping to realize that the results are fair and equitable. All these groups must identify a real benefit in the implementation of the social innovation presented.

The steps to be followed to implement the model proposed by Pozzebon (2014) include:

- *Identifying key processes*, those that are essential for the social innovation to function properly in the context studied. Pozzebon (2014) foregrounds that the identification of processes is the greatest challenge to apply the proposed framework because there is the difficulty to find a universal or generic way to perform such identifications. According to the social innovation in question, it becomes necessary to seek an adequate model to the identification of these central processes.
- *Identifying necessary local adaptations* after social groups and key-processes were outlined. The content of each table cell must be assessed carefully. In this step, it is important to perform a series of meetings with each relevant social group, if possible, in sessions in which all members can indeed participate. The objective is to comprehend how these subjects understand each key-process, leading to identify possible local adaptations and probable consequences of implementing the initiative in the lives of these subjects: What are the costs and benefits? How to maximize benefits? These are the questions pointed out by Pozzebon (2014).

- *Evaluate the final balance for each social group and each key-process identified* after fulfilling the whole table. In this stage, Pozzebon (2014) argues that if it is viable, the researcher should plan a new series of meetings with representatives from the groups interviewed. If it is not possible to make new meetings, the researcher can name possible adaptations for reapplication based on a prediction and, after such identification is carried out, validate it by listening to other groups and stakeholders.

Intersecting all the information gathered about key-processes according to the social groups heard will enable to identify convergences and divergences that might influence reapplication. In the case that identified divergences are not avoidable, the reapplication may have a high risk of failure, and this conclusion might or not be done after the evaluation with the relevant groups of the benefits/advantages/disadvantages or costs for each group.

*Offering a final recommendation based on the identifications performed*, the final analysis of table elements will indicate if it is sustainable to reapply the social innovation in the context studied.

These identifications, made before reapplying the social innovative initiative, can contribute to tackle the challenges that may emerge along the process, helping to save time, efforts and investments.

Concerning what has been exposed, the definition of social innovation chosen here was the one offered by the CRISES (CRISES, 2012). This choice was motivated by the fact that the table produced by scholars connected to the Centre has proven to be a reliable tool to analyse the dimensions of social innovation. In this sense, it was also used in a previous study performed in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul by Maurer (2011).

According to the information contained in its website, the Centre is defined as a Canadian, interuniversitarian and multidisciplinary organization that gathers researchers from eight affiliated institutions: the University of Québec in Montreal, the University of Québec in Outaouais, the University of Laval, the University of Sherbrooke, the Concordia University, *Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales de Montreal* (HEC Montreal), the University of Montreal and the University of Québec in Chicoutimi. CRISES' members study and analyse social innovations as well as transformations based on three complementary axes: development and territory, life conditions and labour and employment. Moreover, CRISES develops several research projects, provides housing and training for postdoctoral students as well as organizes seminars and symposiums, which allow sharing and disseminating new knowledge.

In this sense, the Centre's definition for social innovation corroborates with the understanding exposed by the authors mentioned here. To CRISES, social innovation is a process initiated by actors driven to respond to a social aspiration, to fulfil a need, to offer a solution or to seize an opportunity to change social relations, transforming a scenario or providing new cultural guidance for improving well-being and life conditions for communities.

### 3. Dimensions of analysis for social innovation

The understanding of social innovation allows the emergence of several classifications about its dimensions. Such dimensions are analysed in a singular way by researchers, observing specific contexts and previous studies about the topic, among other possibilities.

To reach our objectives, the classification presented by [Tardif and Harrisson \(2005\)](#) was highlighted, which was produced based on the selection of 49 articles published by CRISES' members. These papers were aligned with the three research axes the Centre follows. The scholars intended to verify the level of knowledge from papers connected with the Centre as well as the integration among researchers. Amid the investigations carried out, [Tardif and Harrisson \(2005\)](#) presented the table named "CRISES' Conceptual Encyclopaedia of Social Innovation" in which they defined five analytical dimensions to identify social innovations. The main categories were Transformations, Innovative Character, Innovation, Actors and Processes that have also been determined by [Maurer \(2011\)](#) as dimensions enabling the analysis of other social innovations. Although these scholars did not use the term "dimensions", it was also adopted here to operationalize this investigation.

These dimensions were revisited in the light of a specific Brazilian context. In this process, some particularities were sought in the context, using the table as reference. The conceptual encyclopaedia might be verified in the [Table I](#).

Regarding the *Transformation* dimension, [Tardif and Harrisson \(2005\)](#) treated the contextual changes taking place, emphasizing the conceptual crises, ruptures and discontinuities, in both macro and micro scales. Such scenarios were pointed as drivers for the emergence of social innovations, which would influence contextual economic aspects. Economic and social transformations compose two important analytical angles in this dimension.

| Dimension transformation                                 | Dimension innovative character | Dimension innovation | Dimension actors                          | Dimension process           |
|--|--------------------------------|----------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| <i>Micro-context</i>                                     | <i>Model</i>                   | <i>Scale</i>         | <i>Social</i>                             | <i>Mode of coordination</i> |
| Crisis   | Work                           | Local                | Movements                                 | Assessment                  |
| Rupture  | Development                    |                      | Cooperative/communities                   | Participation               |
| Discontinuity  | Governance                     | <i>Types</i>         | Civil society                             | Mobilization                |
| Structural modifications                                 | Quebec                         | Technical            | Unions                                    | Learning                    |
|  | <i>Economy</i>                 | Socio-technical      |   |                             |
|  |                                | Social               |   | <i>Means</i>                |
| <i>Economic</i>  | Knowing/knowledge              | Organizational       | <i>Organizations</i>                      | Partnerships                |
| Emergence  | Mixed                          | Institutional        | Companies                                 | Integration                 |
| Adaptation   | Social                         |                      | Social economy organizations              | Negotiation                 |
| Labour relations/relations of production and consumption | <i>Social Action</i>           | <i>Purpose</i>       | Collective organizations                  | Empowerment                 |
|  | Trials                         | Common good          | Recipients                                | Diffusion                   |
|  | Experiments                    | General interest     |   |                             |
|  | Policies                       | Collective interest  |   | <i>Restrictions</i>         |
| <i>Social</i>  | Programmes                     | Cooperation          | <i>Institutions</i>                       | Complexity                  |
| Re-composition   | Institutional arrangements     |                      | State                                     | Uncertainty                 |
| Reconstruction   | Social regulations             |                      | Identity                                  | Resistance                  |
| Exclusion/marginalization                                |                                |                      | Values and norms                          | Tension                     |
| Practice   |                                |                      |   | Commitment                  |
| Change   |                                |                      | <i>Intermediaries</i>                     | Institutional inflexibility |
| Social relations   |                                |                      | Committees                                |                             |
|  |                                |                      | Social networks of alliance of innovation |                             |

**Table I.**  
CRISES' conceptual  
encyclopaedia  
(dimensions of social  
innovation)

**Source:** Adapted from [Tardif and Harrisson \(2005\)](#), [Maurer \(2011\)](#), [Maurer and Silva \(2014\)](#)



To Tardif and Harrisson (2005), in the *Innovative Character* dimension, innovations would be responses to crises and the new solutions described are characterized as being novel or innovative depending on the conditions and means where they emerge. These innovations demand actors to implement new institutional arrangements and social norms. These new solutions would be designed as attempts or experiences in the new implementation stage. New programmes or public policies could promote, support or constrain the rise of innovative economic and social practices. This dimension is composed by three angles of analysis: Model, incorporated by social actions; Economy, the kind intended by the social innovation in question; and Social Action, encompassing initiatives, experiments and attempts that may lead to innovation.

Discussing the *Innovation* dimension, Tardif and Harrisson (2005) stressed and differed several kinds of experiments on social innovation: technical – an innovation that uses technology as an objective aiming to improve individuals' lives; sociotechnical – involving organizational interests along with social demands; social – to be developed by actors from civil society; organizational – originated within organizations; and institutional – coming from actions performed by the State. Social innovations might have as purpose: the common good, general interest, collective interest and cooperation. These authors also highlighted that social innovations vary at a local scale.

The process of innovation is evidenced in the *Actors* dimension, which is described as connected with collective learning, because of the variety of subjects and their characteristics. The prime objective in innovative project is that cooperation takes place among all actors as well as it assists negotiations and agreements (partnerships) to ensure “good governance”. The conditions for the participation of different actors are a fundamental problem. Thus, within this dimension, the multiple actors involved in the process of innovation and the relations established between them are taken into consideration.

At last, the *Process* dimension deals with the process related to the project impact. According to Tardif and Harrisson (2005), it is an essential tool and intrinsically linked with innovation. It aims at understanding the dynamics' complexity and uncertainty, its resistance and tension and the constraining institutional inflexibilities in the innovative process. In this regard, the modes of coordination and the means (relations set up between the parts) are checked, and these elements corroborate with the idea that the innovation process is consolidated with the collaboration among actors and with the restrictions on the social innovation implementation process that might affect and reduce the project potential. In accordance with Tardif and Harrisson (2005), process assessment is essential to identify restraining institutional inflexibilities for innovations and their diffusion.

Hence, these dimensions contemplate the social innovation process from its inception from a context to the assessment of implemented actions, a stage seeking the improvement of the practices adopted to enhance the reach of intended goals.

#### 4. Methodological procedures

As emphasized by Konstantatos *et al.* (2013), socially innovative initiatives are developed as a response to increasing inequalities and social exclusion processes, mobilizing several resources. In this sense, understanding these initiatives demands specific methodologies permitting the approximation and learning side by side as well as promoting that actors, objectives and practices get involved with one another.

Regarding its nature, this study was exploratory and descriptive. Furthermore, it was qualitative and adopted the case study as investigation strategy. Concerning the data



collection process, the case study strategy allowed the use of different sources of evidence (Yin, 2010). Thus, specific methods of data collection were used such as direct observation, documental research and semi-structured interviews.

According to Konstantatos *et al.* (2013), actors, practices, places and phenomena are investigated in the study of socially innovative initiatives, whenever possible, in their *loci* and researchers' efforts lead to comprehend it and to get him or her involved with meanings and priorities from the ones in the context studied.

Concerning the documental research, it holds several forms and has the objective to corroborate and validate collected evidences from other sources (Yin, 2010). Thus, besides the interviews, photographs, promotional non-governmental organization (NGO) images, institutional videos, textual material available online and TV-related material about ADEL were analysed as well. Most of the material was collected from ADEL's blog, its internet website and from ADEL's pages on Facebook.

The number of interviewees was defined based on the availability the NGO and its beneficiaries declared. Several appointments the interviewees had throughout the months were considered as the interviews were requested and performed.

Thus, eight interviews were carried out: five with members from the ADEL, in charge for activities' direction, organization, coordination and execution; two with benefitted youngsters; and one with a family farmer who was a beneficiary in one of the programmes developed by the organization. The information was collected in the municipalities of Fortaleza and Pentecoste in Ceará from November 2013 to February 2014. The number of interviews was defined according to respondents' availability. In this regard, ADEL intermediated and summoned possible respondents; nonetheless, considering the attainable circumstances, only eight interviewees happened to be available to participate.

The interview scripts were defined based on broader topics related to the dimensions of social innovation presented by Tardif and Harrisson (2005). According to these authors, interviewees would be advised to talk freely, followed by some complementary interventions when the need to deepen into a discussion in progress was identified.

Considering the qualitative character, data collection and analysis were conducted following the steps proposed by Creswell (2010): organization and preparation of data to be analysed; data reading; detailed analysis through a codification process; description of location, people and categories of analysis through the process codification; interpretation and extraction of meaning from the scrutinized data.

The data codification was operationalized via the software Nvivo® 10 for qualitative analysis. Each dimension in the table was analysed based on the collected sources. Hence, considering the research objectives, nodes were created in Nvivo®, and each node corresponded to a collection of references about one topic. Through the relationships established between data collected and nodes created, it was possible to bring together codified references from the sources.

Furthermore, this research sought to be reliable and trustworthy by consulting multiple sources, which were categorized through the Nvivo® 10 software, as well as by aligning the analysis with both the theoretical backgrounds and the methodological path that had been defined previously. These steps allowed to triangulate the data and to confer validity to the study. Considering such validity, it was also reached by the utilization of a table of dimensions from the encyclopaedia elaborated by scholars from CRISES. The same table had been used in the previous study authored by Maurer (2011), fact that also grant representativity for our analysis and discussion.

Within ADEL's case, two main programmes were sheltered, through which the NGO's develops its activities. These programmes hold singularities, whereas social innovations, because of this identification, three social innovations were considered within the case:

- (1) ADEL itself, the organization oriented to the economic development of the semiarid region;
- (2) the *Programa Jovem Empreendedor Rural* (PJER – Young Rural Entrepreneur Program in Portuguese), an initiative destined to youngsters; and
- (3) the *Programa Soluções Rurais* (Rural Solutions Program in Portuguese), an initiative oriented to family farms.

The decision was to follow such division to observe how the Dimensions would behave in each innovation and, thus, reaching the perception of the whole.

In this sense, the same nodes were created for all social innovations, 16 to each, in the following order: Name of the Innovation – Acronym for the Dimension – Angle of Analysis, according to the [Figure 1. Tardif and Harrison's \(2005\)](#) “small explanatory variables” were not added to avoid constraining the codification and to improve visualizing possible emerging contributions.

From the categorization of nodes, sources were analysed and information distributed within “social innovations” and dimensions, respectively. Aiming the best adjustment of such distribution, the content analysis technique was conducted, following the directions available in [Bardin \(2006\)](#). The technique was organized in three chronological poles: pre-analysis; exploration of the material; and treatment of results, inference and interpretation. Phrases presented by interviewees, newspapers articles, part of the visual material and video passages were outlined as record units or codification. In cases of ambiguity, as meanings related to codified parts were referenced, context units that allowed understanding the meaning of items and fitting them adequately were taken into account.

The resulting analysis from the table introduced by [Tardif and Harrison \(2005\)](#) did not consider the adhesion of works from all CRISES' research axes, or all specific questions approached in their papers. The authors stated that the proposal ([Table I](#)) was conducted based on the reading and on the study of abstracts; once it intended a transversal analysis, it was actually an overview. Thus, to deepen the composition of variables listed for each dimension, the sources explored were analysed seeking specific elements, identified within the cases studied, so they would sum to the existing variables, contributing theoretically with the emergence of a new revisited table.

| Nodes                       |         |            |
|-----------------------------|---------|------------|
| Name                        | Sources | References |
| Solucoes Rurais - DT-Social | 11      | 18         |

| Nodes            |         |            |
|------------------|---------|------------|
| Name             | Sources | References |
| PJER - DT-Social | 24      | 69         |

| Nodes            |         |            |
|------------------|---------|------------|
| Name             | Sources | References |
| Adel - DT-Social | 21      | 74         |

**Figure 1.**  
Research nodes  
categorization model

**Source:** Elaborated by the author

## 5. Result analysis

This section displays research results. At first, ADEL's activities, its main programmes and benefitted subjects, as well as their origins, are identified. Afterwards, the dimensions of social innovation are verified, using as reference the table assembled by [Tardif and Harrison \(2005\)](#). Moreover, we also verified emerging categories, aiming to complement determined variables sheltered within each dimension.

### 5.1 *The Agência de Desenvolvimento Econômico Local and its main programmes*

The ADEL, founded in 2007, located in the city of Pentecoste – Ceará, is an NGO that works with family agriculture and youth entrepreneurship, operating in communities and territories in the state.

The initiative is a result of joint interests from local actors to change the paths of development in the state semi-arid. It was formed by a group of youngsters who were born in the state outback and had had the opportunity to go to university, motivated by the efforts from the *Programa de Educação em Células Cooperativas* (Program of Education in Cooperative Cells in Portuguese). In this regard, the latter works in that territory stimulating youth activism and facilitating the access to university.

After graduation, ADEL's founders, who had learnt theoretical and practical lessons about cooperation and local development, started talking about the semi-arid region particularities and questioning how they could contribute through an action that would have greater impact on the lives of people living in the communities where they had been born. From these ideas and the restlessness shared with representatives of social movements as well as other organizations working with local development, they decided to return to their communities and found the NGO, with the objective to socialize knowledge and fulfil regional demands.

ADEL's activities have been based on structured actions and programmes: *Programa Jovem Empreendedor Rural* (PJER – Young Rural Entrepreneur in English), which aims at the social and economic inclusion of youngsters inhabiting rural communities, awakening entrepreneurial capacities to encourage their permanence in these communities. In addition to PJER, the *Programa Soluções Rurais* (Rural Solutions Program in Portuguese, formerly known as Josué de Castro Program for Local Development) has the goal of organizing family farmers to aggregate value to their activities and to the productive chains they belong, besides developing their rural enterprises, increasing profitability and productivity. According to its introductory leaflet, ADEL's activities serve youngsters in 42 rural communities in the state of Ceará. ADEL's Executive Director asserted that in the end of 2013, the NGO was working with approximately 320 youngsters and 400 farmers, located in the Vale do Curu and Aracatiçu territories in Ceará.

PJER started its activities in the beginning of 2009; this initiative was conceived after ADEL's participants had realized that, in the visits they carried out to family farmers, there were no youngsters taking part in decision-making processes. Motivated by this observation and by the rural exodus, the NGO members decided to create a proposal to confront such issues affecting these people.

Among the motivating factors that led the NGO to develop initiatives with young people was their school level and the time they had available to study in the Program. ADEL's Executive Director asserted that senior farmers do not usually have much time to dedicate to the formation model demanded in the Program. On the one hand, senior farmers demonstrated tiredness and reluctance, claiming to have already contributed enough throughout their lives. Youngsters, on the other hand, showed excitement, curiosity and anxiety for new opportunities with potential to promote effective change in their reality.

Still as stated by ADEL's Executive Director, PJER's basic cycle comprises the following steps:

- Training the Youngsters;
- Elaboration of business plans;
- Access to credit;
- Monitoring; and
- Establishment of Local Productive Facilities.

During the training process, young participants spend a determined amount of time living in a rural centre. In this period, they have lectures and receive advice about entrepreneurship, besides developing group activities to stimulate cooperation and nurture associative practices. In alternate periods, these participants return to their communities to apply what was learnt. Afterwards, this cycle is restarted until their formation is completed, mixing theory and practice. In other words, youngsters spend a week learning and two others using the knowledge acquired. Currently, PJER works with young people from 32 communities.

The Rural Solutions Program was initiated concurrently to the beginning of ADEL's activities. At first, this initiative was entitled Josué de Castro Program for Local Development, with the goal to provide technical advice to small family farmers located in the Middle Curu region in Ceará. The idea defended by ADEL's founders was to share with producers the technical knowledge they had obtained at university, encouraging cooperation focused on developing local activities. According to ADEL's informative leaflet, these efforts sought to aggregate value to family agriculture and to its related productive chains, besides organizing groups of family farmers with the objective of fostering rural enterprises to obtain greater development and profitability in that area.

### *5.2 Dimension of social innovation revisited – emerging variables*

The content analysis enabled the insertion of classified sources into predefined nodes. All the dimensions from [Tardif and Harrison's \(2005\)](#) table and their subcategories were referenced in, at least, one of the sources; such fact proves the applicability of the classification to identify the dimensions of social innovation. The most referenced dimensions for these three social innovations, corroborating with data from all sources analysed, which refer from the beginning of ADEL's activities, in 2007, to the month of February in 2014, were the Transformation and Process dimensions. It is highlighted from this observation that both context and processing of developed efforts were perceived as the strongest elements within the cases, not compromising the importance of remaining dimensions.

After the identification of the three distinct social innovations as components of the greater case studied, it was sought to track a similar path to the one covered by [Tardif and Harrison \(2005\)](#). The authors analysed 49 abstracts from scientific articles that presented cases of social innovation. For the research goals here, three social innovations were studied *in locus*, and it was intended to create a similar table to the one taken as reference but containing the appropriate adaptations in accordance with the reality examined. Thus, these social innovations were analysed separately, but united in the composition of dimensions targeting at revealing particularities of an identical context, considering that these three together would encompass the greater case studied, namely, ADEL.

Information contained within each subcategory sheltered in the dimensions of [Table I](#) was explored, intending to identify emerging variables. For instance, in the Transformation dimension, the macro/micro Context, Economic and Social subcategories

**Table II.**  
CRISES' conceptual  
encyclopaedia  
(dimensions of social  
innovation), new  
emerging elements  
were added after  
ADEL's case study

| Dimension<br>transformation       | Dimension<br>innovative character | Dimension<br>innovation | Dimension<br>actors                          | Dimension<br>process           |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| <i>Micro-context</i>              | <i>Model</i>                      | <i>Scale</i>            | <i>Social</i>                                | <i>Mode of coordination</i>    |
| Crisis                            | Work                              | Local                   | Movements                                    | Assessment                     |
| Rupture                           | Development                       |                         | Cooperative/<br>communities                  | Participation                  |
| Discontinuity                     | Governance                        | <i>Types</i>            | Civil society                                | Mobilization                   |
| Structural                        | Quebec                            | Technical               | Unions                                       | Learning                       |
| modifications                     |                                   | Socio-technical         | Family units                                 | Mediation                      |
| Climatic conditions               | <i>Economy</i>                    | Social                  |  | Search for recognition         |
|                                   | Knowing/knowledge                 | Organizational          |  |                                |
| <i>Economic</i>                   | Mixed                             | Institutional           | <i>Organizations</i>                         | <i>Means</i>                   |
| Emergence                         | Social                            |                         | Companies                                    | Partnerships                   |
| Adaptation                        |                                   | <i>Purpose</i>          | Social economy                               | Integration                    |
| Labour relations/<br>relations of | <i>Social Action</i>              | Common good             | organizations                                | Negotiation                    |
| production and                    | Trials                            | General interest        | Collective                                   | Empowerment                    |
| consumption                       | Experiments                       | Collective              | organizations                                | Diffusion                      |
|                                   | Policies                          | interest                | Recipients                                   |                                |
|                                   | Programmes                        | Cooperation             | University                                   | <i>Restrictions</i>            |
| <i>Social</i>                     | Institutional                     | Local                   |  | Complexity                     |
| Re-composition                    | arrangements                      | development             | <i>Institutions</i>                          | Uncertainty                    |
| Reconstruction                    | Social regulations                |                         | State  | Resistance                     |
| Exclusion/<br>marginalization     | Formation of<br>networks          |                         | Identity                                     | Tension                        |
| Practice                          |                                   |                         | Values and norms                             | Commitment                     |
| Change                            |                                   |                         | Flaws  | Institutional<br>inflexibility |
| Social relations                  |                                   |                         | <i>Intermediaries</i>                        |                                |
| Discovery                         |                                   |                         | Committees                                   |                                |
|                                   |                                   |                         | Social networks of<br>alliance of innovation |                                |

**Source:** Elaborated by the authors and adapted from [Tardif and Harrisson \(2005\)](#), [Maurer \(2011\)](#), [Maurer and Silva \(2014\)](#)

were analysed three times, as the same nodes had been defined for each social innovation: ADEL, the Rural Solutions Program and PJER. Granted that both programmes are housed within ADEL, they were verified in separate to avoid shocks between their singularities, in essence, the three innovations corroborated with the variables found, because of all elements comprising ADEL as greater innovation, reflecting the NGO's programmes and actions.

Therefore, it is understood that, in the conception of [Table I](#), new variables emerged and began being part of the dimensions, elements that can be seen in bold in [Table II](#).

Considering the components included within the *Transformation* dimension, it was verified the appearance of "Climatic conditions" as an emerging variable. This happened because of many references made to the climatic conditions that pushed through the search for innovative options for living in the semiarid. ADEL's actions and the activities developed by the Rural Solutions Program and PJER made explicit the exploration of alternatives enabling residents to stay in the region, even facing considerable climatic constraints. The year 2012 was highlighted as one in which Ceará underwent one of the worst droughts in the past 50 years and the forecasts also showed an irregular raining period for 2014, with the risk of another long drought, according the Foundation of Meteorology and Hydric Resources of Ceará (FUNCEME, 2014). It is understood, in this sense, that climate-related factors from the location must be identified as a contextual

variable; given the representativeness, this element may have on other dimensions, as revealed in the three cases studied.

Another emerging Variable in the same dimension is linked with the “Social” subcategory, and it was entitled “Discovery”. According to Tardif and Harrisson (2005), when elaborating Table I, the elements sheltered within this subcategory are related to the social reactions in the identified context. In this sense, it is comprehended that the context recognized in the three cases stimulates pursuit and “discovery” of alternatives that would contribute with creating responses to challenges. In ADEL as an organization, the search performed by its founders related to the ways that sharing the knowledge acquired at university could contribute with professionalizing activities the organization operates. Concerning the Rural Solutions Program, the discovery was that family farmers did not know traditional cultivation and handling techniques. Regarding PJER, the programme made possible to empower youth to develop rural enterprises and the consequent permanence of these young people in their communities.

Inside the *Innovative Character* dimension, among the variables comprised in the analytical angle Social Action, it was necessary the inclusion of the term “Formation of networks”. In ADEL’s efforts within its programmes, the creation of networks has arisen as the way to integrate the solutions found. Networks have been formed between the NGO and several actors involved with it as well as with beneficiaries. The efforts carried out by ADEL as an initiative, whose innovative character deserves emphasis, are articulated on the intermediation and identification of social and organizational actors that might engage together to respond to demands that still have not been solved or have been forgotten in Ceará’s semiarid context.

In regard to the analytical angle Purpose, presented in the *Innovation* dimension, the analysis disclosed that “Local Development” appears as key factor in the context explored. ADEL promotes activities fostering local development; the techniques performed with benefitted farmers through the Rural Solutions Program also have the goal to develop their properties and, consequently, the region, an objective also shared by the actions used in the PJER. Furthermore, the new variable included was related to one of CRISES’ axis of work, “Development and Territory”, allowing to shelter and justify the inclusion of the new term.

Considering the *Actors* dimension, among the variables in the Social subcategory, the term “Family Units” was inserted. This addition happened because of the role of families in social decisions for farmers and youngsters and was much emphasized in the sources, even regarding ADEL as an organization, once its founders consider their permanence in the communities, along with their families, an essential fact for nurturing the NGO proposal. The members of several community associations were systematically referred as “families”; the number of families integrating the movement also makes the count of associates.

The second term included in the dimension related to the Organizational subcategory is “University”. This actor’s inclusion occurred because superior education was conveyed as fundamental for ADEL’s creation as well as for the inception of its programmes. The spaces ceded by the Federal University of Ceará for field lessons or the presentation of cultivation techniques were also mentioned in the accounts about importance of this actor for developing new alternatives.

The last variable added to this dimension was inserted within the Institutional actors and is related to “Flaws”, especially the ones connected with governmental actions. Interviewees frequently mentioned these flaws and, in the scenarios exhibited in the videos where the climatic issue was stressed, accounts told about governmental negligence or flaws regarding the struggle against droughts and other restraining regional factors.



In the *Process* dimension, two more variables were inserted in the subcategory Modes of coordination; they are “Mediation” and “Search for recognition”. The first one regards ADEL’s role of working as a “bridge” between different interests, making connections between youngsters, family farmers with other partners, with other regions as well as addressing to community demands. The NGO introduces beneficiaries to several paths that can be followed, enabling those actors to reach easier ways towards local development. The second variable is related to the awards ADEL and their programmes that ensure greater credibility to their activities; these awards would also work as a mechanism of acknowledgement, so the organization’s proposals could be recognized as serious and committed with its mission and vision.

For each social innovation, constant changes were also noticed in all dimensions provided by [Tardif and Harrisson \(2005\)](#) in as much as the same activity was developed. Such changes come from the *Transformation* dimension, which carries out a diagnosis of the context at a determined moment or period and, according to the elements identified there, other dimensions would respond in a different way. Analysing the three innovations in ADEL made possible to observe the constant medley of variables over its operational years, reported in interviews and recorded in other explored sources.

## 6. Concluding remarks

Social innovations might be presented by the pursuit of solutions that enable the improvement of individuals’ well-being. In this regard, the classifications presented by authors who study the topic are diverse. However, the essence of these definitions is aligned with the central purpose of social innovation. Owing to the goals of this research, the definition adopted was the one from the CRISES, Canadian centre dedicated to study the area.

The social innovation scrutinized in this study was the ADEL and its main programmes, the initiative is inserted within the context of Ceará’s semi-arid region, a territory facing great climate and social challenges.

The investigation was conducted via the identification of dimensions composing this social innovation, using qualitative analysis techniques. The table introduced by [Tardif and Harrisson \(2005\)](#), researchers connected with the CRISES, was used as basis on which the following dimensions of social innovation are listed: Transformation, Innovative Character, Innovation, Actors and Processes, rising from the analysis of abstracts from papers produced by scholars from the Centre. Using the table as a reference to underpin this research, it was possible to verify its applicability and dynamism.

Firstly, ADEL’s activities and its main programmes, the origins of their work and people benefitted were identified. It was intended, along this article, to disclose the social importance, especially in the semi-arid of Ceará, of the undertakings carried out by this NGO.

Complementing the description of ADEL’s activities, a deepening in the works done by the *Programa Soluções Rurais* (Rural Solutions Program in Portuguese) was performed through its specific topic. This programme has the goal of professionalizing techniques used on agriculture, besides stimulating the formation of networks and working groups.

The third descriptive topic, related to the social innovations studied here, emphasized the actions performed via the PJER, which deals with youngsters from rural areas. The programme’s goal is to spark the development of rural enterprises, an alternative that contributes with reducing the regional exodus. Moreover, it provides the possibility of sharing knowledge about management and of enhancing local economic development.



Finally, it was verified, by analysing the codifications, that the dimensions of social innovation proposed by Tardif and Harrisson (2005) were perfectly applicable to the three cases. The identifications also permitted the emergence of specific variables linked with the context explored.

This research contributes to the academic production in the innovation field by presenting initiatives that promote life quality improvements in social and economic contexts impaired by several factors. By performing a scrutiny of an intrinsic case, through the employment of a consistent table elaborated in a broad effort of CRISES' Canadian scholars, it was possible to analyse the dimensions of social innovation to seek the particularities of this type of innovation in its most fundamental elements and, thus, to awaken the interest for future studies.

In addition, we intended to motivate other case studies to present similar initiatives to apply the CRISES' table, making possible the emergence of variables from different contexts not only in Brazil but also in other places in the world.

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