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# **DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL INNOVATION AND THE ROLES OF ORGANIZATIONAL ACTOR: THE PROPOSITION OF A FRAMEWORK**

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** To propose a framework that involves the analysis of the dimensions of social innovation and the roles played by the organizational actor.

**Originality/gap/relevance/implications:** The challenge here was to outline a framework within the Brazilian context, contributing as an instrument to the decision making of the organizational actor, serving as guidance to better comprehend social innovation initiatives that they promote, as well as characterizing the roles that they should play in order to better promote and advertise the implemented social initiatives.

**Key methodological aspects:** The study was of qualitative nature, and the case was a network created by organizations of the civil society that manage social innovation (Articulação do Semiárido Brasileiro – ASA). The NGOs linked to ASA, which works within the Brazilian states of Paraíba, Pernambuco, and Rio Grande do Norte, were the analysis units of the case surveyed. The Analysis of Contents was adopted for data handling, supported by the software Atlas.Ti.

**Summary of key results:** The organizational actor has a leading role among social innovation initiatives, as a legitimate representative of society's interests in articulating bottom-up initiatives (actors); in identifying non-satisfied social needs (social needs); as a manager of social relationships, especially when it comes to governance and participation (process); pointer of innovative capacity of the ideas implemented (innovativeness and promoter of the social benefits provided in the community (social improvements and answers).

**Key considerations/conclusions:** Based on the roles identified, it is possible to map out the actions of the organizational actors, helping them in their tasks of planning, implementing and disseminating social initiatives, which results in a model that is both operational and analytical.

## KEYWORDS

Social innovation. Organizational actors. Social needs and process. Social improvements and answers. Innovativeness.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

The current society presents challenges that point towards a social transformation process, which requires deep changes in social structures, individual behaviors, and routine methods, in a quest for social development and solutions for the effectiveness of social practices. This focus on the social dimension is important because it highlights the critical development of our current society model, in its economic, political and social dimensions, related to economic growth, as well as the growth of social inequality, unemployment, and new environmental risks.

Social innovation arises as an alternative to the traditional (economic) paradigm. Through movements concerned with social issues, a new paradigm is created, based on initiatives that generate new ways of social organization and offer new instruments for designing a new society (Bava, 2004; Farfus & Rocha, 2007).

Therefore, social initiatives are used as examples of social innovation, due to their potential to solve social issues in an alternative fashion, in a way that develops pragmatic and participatory solutions for environmental and social issues due to the crisis of Modernity or to inadequate actions from the Government or the Market. This reasoning is based on another way of producing value, less economic and more concerned with actual demands and with conciliating production and redistribution systems (European Commission, 2013; Gabriela, 2012).

In this sense, social innovation plays an important role in the development of these locations, indicating internal opportunities that benefit sustainable development and generating benefits or answers that cater to specific social needs. They are a result of specific abilities within the communities that make harnessing of the local potential possible, as well as the structuring of a new development model.

Thus, it is assumed, that social innovation presents five dimensions: 1. the direction to cater specific social needs experienced locally in a situation characterized as unacceptable or unsatisfactory; 2. the presence of the social actors, institutions and organizations responsible for social innovation acting collaboratively; 3. the processes of social innovation as actives of collaboration, cooperation and learning for the actors; 4. benefits or answers, which generate social value, resilience and social capacity to satisfy the unsatisfied needs; 5. innovative character for the context, but not limited by it, which could already be used in other social reality.

It is believed, then, that the organizational actor (dimension of actors) has a leading role within these initiatives: to identify unsatisfied social needs (dimen-

sion of social needs); to manage social relations, especially when it comes to governance and participation (dimension of process); to point the innovative capacity of the implemented ideas (dimension of innovativeness); and to disseminate social improvements obtained by the community (dimension of social improvements and answer).

Based on the roles identified, it will be possible to map out the actions of the organizational actors, helping them in their tasks of planning, implementing and disseminating social initiatives. These roles must reflect a social idea; they must be valid and significant, sensitive to the underlying phenomenon, intelligible, easy to be interpreted and relatable to the other roles (Noll, 2004). Therefore, the interest in identifying these roles played by the organizational actors sparks, as social innovation initiatives are a challenge to be faced, to meet social demands and effectively contribute to social improvements.

Choosing one approach that captures the essential characteristics of social innovation is necessary for three reasons (Bund, Hubrich, Schmitz, Mildemberger, & Krlev, 2013): 1. the need to have a concrete answer that serves as a reliable reference for the development of arguments that support the actors involved in the decision-making process; 2. the operation of a concept of social innovation in a way that integrates theoretical and empirical assumptions; and 3. the offer of subsidies linked to specific organizations involved in projects.

The roles played by organizational actors must be observed from the perspective of social innovation, so that it is possible to map out the extension, characteristics, impacts and results of social innovations for social transformation. For such, it is necessary to make an extensive analysis to understand the conditions for creation and implementation of social innovations and also the conditions for their dissemination, in a way that may generate social inclusion practices.

The dimensions and roles outlined in this paper may become an instrument for translating the theoretical and abstract concept of social innovation into something concrete. This helps to establish a comprehensive perspective on the creation of social value and also contribute to organizational actors legitimize their social innovations activities, based on data that characterizes social reality and promote sustainable development. Thus, the investigation's purpose is to propose a framework that involves the analysis of the dimensions of social innovation and the roles played by the organizational actor.

Structurally, this article is divided into five sections. Further, from this introduction, it is presented, in section two, the theoretical perspective of social innovation; followed by section three and the methodological aspects. In the fourth section, it is described the results presented based on the application of the proposed model, and lastly, the final arguments are presented.

## 2 CONCEPTUAL ASPECTS OF SOCIAL INNOVATION

The diversity of definitions related to social innovation is a result from an agglomerate of concepts, which have in common the type of innovation that seeks to benefit certain places and improve individuals' living conditions. The variety of concepts presents a field of study without a clear epistemology, and a pragmatic consensus has not yet been reached (Minks, 2011; Rüede & Lurtz, 2012).

Social innovation is concerned with the generation of social value (Cloutier, 2003; Saucier *et al.*, 2006; Phills, Deigmeier, & Miller, 2008; Assogba, 2010; Herrera, 2015) for social actors and society. It presents itself as a new answer to an unsatisfying situation (Lévesque, 2002; Cloutier, 2003; Moulaert, Martinelli, Swyngedouw, & González, 2005; Farfus & Rocha, 2007; Mulgan, 2006; Assogba, 2010; Sharra & Nyssens, 2010; Hulgård & Ferrarini, 2010), and aims at the welfare of individuals (Cloutier, 2003; André & Abreu, 2006; Pol & Ville, 2009) and collectivities through the satisfaction of needs (Cloutier, 2003; Farfus & Rocha, 2007; Murray, Caulier-Grice, & Mulgan, 2010; Sharra & Nyssens, 2010; Bignetti, 2011), such as health, education, labor, leisure, transports and tourism.

These concepts of social innovation integrate two perspectives: one focused on processes and one that focuses on results (Sharra & Nyssens, 2010; Hulgård & Ferrarini, 2010). The focus on process discusses inclusion, capacitation, and intense cooperation between the actors involved, as a way to obtain permanent and impactful social transformations that might represent changes in social relations and conditions (Lassance & Pedreira, 2004; André & Abreu, 2006; Bignetti, 2011). The result's perspective considers that social innovation needs to go beyond specific needs, aiming for social value, based on values, aspirations and creation of new meanings (Saucier *et al.*, 2006; Mulgan, 2007; Phills *et al.*, 2008).

In an approach that integrates those two perspectives, it is important to cover the combination of result (social objective) (Mulgan, 2006; Saucier *et al.* 2006; Phills *et al.*, 2008; Pol & Ville, 2009; Howaldt & Schwarz, 2010; Assogba, 2010) and process (emphasis on the participatory and collaborative nature of learning) (Nilsson, 2003; Lassance & Pedreira, 2004; André & Abreu, 2006; Klein, Tremblay, & Bussi  res, 2010; Young, 2011) to accurately define social innovation (Hulgård & Ferrarini, 2010). For this integrate approach, the product of social innovation cannot be isolated from the process or the way how innovation was organized and developed.

The constructs presented reflect the complexity of the concept. This essay understands that one complete definition of social innovation should operate all the concepts in a complementary way, acknowledging that one single dimension is not sufficient to translate the complexity of the subject. Therefore, the authors

felt the need to establish a definition for social innovation that would embrace all the key concepts, understanding that social innovations are collective processes that seek to fulfill social needs, disseminated by actors to generate improvements or social answers.

Based on the concept adopted for social innovation and on the review of its characteristics, a number of social innovation's dimensions of analysis compose this paper's framework and are categorized in 1. actors; 2. processes and collective activities; 3. social needs; 4. social improvements or answers; 5. innovativeness.

## 2.1 DIMENSION OF ACTORS

A new paradigm is progressively being established, according to which individuals and their capacity of building social relations are fundamental to the process of social innovation (Sgaragli, 2015). The concept of social innovation is understood as a process of collective and shared creation that covers a broad context and multiple subjects (Howaldt & Schwarz, 2010).

The actors linked with the concept of social innovation may be categorized in social organizations and institutions (Tardif & Harisson, 2005). The social actors may be members/individuals of the civil society, of cooperatives and associations, of unions or community associations. The organizational actors include companies, social economy organizations, collective enterprises, and beneficiaries of private organizations. It is also included as institutional actors the State representatives' in the three levels (federal, state and local).

Social innovation is mostly represented by third sector institutions, but can also be made present at public policies instituted by the Government and social responsibility measures adopted by private companies (André & Abreu, 2006; Quirino, Alvarenga, Carvalho, & Goulart, 2015). These initiatives should gradually emerge outside institutions, as a result of a mobilization towards a common goal, in which the civil society acts as a protagonist.

That way, society encourages the discovery of new solutions that meet social needs through the articulation of actors that can reach social results. To think about the involvement of social actors, as members of civil society, for developing a social innovation is to understand the ways how these actors articulate themselves and how they can be involved in the process of developing new solutions for social challenges.

The involvement of the social actors depends on their relationship with the satisfaction of non-satisfied needs, involving current governance mechanisms, and their high articulation level, learning, and empowerment, as well as the reality of the social context. This directly refers to the strategic performance of the civil society is a search of the effectiveness of participatory democracy that

expresses the creation of public spaces and engagement of the civil society itself in the processes of discussion and decision-making related to the social and public policy matters (Dagnino, 2002).

The organizational actor is related to the role of the civil society (social actor) in their means of collective articulation as a legitimate actor in defense of their interests and configures in the civil society organizations, located between the market and the State, acting collectively.

The success factors for implementing social innovation are in the synergy of actors and their motivation for innovation; their strength to deal with obstacles; their availability to manage the resources to fix those obstacles (Tardif & Harisson, 2005). Social innovation takes on the participation of actors that occupy different roles distributed in multiple dimensions, with different cultures and identities, assuming a collective and public interest.

Based on the arguments exposed above, the dimension of actors exists in a new combination of business models, starting with a partnership between Market, Government, and civil society. These partnerships draw attention to the permanent need that these actors should be involved in the decision-making process, making choices that facilitate required changes (Rodrigues, 2007).

## 2.2 DIMENSION OF SOCIAL NEEDS

Social needs are considered to be co-constructions made by civil society, in a bottom-up and democratic process. Social innovation should be focused on how its objectives will be defined and built by civil society, to be put into practice, and the purpose of that innovation should be qualified as socially innovating (Guyon & Besançon, 2013).

Social innovation should not be merely understood as the search for satisfaction of social needs caused by the absence of the Government or the Market, but should be seen as an opportunity to find answers to multiple social, an economic and environmental crisis that are faced by societies all over the world. Therefore, civil society organizations try to react and search for new practices through social innovation initiatives, by using local solidarity and reciprocity mechanisms that recognize new governance structures (Pisano, Lange, & Berger, 2015).

Change in local economic structures, caused by the crisis, discontinuities, and ruptures, procudes impacts to the ensemble of economic relations that lead actors to make adaptations and create new trajectories or even new production structures, if those are on an emergency basis (Maurer & Silva, 2014, Freitas, Morais, & Vilela, 2016). In some cases, civil society develops innovation, as to have a greater understanding of the context in which it is inserted, which makes it the best fit for facing those challenges, holding information about its members



when it comes to the time and place of events and experiences, their needs, and aspirations (Davies, Simon, Patrick, & Normam, 2012).

The organizational actor has a role to play in identifying social needs, to help to solve social claims that are not articulated with necessities and to cooperate with actors and affected parties during the data collection phase. This role is related to structural modifications that occur due to the search for social needs satisfaction, and those needs can be qualified as incremental, radical or systemic (Mulgan, 2006). This way, it is easier to identify and characterize different kinds of social changes.

These structural changes demand actors to rethink and review their actions, which can generate conflict with predetermined or previously structured situations.

## 2.3 DIMENSION OF PROCESSES

To accomplish the processes' role, social innovation should first meet two requirements related to its creation and implementation process: the diversity of actors and the user's participation (Cloutier, 2003). The former emphasizes the importance of cooperation between the many actors involved, distinguishing cooperation designed by strategic allegiance between actors from the one that occurs between the network of multidisciplinary teams. The latter refers to the active participation of individuals/organizations that represent this dimension. It comprehends all phases of the social innovation process: from problem awareness to identification of causes and implementation of solutions. Therefore, the degree of actors' participation varies according to the stage of the innovation process.

Social innovations change the actors involved with it. Therefore, this integrated approach demands an interdisciplinary team, introduction of new assignments, a new division of labor based on aptitude and interests, new coordination and learning methods to improve practices (Cloutier, 2003; Tardif & Harrisson, 2005; Benneworth & Cunha, 2015).

Consequently, it involves a change of attitudes, behaviors or perceptions from a group of people with aligned interests that try and find better collaborative actions within the group (Caulier-Grice, Davies, Patrick, & Norman, 2012). The participatory approach allows the actors to develop the abilities that are more likely to satisfy their long-term needs, emphasizing their capacity of participation and acting on behalf of their aspirations (Moulaert, 2013). Developing the actors' talents and investing on training their abilities is a way of both challenging the relations of power and including participatory approaches for the development of initiatives in a way that makes good use of the resources available in a region.

In the dimension of processes, social innovation shows its relevance, which comes from social inclusion, training individuals and the idea of social change

as a factor that can transform the relations of power (André & Abreu, 2006). Therefore, social innovation becomes a matter of process innovation, and also of a change in the dynamics of social relations and relations of power, in a way that leads to a larger inclusion of individuals, reaching a position of social justice as a result of social construction.

## 2.4 DIMENSION OF INNOVATIVENESS

Social innovations have innovativeness as a common characteristic, in the sense of being new solutions or answers. Chambon, David and Deveyey (1982) argue that the innovative character is a relative concept because it presents social innovation as a non-standard solution in a specific context. This dimension is related to one action of reorganization measured by the extension and depth of changes caused on the environment. Therefore, it is a sufficient condition for social innovation, although it is not essential (Cloutier, 2003).

Social innovations appear as a positive result after a time of crisis, when actors are pushed into action and into solving a determined problematic situation. These solutions must be “new”, unprecedented in the environment in which they emerge, being also identified as the implementation of new institutional arrangements between actors and new social rules (Tardif & Harrison, 2005). New solutions emerge as alternatives in the implementation’s initial phase, however, in long-term, tend to be institutionalized, generating new work, development, and governance models.

The impact of the innovation is a more determinant trait for social innovation than its novelty factor. However, new solutions serve to assist in achieving results, improving existing practices and consequently improving the lives of populations (Caulier-Grice *et al.*, 2012). The main concern is the way of doing or producing knowledge, as well as including values such as participation and dissemination of knowledge among all involved parties in search of a solution that can be easily applied by the community with its knowledge.

One of these characteristics is to allow innovation that has already been used in another context, nonetheless, what characterizes social innovation is a new institutional arrangement provoked by a collective action. Therefore, regardless the type of social innovation, Tardif and Harrison (2005) mention that these innovations have a local or localized characteristic. That is, originality is not only in the development of innovations, but also in the employment of existing knowledge and solutions vastly explored by the market in new contexts.

Buckland and Murillo (2013) present two kinds of innovations in their investigation regarding the kinds of social innovation implemented. The first kind is based on open innovation, in which individuals and other interested parties are

free to copy one idea, reuse it and adapt it (Chesbrough, 2006). The second kind is based on closed innovation, squashed by intellectual property.

The social objective of innovations can be shown, highlighting the innovative character of the innovation process, from the identification of social needs to the implementation process, as well as the adaptation to other contexts at the time of reapplication. All of this development depends on the participation of a diversity of actors who act in a democratic fashion, making innovativeness a dimension related to the change of daily practices.

## 2.5 DIMENSION OF SOCIAL IMPROVEMENTS AND ANSWERS

This dimension is focused on the result of a particular social innovation. Authors argue that the importance of this dimension is the social transformation it triggers (Dainienė & Dagilienė, 2015). Murray *et al.* (2010) approach the systemic change phase as the final objective of social innovation; Cloutier (2003) advocates that social innovation should be characterized according to its change objectives, highlighting the concern towards solving social issues and searching for better life conditions for individuals and/or communities; Buckland and Murillo (2013) present the variable of impact and social transformation, arguing that all social innovations aim to solve social issues.

Organizational actors should focus on social objectives, directing their efforts towards the less fortunate or marginalized sectors of society. Also, they have a role of articulating with other sectors of society in favor of those goals (Phills *et al.*, 2008).

Social innovation should be more effective than existing solutions. It should generate improvements in terms of results, including living conditions, satisfaction levels, life expectancy rates, reintegration into the labor Market, improving welfare and social cohesion (Westley, 2008; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010; Caulier-Grice *et al.*, 2012). It intends to do more than to just solve a social issue, it intends to provide answers to an aspiration (Saucier *et al.*, 2006; Sandeep & Ravishankar, 2015). For that reason, it cannot be reduced to the dimension of social needs resolution, but instead it should be seen as a creative way of contributing to the welfare of individuals and collectivities.

In this context, the role of sociopolitical improvements provoked by social innovation is evidenced by other roles, such as the encouragement of social participation in the process of forming and consolidating regional identities that favor basic consensus among social actors that are essential to local development.

Social innovation has a bottom-up perspective, considering that civil society can (re)discover its cooperation power and become an active agent in the search for solutions of local social needs. This process is favored when its members

creatively use products, services, places, knowledges, abilities and existing traditions (Manzini, 2014), while managing their own resources, without waiting for a general top-down change in politics, economics, institutional assets and system infrastructure.

## 2.6 INITIAL FRAMEWORK PROPOSITION: ROLES PLAYED BY THE ORGANIZATIONAL ACTORS

The dimensions presented in literature discussed the roles that organizational actors should take on social initiatives, so that these can be characterized as actual practices on social innovation. Thus, social innovation initiatives must be investigated from an approach which considers the roles of organizational actors involved in order to act in coordination with the other actors to identify social needs and innovative solutions, focusing on social innovation and the generation of value that result from such innovations.

Tardif and Harrison (2005) present an analysis that is close to the one of this article, as it aims to understand and effectively systematize social innovation through a work that produced a synthesis about key-concepts used in 49 studies published by the members of the Centre de Recherche sur les Innovations Sociales (CRISES) in their three systematical axis: territory, living conditions, and work and employment. As a result, the authors found that the research of the territory axis was mainly interested in the roles of the social actors and their innovative practices in territorial restructure. The research involved the development of the network and its link with territory, relationship between companies, social partners and political and local bodies, local identity and its relationship with economic and social development.

The researches on living conditions took into account consumption, time management, family structure, integration into the labor market, housing, health and security, usually linked to public policies and social movements. Meanwhile, researchers that discussed the work and employment axis would focus their research on work organization, labor laws, corporate governance and knowledge economy (Centre de Recherche sur les Innovations Sociales, 2010).

The most important contribution to the report was the integration of studies from the three axis through similarities and complementarities regarding the concept of social innovation within the perspective of social transformation that resulted in the dimensions: transformation; innovative character; innovativeness; actors; process.

The work of the authors mentioned was used as a main reference for discussions of social innovation, being widely debated in depth, and, replicates, which

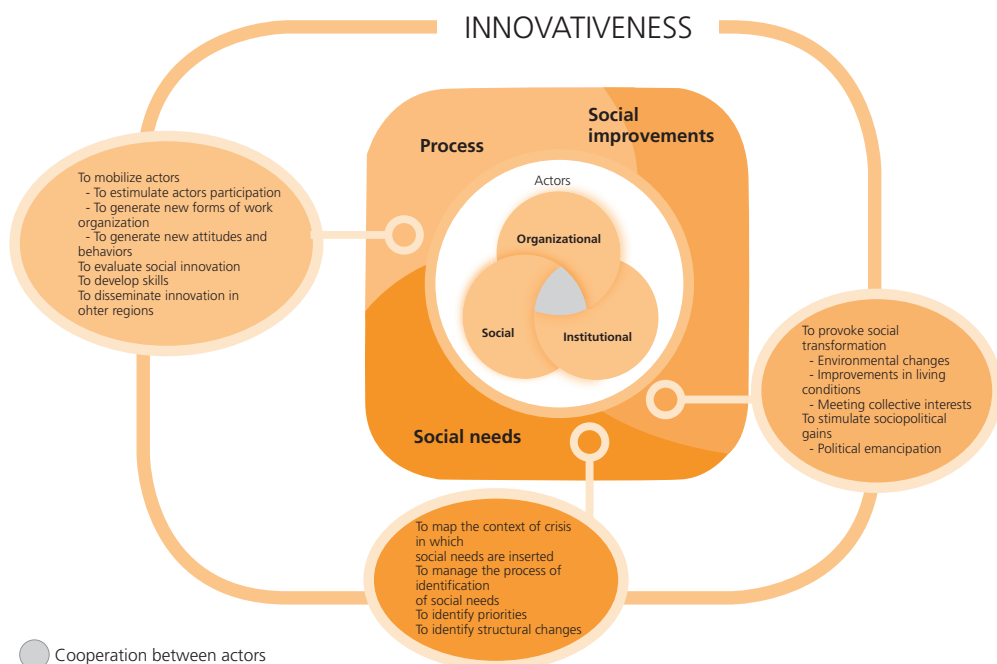
characterizes a seminal work. However, what distinguishes it from the proposed in this article is that Tardif and Harrisson (2005) leaned to a work approach and did not define, specifically, the roles that the organizational actors would play when operationalizing of the concept.

The proposed framework presented in this section is flexible and allows adjustments to specific contexts that involve social innovation initiatives, since the roles will be played by the organizational actors involved. Its preliminary construction was based on the literature review and, subsequently, it was subjected to the data obtained in the empirical phase of this research. This decision follows the recommendation given by Hoff (2008), who indicates the need of using frameworks for the formulation of hypotheses and for tests in future empirical studies, aiming not only to develop methodological and analytical procedures but also to test their consistency of practice.

As Figure 1 shows, these dimensions occur along the path of social innovation initiatives. The innovativeness dimension is conceived as a social system

FIGURE 1

## PRELIMINARY FRAMEWORK OF ORGANIZATIONAL ACTOR'S ROLES IN SI INITIATIVES



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

that is present in the others dimensions. Furthermore, it is considered that innovation is related to the following aspects: in the dimension of actors, the actions performed by individuals; in the dimension of social needs, the interpretation of environments and the search of solutions that are more appropriate to their contexts; in the dimension of process, the way innovative characteristics should be managed; and in the dimension of social improvements and answers, the realization of ideas that generate social value.

Actors can generate a pro-innovation environment and influence the organizational actor's roles in others dimensions, encouraging creativity and offering new approaches for solving social issues and connecting the broader context of the innovation process to its social transformation objective.

Although five dimensions of social innovation have been initially identified, such dimensions were subsequently examined to investigate their existence and of other variables that were not identified in the literature review to compose the final version of this proposed model.

### **3 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES**

The aim of this paper was to propose a deeper theoretical discussion about social innovation, presenting a framework that involves the identification of dimensions of analysis and the proposition of the organizational actor's roles in each dimension, inserted into the process and result approach. To reach that goal, regarding the methodology, the qualitative approach was adopted with the purpose of contributing to the development of the theory that involves social innovation, since this method facilitates the study in depth and in detail (Patton, 2001).

This research was exploratory and descriptive. At first, the authors tried to identify the dimensions of social innovation and the organizational actor's roles in each of those dimensions, based on a thorough theoretical review that included national and international authors. This resulted on the proposition of a preliminary model that allowed for the identification and evaluation of social innovation initiatives. The next step used the strategy of case study for validating the proposed model. This is because, in a qualitative research, it is very important that the context of the phenomenon studied is taken into account (Pettigrew, 1992). The method of case study was considered to be the most appropriate to achieve the goal set for this research, given its relevance for answering questions that involve "how" and "why" (Yin, 2015), by means of a thorough data collection that involved multiple sources of rich contextual information (Creswell, 2010).

The selected case was Articulação do Semiárido Brasileiro (ASA), considered to be an emblematic case of civil society organization that promotes, as an

organizational actor, social innovation initiatives that can confirm, challenge or expand the theory (Yin, 2015). Civil society organizations related to ASA have been defined as unities of analysis of the case in this study, and their technical and executive managers have been defined as research subjects.

To address some practical or technical difficulties (Flick, 2009) inherent in qualitative researches, the data was collected using the accessibility criteria – the geographic region to be investigated was reduced to the States of Paraíba, Rio Grande do Norte and Pernambuco, Brazil, that have 49 organizations representing the Executive Coordination per State. The representatives of these organizations were contacted through e-mails that requested an interview, according to their availability. The number of respondents was set when the roles of the organizational actors reached the theoretical saturation point (Lima, 2005) suitable to meet the purposes of the research (Paiva, Souza, & Mello, 2011), totaling 18 (eighteen) social subjects.

The data collection techniques used were bibliographical research; field research consolidated by semi-structured interviews with subjects and non-participant observation by means of visits and experience with organizations during the period of research, that took place between April and June 2015. Such data collection instruments were used simultaneously in order to grasp the depth of the issues inherent in the analyzed case, in what refers to the guiding questions of this study.

The data were analyzed according to the phases of Bardin's (2011) content analysis process: pre-analysis; material exploration; and data treatment, inference and interpretation. To analyze the interviews, the qualitative research software ATLAS.ti was used as a support tool, giving the advantage of generating, structuring and analyzing qualitative data, presenting results through the construction of semantic networks.

In addition, the data triangulation was made confronting data obtained on the interviews with the documental analysis and non-participant observation so the research would meet validity and reliability criteria.

## 4 RESULTS ANALYSIS

Before presenting the data's analysis, it seemed reasonable to present the object of this study, which allowed for the creation, execution and dissemination of social innovations in the Brazilian semiarid region. Articulação do Semiárido (ASA) stands out for the achievement of the Program of Training and Social Mobilization for Coexisting with the Semi-Arid, which consists of a set of actions of procedural training and mobilization of families and organizations for coexistence with the Semi-Arid. The program develops two projects: the Program One

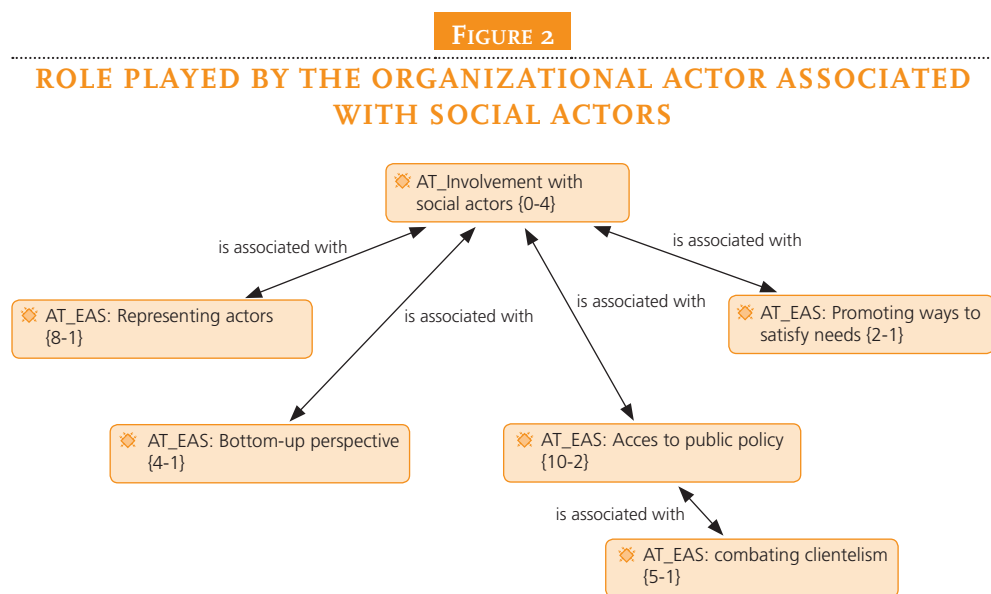


Million Cisterns (P<sub>1</sub>MC) and the Program One Land and Two Waters (P<sub>1</sub>+2), involving families in the discussion and implementation of public policies directed to expand access to water and to other means of production and basic right, in the semiarid. Thus, ASA promotes and disseminates social innovation in the semiarid context, discussing and organizing new options of public policies aimed to expand the access to water to low-income families in the region, as well as actions aimed at food production for self-consumption, with the objective of ensuring safety and food sovereignty.

## 4.1 DIMENSION OF ACTORS

In the Dimension of Actors, roles related to the categories: involvement with social actors; involvement with other organizational actors; involvement with institutional actors; and cooperation between actors were validated by the empirical case.

Regarding the mechanisms used for the involvement of organizational actors with other actors, the following roles were observed (Figure 2):



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Civil society has its interests represented because the organizational actor has the role of representing social actors on the public sphere, in a democratic perspective, expressing their values and interests and being concerned with



the participation of local communities in debates and decisions involving their needs, in the search for consensus on referrals.

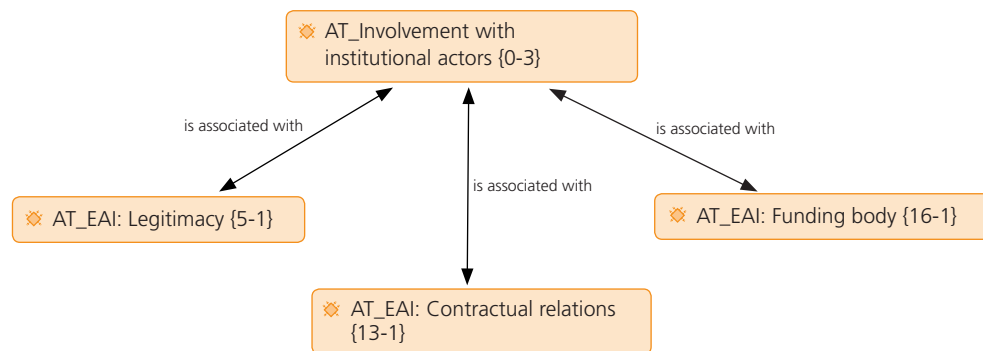
Regarding the role of articulating bottom-up processes, one can notice that the State is no longer the sole agent responsible for the elaboration of public policies focused on the core needs of the population, and the community is a space to participate in the process of planning and implementing actions to meet their demands. The empirical case studied allows to confirm that the role of social and political articulation played by the organizational actor has contributed to the construction of a large project, promoting the articulation between various civil society organizations on behalf of their collective interests.

Another role examined was the role of generating access to public policies and the ability to promote the means of satisfying their own needs. This is because the organizational actor is capable of identifying local needs and building mobilization processes that draw attention to latent demands and consequently attract the interest of governments to solve issues.

When it comes to the involvement with institutional actors (Figure 3), the organizational actors play the role of making their choices legitimate; ensuring that contractual relations are fulfilled; and obtaining funding for social innovation initiatives.

**FIGURE 3**

### ROLE OF INVOLVEMENT WITH INSTITUTIONAL ACTORS



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

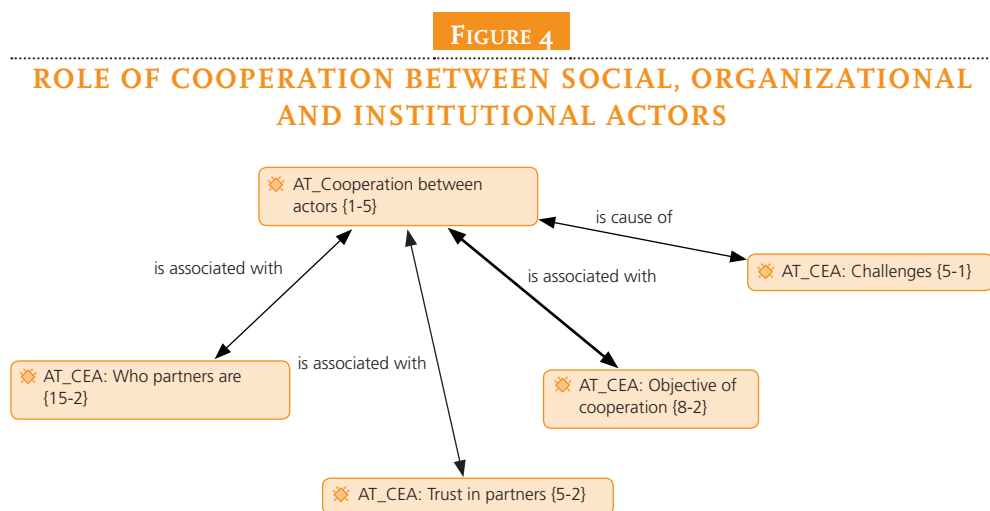
The performance of the role of legitimation is related to the access that the organizational actor has to the State institutions. This access is established through a communicative process that operates within the public sphere, in which the actor mediates social needs with the political system. This process

allows that the impulses that originate from this articulation are able to reach decision-making entities.

It was found that this process can also be observed on the role related to establishing contractual relations and ensuring their fulfillment. These relations are established through interactions between the collective action and the public sphere. It is also present on the role of obtaining funding from the State for social innovation initiatives.

The organizational actor has the role of being involved with other actors, through collective actions and partnerships, in the search for new practices of interacting with the public sector (institutional actor) and with beneficiaries (social actors), as well as other organizational actors who develop works that are similar to the case in question.

Regarding the cooperation between social, organizational and institutional actors, the following indicators were identified during the data collection phase (Figure 4):



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Social innovation can be introduced by actions performed by many actors. Thus, its process has attracted many partners. One indicator that stands out in the analysis of the roles played by the organizational actor is the identification of who those partners are. In addition to those partners, many civil society organizations and government institutions cooperate to favor initiatives in the semi-arid, adding more resources and strengthening the political space, mainly in the implementation of social innovations.

This cooperation acts on the construction of new social relations and new patterns of sociability, based on a set of values of reciprocity and sharing, complementarity and interdependence bonds. This way, trust between partners arises as a category for analyzing the cooperation between them and develops to the extent they absorb such values and fulfill the responsibilities, functions and duties set by the partnership.

Cooperation is, then, a way of generating an interdependent network of social actions, based on trust between actors working together. In some cases, those relationships occur for a determined period of time and take into account the parties' interests in cooperating. These parties should be well aware that cooperation is the path for reaching designed social objectives.

Therefore, the purpose of cooperation focuses on generating new forms of social productive actions, which aim to cater social needs. A challenge that permeates this process is in the involvement between the organizational actors and the institutional actors regarding access to funding. The cooperation between the social actors and the organizational actors provide legitimacy for access to such funds. That is because the programs were financed by the Federal Government, most of those interaction happen with that agent and their agencies, which look to achieve an oversight of the usage of such resources in the program, also implying in the imposition of standard methodology, ultimately causing trouble when implementing the projects.

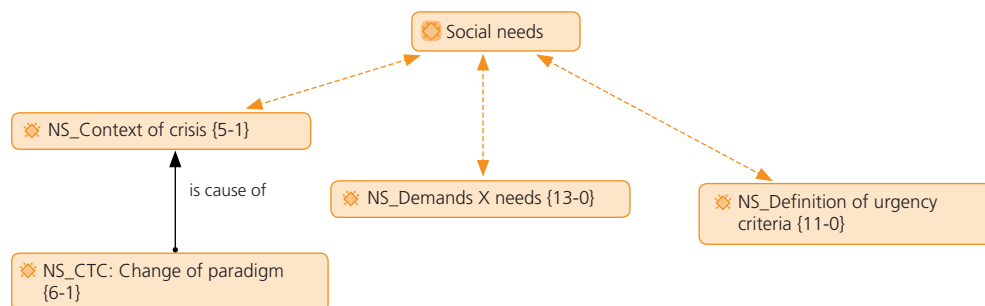
## 4.2 DIMENSION OF SOCIAL NEEDS

The dimension of social needs (Figure 5) made it possible to realize that the task of mapping out the context of the crisis emerges as a key role to be played by the organizational actor, fundamental to set an outline for achieving development, social cohesion and stability from the local context and specific problems. Consequently, this transformation comes with a new paradigm, proposing the reconstruction of the integration model of locations, as response for unanswered social needs, for the purpose of social inclusion and improving the living conditions of actors inserted in their contexts.

The existence and dynamic of unsatisfied needs can help to identify strategies and approaches for helping new and improved ways of satisfying those same needs. That shows the importance of the role of searching for connections between demands and social needs, which happens through a social construction process, in a way that becomes an incentive for social actors to organize themselves and act collectively when facing a determined situation, aiming to access distinct resources – financially, politically and culturally.

FIGURE 5

## ROLES OF THE DIMENSION OF SOCIAL NEEDS



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

By identifying the urgency criterion, it is possible to map out social needs, allowing the organizational actor to set priority actions. This can be a way of acquiring specific answers for local needs, which comes also as a result from mobilization and articulation of actors that seek empowerment and development of their capacities and competences.

The criteria then established made it possible to realize the focus on projects that are directed to civil society, through social innovations and public policies, involving farmers as protagonists for improving their own living conditions, helping them to adjust them according to their social needs.

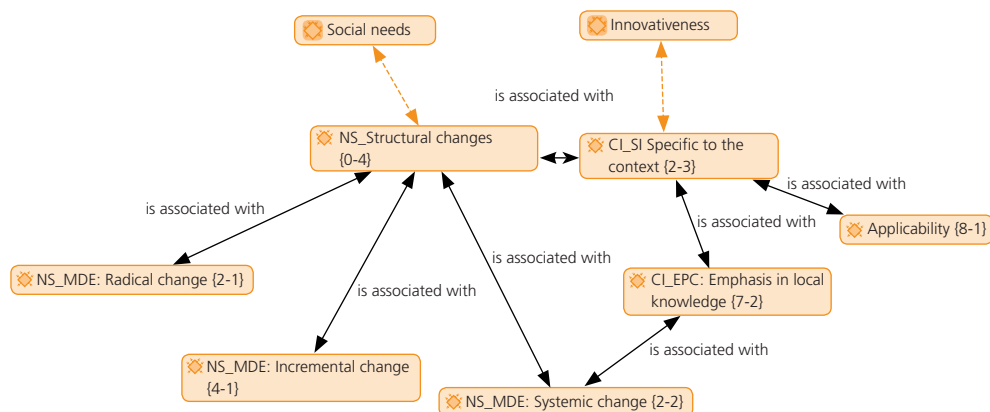
The role of identifying if social needs will provoke radical, incremental or systemic structural changes is related to the role of identifying specific innovations for the context, pertaining to the Dimension of innovativeness. Figure 6 shows these connections.

The region's capacity to acquire specific answers for its social needs is the result of the mobilization and articulation of actors that seek empowerment and development of their own capacities and competences. The organizational actor acts as an element for social transformation, privileging new ways of solidarity and partnerships.

The following cases present characteristics of systemic change, which allowed for the adaptation of techniques (water collection for consumption and water for production) in the context of a crisis. They also show the applicability of social innovation, because they are cheap, easy to be implemented and provide a quick solution for the problem in question – water storage capacity and how families can have access to it in a decentralized way.

FIGURE 6

## ROLES PLAYED BY THE ORGANIZATIONAL ACTOR IN THE DIMENSION OF SOCIAL NEEDS AS RELATED TO INNOVATIVENESS



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

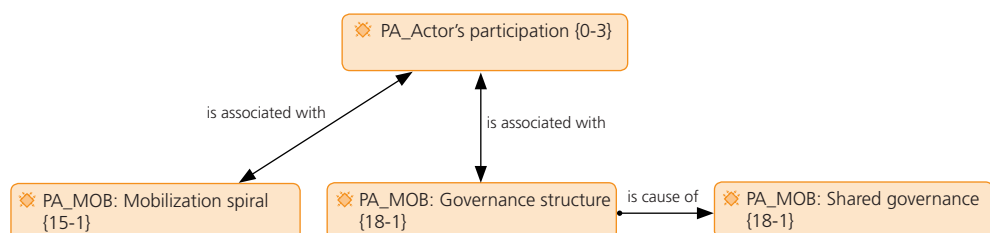
### 4.3 DIMENSION OF PROCESSES

In the dimension of processes, the roles to be played by the organizational actor and that refer to strategies developed and adopted for the survival of social innovation are: actors' participation strategies; skills development strategies; and evaluation and dissemination strategies.

Figure 7 shows the roles referring to actors' participation.

FIGURE 7

## ROLE OF STIMULATING ACTORS' PARTICIPATION



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

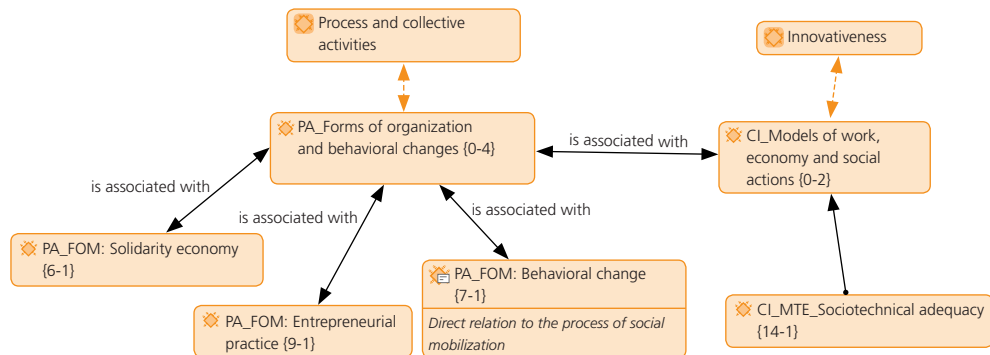
The strategy of actor participation predicts the mobilization of civil society for implementing programs focused on social needs. It also tries to create mechanisms that promote the participation of involved actors and generate a system for “social control”.

The collected data have allowed to realize that mobilization comes from the experiences of many community associations existing in the cities. The governance structure refers to their ways of relating, creating structures and paradigms that are built and rebuilt from a model that perpetuates the functioning of social innovations. Still regarding governance structure, there was a concern in managing in a shared way and that the positions occupied by organizational actors would be different and directly related to their articulated capacity of arguing, systematizing, organizing and mobilizing other actors in the process of social innovation.

The roles of creating new ways of work organization and generating behavioral changes in the social innovation process were related to the models of work, economy and social actions in the dimension of innovativeness (Figure 8).

FIGURE 8

## NEW WAYS OF ORGANIZATION AND BEHAVIORAL CHANGE



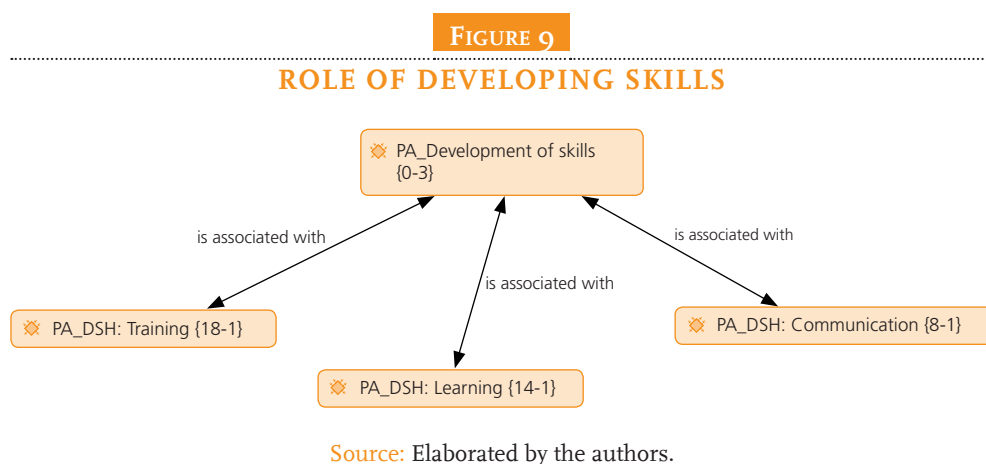
Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The practice of solidary economy promoted by the organizational actor has the purpose of making social actors the protagonists of their own social and economic development. That way, it is considered to be a self-managing practice that involves the community in the definition of priorities and destination of resources.

Moreover, these innovations have awakened an entrepreneurial practice in the communities benefited, as a category of analysis of new forms of work orga-

nization and behavioral changes, for allowing social actors to have access to local markets. These new forms of work organization provoked a glimpse of a new paradigm that rescues traditional knowledges and bets on the region's potential, stimulating behavioral changes of social actors under the influence of the organizational actor. It is therefore set in the pursuit of socio-technical adequacy.

The role of developing skills (Figure 9) involves the concern of the organizational actor to train social actors for acting in the phases of development, implementation and dissemination that compose the social innovation process.



According to the collected data, trainings happen mostly through courses that focus on social needs, guiding participants towards the development of the self-managing enterprises in which they participate.

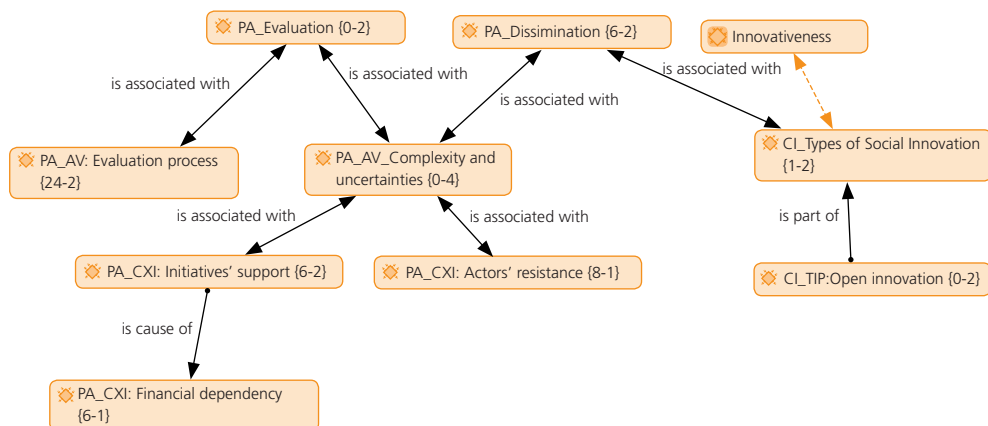
The systematization of these exchanges of experiences occurs through the production and sharing of communication materials that function as a way of strengthening existing practices and disseminating the organizational actor's actions with the other involved actors.

Regarding the evaluation strategy, the organizational actor plays a relevant role of establishing the evaluation process, based on mechanisms that allow for a quantitative and qualitative analysis of implemented projects (Figure 10).

This step is identified as the follow-up of implemented projects, which includes the concern with evaluation and transparency of activities arising from the monitoring and evaluation requirements laid down in legislation, as well as the accuracy regarding the use of public resources when they are passed on by companies. The evaluation process brings the challenge of understanding the complexities inherent to the social innovation process and facing the uncertainties that surround it, and which are related to the following aspects: the support

FIGURE 10

## ROLE PLAYED BY THE ORGANIZATIONAL ACTOR OF EVALUATING AND DISSEMINATING SOCIAL INNOVATIONS



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

of initiatives; financial dependency; and the resistance of the actors, identified as a complex factor within this social dynamics.

This dissemination strategy is associated with the concept of open innovation, in which users and other interested parties are free to copy the idea and adapt it to their reality. That is because social innovation is characterized for its dissemination related to specific actions, articulated in network and adapted to contexts, having the actor as the main driver and representative of this paradigmatic transition.

### 4.4 DIMENSION OF SOCIAL IMPROVEMENTS AND ANSWERS

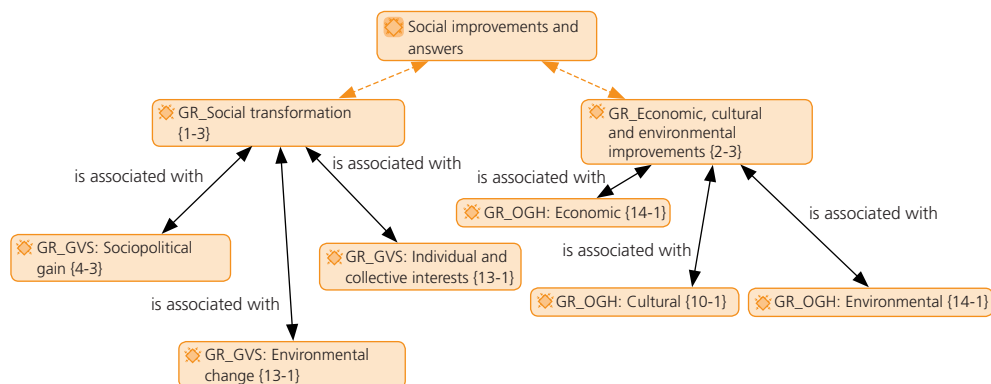
In this dimension, it was possible to notice that social innovation should be understood not only as a defining criterion for mediating the use of technologies, but also as a tool that reaches those who needs such technologies. The social improvement generated as an outcome from that innovation should provide the appropriate answers for the social issues in their specific contexts, as shown in Figure 11.

The case studied has shown that the role of stimulating sociopolitical gain is related to the empowerment of the communities involved. This results in a process of developing new ways of work organization and new social practices that wish to turn them into active beings in the search of the satisfaction of their needs.



FIGURE II

## SOCIAL IMPROVEMENTS AND ANSWERS



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Other roles were validated during the empirical phase of this study, which were not previously identified during the literature review phase. The first of them was the role of stimulating economic improvements and answers that emphasize the social process of the countryman. It is important because it takes the countryman into a state of thinking about his own state of misery, on account of the unequal appropriation of space, as well as the concentration of income in the ruling classes. Another one is the role of stimulating cultural improvements and answers, which ensures ethnical and cultural diversity in communities that seek to strengthen and maintain their cultural identity by respecting traditional knowledge and adopting innovating actions that contribute to regional valorization.

Finally, the role of stimulating environmental profits is not exclusively related to ecologic issues. This constitutes as a variable interdependent to economic, cultural and social factors that seek a rapprochement between the environment and development, involving the discussion on the need to promote a sustainable management of the natural resource base.

## 4.5 DIMENSION OF INNOVATIVENESS

Within the dimension of innovativeness, it was noticed that many of the innovative characteristics of the roles played by the organizational actor were presented in the dimensions of social needs and process.

In the social needs dimension, innovativeness is associated with emphases on knowledge that the local actors seek preservation of local knowledge when

managing a small production unit and the use of agro ecological practices in accordance with the specificities of the context. This relates to the recognition of the social actors' knowledge about soil type, plants and ecological processes, and insertion of improvements of the communities' living conditions to be benefited.

Change occurs within an existing reality, in a way that the alternatives developed are generated as to systematize practices, methods and instruments that facilitate change in such place. It is a slow process, which involves the incorporation of a new way of living, a cultural process, of continuous and constructive learning.

On the other hand, they promote applicability of social innovation because they are cheap and easy to implement, as well as to solve the problems quickly, such as water storage capacity, and to promote decentralized access for the benefited families.

In the process dimension, it is observed encouragements for behavioral changes of the social actors involved by the organizational actor that presents social-productive characteristics for coping with drought, hand in hand, therefore, with the dynamics of solidary economy, social innovation, autonomy and self-management. The innovation dynamics within the local sociotechnical networks favor the creation of spaces for social interaction that are essential for building and sharing knowledge guided by the principles of agro ecology.

Furthermore, the social innovation investigated acquires contours similar to the notion of open social innovation (Chesbrough, 2006), as an indicator of the type of innovation because it involves subjects of many sectors (social, organizational and institutional), through a collaborative arena aimed for changing the paradigm.

For the purposes of an open social innovation, re-applying social innovation is based on the idea that the process should be of a reorganization of the own social innovation in accordance with local reality. This allows participation, appropriation and adaptation of the knowledge from local references, thus generating better living conditions for the communities.

However, it is important to emphasize that in the dimension of innovativeness this aspect is not restricted to the technology implemented, but also involves the organizational actor's role to develop projects and discuss alternatives for social inclusion and sustainable development, civil society strengthening and opening for larger social participation in public policies.

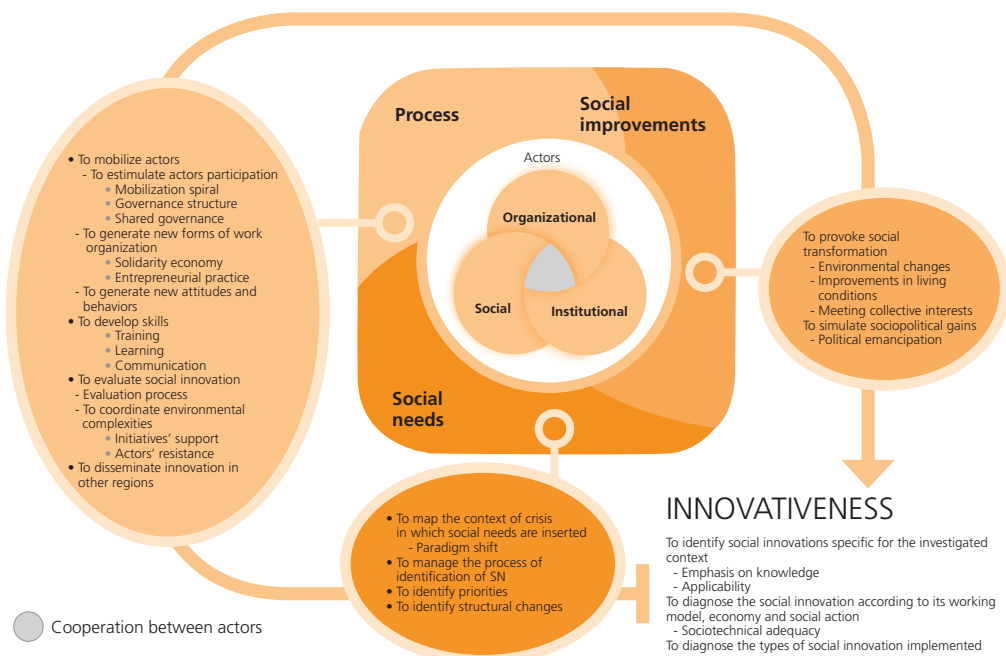
## 4.6 FINAL FRAMEWORK PROPOSITION

In the literature review phase, the authors presented a theoretical proposal of the roles played by the organizational actors within the dimensions of social innovation. In a second moment, an empirical research with the goal of completing

that theoretical model was made. This process resulted in a model built from a research both theoretical and empirical, which shows the following features (Figure 12). The authors consider that this final framework is able to point out the role of the organizational actor in a social innovation.

FIGURE 12

## ROLES PLAYED BY THE ORGANIZATIONAL ACTOR IN A SOCIAL INNOVATION



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

This way, one can infer that the proposed definition of social innovation presents the roles of the organizational actors within the dimensions of social innovation in the perspective of process and result, generating transformation and social value for the communities involved.

## 5 CONCLUSION

The research developed for this study provides a conceptual contribution by advancing the discussion on social innovation. It delivers a systematic organization of the roles played by the organizational actor within the five dimensions

of social innovation, identifying categories and analysis indicators of roles perceived as the most relevant. This resulted in a framework that allows to operate the concept and to analyze the phenomenon.

It is observed the role of the organizational actor as legitimate representative of society, articulating bottom-up initiatives for the satisfaction of their basic need and in the possibility of access to public policies. It is articulated for the development of social innovation, when it comes to mobilizing other actors involved, the development of abilities, assessment and diffusion of these initiatives. The framework confirms that social innovations are not limited to the use of technologies, but they represent the tools that generate social gain from local structural changes.

It is important to notice that social innovation initiatives constitute dynamic and non-linear processes associated to many factors that result in efforts to solve complex problems related to the satisfaction of social needs. This essay also stands out for its theoretical originality and its contribution to the literature about the subject, by proposing a preliminary framework based on international theories and then validating it through an empirical research. Finally, it proposes a framework that analyzes the role played by the organizational actor within social innovation initiatives in the Brazilian context.

When validating dimensions, categories and indicators that represent the roles played by the organizational actor, the authors believe that the framework can be applied to other organizational contexts, making necessary adaptations, but keeping the main dimensions and categories of analysis.

In a practical sense, this work will be able to help organizational actors plan strategic actions that can be adopted to promote a continuous cycle of social innovations, showing plausible starting points.

## DIMENSÕES DA INOVAÇÃO SOCIAL E OS PAPEIS DO ATOR ORGANIZACIONAL: A PROPOSIÇÃO DE UM FRAMEWORK

### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Propor um *framework* que envolva dimensões de análise e seus respectivos papéis do ator organizacional nas iniciativas de inovação social.

**Originalidade/lacuna/relevância/implicações:** Houve o desafio de delinear o *framework* dentro de um contexto brasileiro, contribuindo como instrumento para tomada de decisão do ator organizacional, ajudando-o a uma melhor compreen-

são das iniciativas de inovação social que coordena, bem como caracterizar os papéis que devem desenvolver para uma melhor promoção e divulgação das inovações sociais implementadas.

**Principais aspectos metodológicos:** Realizou-se um estudo de natureza qualitativa e teve como caso a rede formada por organizações da sociedade civil que atuam na gestão de inovações sociais (Articulação do Semiárido Brasileiro – ASA). As ONGs vinculadas a ASA que atuam nos estados da Paraíba, Pernambuco e Rio Grande do Norte foram consideradas como unidades de análise do caso investigado. A Análise de Conteúdo foi adotada para o tratamento dos dados, apoiada pelo uso do software Atlas.Ti.

**Síntese dos principais resultados:** O ator organizacional tem um papel destacado nas iniciativas de inovação social, como representante legítimo dos interesses da sociedade na articulação de iniciativas *bottom-up* (atores); na identificação das necessidades sociais não satisfeitas (necessidades sociais); gerenciador das relações sociais, especialmente no que diz respeito à governança e participação (processo); e estimulador dos ganhos sociais causados na comunidade (ganhos e respostas sociais).

**Principais considerações/conclusões:** Os papéis apontados permitem um mapeamento das ações do ator organizacional, auxiliando-o nos trabalhos de planejamento, implementação e difusão de iniciativas sociais, resultando em um modelo que possibilita operacionalizar o conceito e propiciar análise do fenômeno.

## PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Inovação social. Atores organizacionais. Necessidades sociais e processo. Ganhos e respostas sociais. Caráter inovador.

## DIMENSIONES DE INNOVACIÓN SOCIAL Y FUNCIONES DEL ACTOR ORGANIZACIONAL: UNA PROPUESTA DE UN MARCO

### RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Desarrollar un marco que involucra dimensiones de análisis y las funciones respectivas del actor organizacional en las iniciativas de innovación social.

**Originalidad/laguna/relevancia/implicaciones:** No fue el desafío de delinear el marco, en un contexto brasileño, contribuyendo como una herramienta para el actor organizacional toma de decisiones, que ayudar a una mejor comprensión

de las iniciativas de innovación social que coordina y caracterizar los papeles que se deben desarrollar para mejorar la promoción y difusión de las innovaciones sociales implementadas.

**Principales aspectos metodológicos:** Se realizó un estudio cualitativo y tuvieron como si la red de organizaciones de la sociedad civil que trabajan en la gestión de la innovación social (Articulação do Semiárido Brasileiro – ASA). Las ONGs vinculadas a la ASA que operan en los estados de Paraíba, Pernambuco y Rio Grande do Norte se consideraron unidades de análisis del caso objeto de investigación. Se adoptó el análisis de contenido para el tratamiento de los datos, con el apoyo de la utilización de software ATLAS.ti.

**Síntesis de los principales resultados:** El actor organizacional tiene un papel destacado en las iniciativas de innovación social, como el representante legítimo de los intereses de la compañía en la articulación de iniciativas de abajo arriba (actores); la identificación de las necesidades sociales insatisfechas (necesidades sociales); gerente de relaciones sociales, especialmente en materia de gobierno y participación (proceso); y estimulantes logros sociales causados en la comunidad (ganancias y las respuestas sociales).

**Principales consideraciones/conclusiones:** Los documentos indicados permiten el mapeo de las acciones del actor de la organización, ayudándole en el trabajo de planificación, ejecución y difusión de iniciativas sociales, lo que resulta en un modelo que permite poner en práctica el concepto y proporcionar análisis del fenómeno.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

Innovación social. Actores de la organización. Las necesidades sociales y de procesos. Las ganancias y las respuestas sociales. Carácter innovador.

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