

EDITORIAL

Thematic dossier: Social Innovations and Democratic Experimentation in Governance and Public Policy

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1. INTRODUCTION

This dossier of the Revista Brasileira de Políticas Públicas e Internacionais (RPPI) (Brazilian Journal of Public and International Policy, in English) aims to highlight and promote discussions on the dynamics of social innovation and experimentalist practices aimed at strengthening democracy and improving governance for socio-environmental transformation. Its organization stems from our motivation, as guest editors, to publicize and broaden the debate around the papers presented in the Thematic Session (TS) of the same name, which we organized in two editions of the Encontro Nacional de Ensino, Pesquisa e Extensão do Campo de Públicas (ENEPECP) (National Meeting of Teaching, Research and Extension in the Field of Publics, in English) in 2021 and 2023. The dossier brings together the best papers presented, which underwent an extensive and careful peer review process by RPPI, as well as an

invited paper by Professors Christopher Ansell, from the Department of Political Science at the University of Berkeley, in the United States, and Jacob Torfing, from the School of Governance at Roskilde University, in Denmark, originally published in 2021 in the journal *Policy & Politics*, whose translation into Portuguese was authorized by the authors and the journal especially for this report.

Beforehand commenting on each of the texts and their contributions, we would like to introduce with this editorial the epistemic, analytical and axiological lens that animated the proposal of the TS and this dossier, which compose some of the outputs of a long collaborative research agenda that has been woven by us and our research groups and teams around social innovation and democratic experimentalism in the Field of Publics in Brazil. Anchored in a pragmatist and critical lens, this interdisciplinary and inter-institutional dialog has been promoted with colleagues from various regions of Brazil and different countries. This editorial therefore begins by addressing the present time and the challenges posed by a scenario of multiple crises that overlap with historical and multifaceted public problems in the country. This scenario requires the negotiation, co-creation and practice of new forms of production and consumption, as well as new patterns of connection between the State, the market, civil society and academia; in short, it demands new ways of interacting with each other, in organizations and institutions, and with living environments.

Based upon this contextualization, we move on to the approach we have adopted to social innovation, understanding it in its relationship with democracy, based on the notion of democratic experimentalism, and how this can help not only to enrich or adjectivize, but to resignify the notion of innovation in its classic conception.

It is from this understanding that we introduce the texts presented here, which bring a plural debate on social innovations, based on different experiences and in different areas of public policy and governance, serving as inspiration both for practices and for new studies in the field of public policy.

2. WE KNOW THE LESSON BY HEART, ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS LEARN IT... OR EXPERIMENT WITH IT?

The debate on the impact of human activities on life on the planet is more than half a century old, since the emergence of seminal works - such as *Silent Spring* (Carson, 1962) and *Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al., 1972) - which served as "alert launcher" (Chateauraynaud, 2011) regarding the harmful effects of unlimited economic growth and anticipated some of the consequences of the ecological crisis we are currently experiencing.

Since then, this debate has made great strides in the fields of science, politics and public opinion. Today, there is widespread recognition and publication of scientific evidences revealing the human impact on the Earth system and its biosphere on a planetary scale (Folke et al., 2021). Of particular note are the successive and increasingly accurate reports published, since 1990, by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which demonstrate the impacts of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions on the multiple forms and spheres of life on the planet.

There have also been several expansions and diversifications of public policies, conventions, laws, devices and institutions aimed at responding to the ecological crisis. Initially focused on environmental conservation and preservation (Catton and Dunlap, 1978), the Global Climate Convention at ECO 1992 created new repertoires and principles such as precaution and the polluter pays. With the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, concern also turned to mitigation, with the reduction of GHG emissions, and adaptation, invoking new ways of dealing with and responding to the risks that are already being experienced and are more intense in some parts of the planet, especially among the most vulnerable.

Sustainability will then become an "umbrella" word in the public debate, in the scientific, political and media fields, becoming almost unanimous. Hence, we could assume that the expansion of knowledge, institutionalization and the production of a consensus in public opinion would be more than enough to change course in these more than sixty years of history.

Unfortunately, however, the facts show that they are not. As the latest IPCC report (2023) shows, there are huge gaps between the predictions and what has actually been achieved. The speed and scale of mitigation actions and the inequalities in terms of adaptation in the various regions of the planet have meant that climate change is already irreversible and the window of time to build solutions so that the planet is habitable by 2100 is narrowing rapidly. Moreover, the structural inequalities that already exist between and within countries are widening, exacerbated by what is now known as "climate injustice", as these injustices are added to those already suffered by the most vulnerable populations, who have fewer means of responding to the risks and other impacts of the climate crisis.

This scenario calls attention to the fact that behind the "sustainability" discourse often rides an inertia and a weakening of criticism and action on the causes and effects of the crisis and the very directions taken by capitalist societies and their effects (Berkes, Colding and Folke, 2002; Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999). In contemporary times, more extreme positions are emerging that attempt to mask and "dispute the facts" through denialist and/or escapist narratives (Latour, 2020), which are reinforced by the proliferation and articulation of populist and extreme right-wing governments in various parts of the world. These realities are even more critical in the countries of the South, as they are combined with public problems and structural and historical inequalities, making the challenges more robust and complex.

For those who have or have not followed the trajectory of these more than five decades of scientific debate and socio-environmental policy, it is becoming increasingly clear that it is not enough to know the lesson, but to learn it, as the poet Beto Guedes expresses in his song, and going further, to experiment in order to transform social practices, habits and ways of living, with the aim of changing the course of this trajectory and guaranteeing life on the planet and the "Buen Vivir" in the territories.

3. FROM INNOVATION TO SOCIAL INNOVATION

The panorama we have briefly discussed now not only invites, but impels us to rethink traditional ways of "innovating". We therefore propose another view of innovation, understood here, inspired by John Dewey's critical

pragmatism, as a way of instituting, in other words, favoring democracy in order to transform realities (in their different dimensions), with a view to the desired ends. From this viewpoint, this interpretation differs from the notion of innovation pioneered in economics by Joseph Schumpeter, as the driving force behind economic development or economic cycles, through the "creative destruction" promoted mainly by the entrepreneur.

Changing course and facing up to the challenges of the present requires going beyond combating "global warming". It means going ahead of reducing the temperature by a few degrees and changing the statistics, it means producing transformative changes. Given the context, the notion of social innovation takes center stage. Not just to adjectivize innovation, giving it a quality that is commonly attributed to the social - as if there were a social in itself, which we know is a fallacy (Latour, 2012) - but to give innovation a new meaning. As discussed in the Vienna Declaration for Social Innovation - a milestone in this new understanding at a global level - it is a question of considering social innovation as a new innovation paradigm (Vienna Declaration, 2011).

Social innovation operates as an analytical key to understanding the changes produced in social interactions and also in transactions with nature, and is therefore intrinsically linked to the notion of democracy as a way of life, as conceived by John Dewey. As Andion et al. (2017) argue, inspired by this perspective, social innovation is thus a central notion for understanding the formation of publics as collectives capable of influencing the direction of the institutions and societies they are part of, making them more autonomous and therefore more democratic. This process is strengthened to the extent that the possibilities of experiencing democracy or exercising "power with", in the sense attributed by Follet (1918 and 1924), are more likely. This brings us to the relationship between social innovation and forms of governance, since more or less democratic forms of governance can be vectors that stimulate or hinder social innovation.

4. SOCIAL INNOVATIONS AND DEMOCRATIC EXPERIMENTS IN GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC POLICY

However, how does this discussion relate to the field of public policy? The intention of this report is precisely to bring this question into the debate and to advance some avenues of response. In particular, we are interested in shedding light on public governance, focusing on socio-state interactions and their challenges, and how this can generate more or less fertile ecosystems for social innovations and democratic experimentation and for socio-environmental transformations in the territories.

The articles in the dossier explore this question in different ways, bringing theoretical and empirical reflections. Highlights include the Social Innovation Observatories, which have set themselves up as platforms to reinforce and encourage co-creation in social innovation ecosystems in various regions of the country. These emerged from the precursor experience of the Observatório de Inovação Social de Florianópolis (OBISF) (Observatory of Social Innovation of Florianópolis, in English) (Andion, 2021) and today

constitute a network to promote social innovation in science and public policies, in conjunction with national and international partners.

The first article by Ansell and Torfing (2025), partners in this network, discusses the notion of co-creation and its importance for thinking about a new type of governance: generative. To delimit the concept, they differentiate it from coproduction, which is traditionally related to the introduction of users as active agents in the provision of public services, involving "collaborative governance", usually requested by public servants. Co-development, on the other hand, is related to more spontaneous, open and unsolicited processes. Co-development emphasizes the distributed nature of innovation, bringing together public innovation and social innovation with the aim of creating public value. In this sense, co-creation brings a new type of generative governance that encourages the emergence of productive interactions between different actors.

The article by Gianella and Ferrarini (2025) also focuses on the notion of co-creation, now empirically relating it to democratic experimentalism, based on a case study in the city of Porto Alegre. The study starts from a discussion of the current democratic crisis in contrast to participatory experiences produced across institutional boundaries that indicate ways of strengthening local democracy. The article analyses the Congresso Popular de Educação para a Cidadania (CPEC) (Popular Congress of Education for Citizenship, in English), held in Porto Alegre since 2022 by citizen collectives in peripheral communities, as a process of democratic experimentation in the co-creation of political spaces between heterogeneous people, questioning its potential and limits for the inclusion of peripheral voices in the democratization of the city. The study employed methodologies of observational participation, individual and group interviews with leaders of the collectives active in the CPEC, as well as analysis of reports and audiovisual materials, in order to describe and discuss the experience of the CPEC in the production of mobilization, participation and belonging, personal and social transformation, and its configuration as an underground network of social links and socio-political capacities that tend to form part of the basis of a new generation of democratic innovations in Porto Alegre.

Witt, Andion and Manoel (2025), in turn, adopt a critical pragmatist perspective to analyze public governance and seek to understand the relationship between governance and social innovation in two fields of public policy in the city of Florianópolis: guaranteeing the rights of children and adolescents and urban agriculture. The work develops an original analytical approach to understanding public governance regimes in practice, understanding them from relational configurations (spatially and temporally situated), involving: actors, relationships, positions, resources and devices. Based on this perspective, the authors propose a "governance kaleidoscope" to unveil the configuration of governance in the two public arenas studied. Data was collected by means of cartography and ethnography of the public arenas within the framework of the Observatório de Inovação Social de Florianópolis (Observatory of Social Innovation of Florianópolis, in English), triangulating different methods such as direct and participant observation, interviews and document and media analysis. The results reveal various public arenas, their political ecologies and relational configurations, which will influence the actions

of civil society, socio-state interactions and the dynamics of coproduced social innovation.

The article by Santo et al. (2025) discusses the experience of creating and implementing the Observatório de Inovação Social da Fronteira (OBISFRON) (Observatory for Social Innovation on the Border, in English), in Corumbá, Mato Grosso do Sul. The experience is based on the precursor methodology built by the OBISF (Andion, Alperstedt and Graeff, 2020), articulating it with the decolonial perspective of the Buen Vivir. The work contributes to the approach to social innovations and their ecosystems, taking into account the ways of life and governance in the Latin American context. The authors propose a transdisciplinary reading of the perspective of the Buen Vivir, supported by social innovations in the pragmatist line, with a view to promoting the democratic participation of civil society actors, strengthening local community ties and reconfiguring the relationship with nature. In its theoretical framework, the paper discusses the concept of Buen Vivir, based on the plurality of conceptions and worldviews of Latin American and Amazonian peoples, supporting the possibility of embracing this perspective to rethinking development on an alternative, democratic, multicultural and decolonial basis. The discourse then addresses social innovation as a vector for social transformation and its approach in the light of pragmatism, promoting a dialog between the two strands. In the final analysis, the research highlights the role of civil society actors and presents the social innovation ecosystem on the Brazil-Bolivia border, along the lines of the methodology adopted, identifying and making visible the territory's public problems and the practices of the various actors, mapping their interactions. Using the concept of public arenas (Cefai 2007), the arenas of Women, School Meals, Welcoming Immigrants and Refugees, Anti-Racist Education and Quilombola Communities are examined.

The article by Souza, Silva Júnior and Assis (2025) deals with the experience of implementing the Observatório de Inovação Social de Petrópolis (Observatory of Social Innovation of Petrópolis, in English), also inspired by the analytical and methodological approach of the OBISF (Andion, Alperstedt and Graeff, 2020). The authors present and analyze the initial results of the cartographic research that identified actors involved in the production of social innovations in the city. On a theoretical level, the article begins with a discussion about the limitations of the predominant positivist perspective in the study of public policies and the contributions of interpretivist approaches more in tune with pragmatist critique to the processes of participation in public policies. A brief socio-historical contextualization of the city is presented, based on maps that illustrate some environmental problems and related population distribution processes, explaining the unequal division of race, class and risks of climatic events in the municipality. In conclusion, preliminary results from interviews with some of the players in the social innovation ecosystems are presented, in which the main public problems, the dilemmas of influencing municipal public policies and the challenges of social participation are addressed.

The article by Marcondes and Teixeira (2025) looks at state capacities and the crosscutting nature of public policies, with a view to including people with disabilities. Grounded in a historical review of the advances and limitations in the realization of the rights of people with disabilities, the article highlights the need to develop institutional capacities for the realization of these policies. In

this sense, the role of crosscutting socio-state articulation of management and participation instances and mechanisms to forge an ecosystem of social innovation is fundamental. Rooted in an analysis of the institutional capacities formally established in the state of Rio Grande do Norte (from 2003 to 2023), the research describes limited progress and persistent challenges, marked by isolated initiatives and a lack of prioritization in public policies for people with disabilities. The article provokes a reflection on inter-federative relations, highlighting the impacts of political alignment between the federal and state governments and the fragility of institutional capacities with regard to the crosscutting nature of these policies.

Still focusing on government action, the study by Soares (2025) critically explores the notion of public governance, using Guerreiro Ramos' sociological reduction to analyze the implementation and consequences of Decree 9.203/2017, which provides for the governance policy of the direct, autarchic and foundational federal public administration. The article reveals the shift produced by the decree in the meaning attributed to public governance, which will be linked to the institutional dimension of the phenomenon and government efficiency, focusing on public innovation in a strict sense, but without considering the addition of public value and public policies and their interface with social innovation.

The article by Costa and Fonseca (2025) analyzes the profile of solidarity economy ventures in the municipality of Araraquara and the impacts suffered because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The article contrasts the impacts of the pandemic on the dynamics of creation and strengthening versus weakening and closure of enterprises. If, on the one hand, the pandemic has caused the death of many enterprises, on the other hand, the mobilization of community initiatives has made it possible to cope with the pandemic, especially initiatives related to the production of personal protective equipment (PPE) and food. The research analyzed multiple cases, offering a description of the dynamics of the solidarity economy in the municipality in a challenging context arising from the scenario of political, social and economic instability created by the pandemic. Amongst the reflections provoked by the work, we highlight the debate on the solidarity of solidarity economy groups and enterprises in creating means of prevention in an environment conflicted by crises and the challenges of institutionalization.

Tackling risk and disaster, Almeida and Teodósio (2025) discuss the right to the city based on an analysis of the case of the collapse of the Brumadinho mineral dam in 2019, with multidimensional impacts of great magnitude that are perpetuated, compromising the environment and the affected population's way of life, as well as the loss of 272 lives. The article is based on the pragmatist perspective, based on Andion and Magalhães (2021), with a view to approaching social actors who organize and mobilize in search of their rights. The development of the work starts with the contextualization of Brumadinho and the discussion about mining, its impacts and drug addiction. The methodology was conceived from the perspective of engaged research, involving various resources to approach the riverside communities located on the banks of the Paraopeba River. The analysis focused on collective actors and their actions, beyond institutionalized participation, highlighting the role of

local social movements and female leaders in the search for rights and practices of resistance.

In the end, the study by Silva et al. (2025) analyzes democratic experiments in the context of candidacies and collective mandates in Belo Horizonte, from 2016-2022, presenting potentialities and challenges. Employing a qualitative methodology and addressing local cases, the article analyzes composition, agendas and proposals, forms of participation in the context of mandates, and highlights potentialities and challenges for promoting participation, fostering social control and strengthening links between parliamentarians and social movements. The article then presents reflections on the experiences of collective candidacies and mandates as experiments aimed at promoting the expansion of social participation and deliberation in institutional spaces in the legislature, in the face of the crises surrounding traditional representation.

To conclude, we would like to thank RPPI for its trust and for the space to deepen the critical and reflective debate on a topic that is still little explored in the field of public policy in Brazil: social innovation and its relationship with governance and public policies. As a result, this dossier provides a sample of the richness, quality and contribution of the Field of Publics to the research agenda in social innovation and democratic experimentalism, from different perspectives, be it social innovation ecosystems, public arenas, governance and socio-state interactions, public administration, the legislature, public policies or even specific situations/sectors such as those involving risks and disasters, solidarity economy, among others. We all desire that this issue is widely accessed and inspires readers to advance in their research and studies, and in their practice in public management and public policies, helping to create spaces, organizations and territories that are more conducive to co-creation, democratic experimentalism and social innovation.

The editorial team of the thematic dossier wishes everyone an excellent read!

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