

SOCIAL INNOVATIONS IN BRAZIL: HOW DO SOCIAL INNOVATIONS FLOURISH?

The different research activities about social innovation in Brazil indicate that this country has been, for many reasons, a “cradle” of social innovation.

Carla Cipolla / Rita Afonso

BRAZIL (AND RIO DE JANEIRO)

Brazil has many problems related to social inequality, poor public management of resources, and a lack of access to basic public services and rights, such as education, technology and security. In the city of Rio de Janeiro, the situation is no different, despite this being the second-largest city in the country. It has been defined for decades – and still faces the problem – as a “broken city” [1]. This refers to the enormous inequality existing between the slums (where the city’s poorest residents live “in the hills”, usually in informal settlements) and the rest of the city (whose residents live on the “asphalt”). There is a sizeable percentage of residents living in asphalt areas who can be classified as middle class: it is reported that 45 % of Rio de Janeiro’s residents live in residential condominiums, composed of housing units in condominium tenures or buildings containing such units [2]. Among these, only 10 % are in the wealthiest areas of the city (the South), with very few in the poorest areas. Other Brazilian cities may have different characteristics, but the city of Rio de Janeiro is taken as the main reference for our analysis. Historically, Brazil has been an important experimental ground for the development of social innovations in theoretical and practical terms, even if they have never been classified or named as such before. Famous examples include Participatory Budgeting and World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, and experiences such as the Theatre and the Pedagogy of the Oppressed, respectively by Augusto Boal and Paulo Freire.

TYOLOGIES FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION IN BRAZIL

Nowadays, in the Brazilian scenario with a special focus on the city of Rio de Janeiro, it is possible to highlight five types of social innovation by clustering the central themes addressed by the initiatives. There are other examples in each of these typologies, and some cases could be classified

in multiple typologies (the most representative one for each case is presented in the table).

IDENTIFYING ASPECTS OF BRAZILIAN SOCIAL INNOVATIONS

Many of the Brazilian social innovations arise in response to unmet social needs and the lack of access to basic resources. It is common sense in Brazil to affirm that groups in this situation (and all Brazilians in general) are “creative” when it comes to finding ways to face and overcome their own problems. This echoes the social innovation theories [1] which recognize the creative capabilities of ordinary people to be “heroes” of everyday life by creating and developing new solutions, without expert guidance or government support. This proactive attitude is particularly important to groups trying to cope with the lack of resources and education, which may see themselves (and be seen) as passive recipients of help or assistance. One of the main channels used by these groups, to find a way of escaping their restricted environment, is culture (e.g. FLUPP). Actions related to the production and consumption of culture are overcoming visible and invisible barriers in the city, and are reverting the flow of information and people from the centers to the peripheries, where many powerful cultural manifestations are taking place (e.g. Norte Comum).

Creative capabilities can also be observed in other groups, usually (but not exclusively) among young people: members of the urban middle class who have access to knowledge and resources. Such individuals are seeking alternatives to unsustainable patterns of production and consumption (e.g. Movimento Roupas Livres, Caronaê) or want to find meaningful work (e.g. Impact Hub in São Paulo).

Classification	Description	Example	Challenges
1 - Government and SI	Social innovations promoted by governments at different levels, with the aim of changing the way the government makes decisions on behalf of the population	<i>Participatory Budgeting</i> (Porto Alegre, Fortaleza, Belo Horizonte) - Inspired more than 1,500 cities worldwide in deciding how governments (municipal or neighborhood) invest their resources on behalf of the citizen.	<i>Strengthening of democracy and more participation in city hall decisions</i>
		<i>Lab Rio</i> (Rio de Janeiro) - Action of the municipal government of the city of Rio de Janeiro, in which young residents help construct the city's strategic planning.	<i>Promoting youth participation in city hall decisions</i>
2 - Culture and SI	Actions linked to culture, arts and communication	<i>FLUPP</i> (Rio de Janeiro) - A literary festival that occurs in many favelas in Rio, which were covered by a public security policy called "Pacification".	<i>Changing the stigma that favela residents have no interest in reading or writing</i>
		<i>Papo Reto</i> (Rio de Janeiro) - Creation of a real-time security system, through a WhatsApp group that communicates to residents the security conditions in the favelas of Complexo do Alemão.	<i>Overcoming insecurity caused by inter-drug and police conflicts</i>
3 - Networks and SI	Initiatives that are part of or build a national, local or international network	<i>Impact Hub</i> (Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Belo Horizonte, Recife, Florianópolis and Curitiba) - Co-working space for entrepreneurial activities, part of the international network Impact Hub.	<i>Creating an environment conducive to the work of young entrepreneurs</i>
		<i>Norte Comum</i> (Rio de Janeiro) - Shifts the cultural production to peripheral areas in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Created a local network that covers more than 10 neighborhoods.	<i>Overcoming the lack of cultural attractions in the poorest areas of the city</i>
4 - New consumption and production patterns, sustainable behaviors	New and conscious forms of production and consumption	<i>Movimento Roupa Livre</i> (Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Florianópolis, Recife, Salvador) - Large events to sell used clothes and teach the public to customize them.	<i>Changing unsustainable production and consumption patterns</i>
		<i>Caronaê</i> (Rio de Janeiro) - car-sharing system (app) operating in a public university in Rio de Janeiro.	<i>Improving mobility standards</i>
5 - Universities and SI	New ways to exchange knowledge at university	<i>Universidade das Quebradas</i> (Rio de Janeiro) - Promotes new interactions between academic and popular knowledge.	<i>Promoting interaction between academic and popular knowledge</i>
		<i>DESIS Lab</i> at University of Brazil (Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, Curitiba, Florianópolis and Porto Alegre) - member of an international network, Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability, composed of more than 40 labs in the universities.	<i>Promoting a sustainable and innovative future</i>

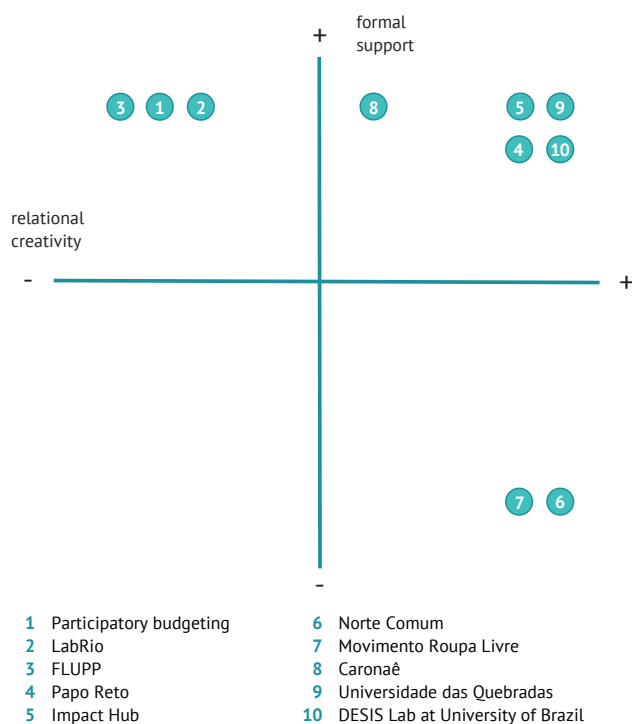
Aspects of social innovation in Brazil

Brazilian social innovation initiatives are not strictly related to income generation for low-income or poor groups, i.e. they go beyond what we know as entrepreneurship, based on the offering of new products or services. This indicates the need to maintain a broad focus when analyzing and supporting the emergence of new social innovations, even in a developing country.

Many social innovation initiatives rely on the use of ICT. These technologies prove to be useful for creating new communicative patterns in the city and promote new connections between slums and the outside areas (e.g. Papo Reto). As a result, not all of them spread in the form of networks, and when they do, this happens on a small scale, for instance connecting different initiatives in the same city (e.g. Norte Comum). In addition, international

networks have been influencing the emergence of social innovations in Brazil (e.g. Impact Hub and DESIS Network). Not all Brazilian innovations are easily replicable; they may be related to a local context and emerge due to a specific set of institutional stimuli (e.g. specific policies) which activate local resources in a unique way (e.g. FLUPP).

Initiatives may be largely based on interpersonal face-to-face relationships and encounters, i.e., the kind that occurs in small groups, on a small, local scale. An important aspect in social innovations in Brazil is the interpersonal relational issue [4], which allows groups to overcome individualism and renew the social fabric in large cities such as Rio de Janeiro.



Matrix placing social innovation initiatives in their relation to institutional support and interpersonal relational characteristics

MATRIX – INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT X INTERPERSONAL RELATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Each social innovation initiative presented before can be classified on a matrix. The vertical axis indicates how far an initiative relies on interpersonal relational qualities and autonomous creativity to operate. The horizontal axis indicates to what degree the initiative relies on formal support, which includes support provided by the government, public policies, universities and international networks.

As suggested by the matrix, formal support encourages the emergence of social innovations, but initiatives are not limited to those that receive such support. Many initiatives rely exclusively on the autonomous creativity of individuals and interpersonal relational qualities, and still manage to emerge.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis shows different types of social innovation initiatives in Brazil, with a special focus on the city of Rio de Janeiro.

Many initiatives are responses to the day-to-day social problems of people and groups and provide a means of accessing rights, goods and services. Others are organized by middle class representatives looking for new possibilities to improve their everyday lives in urban contexts. Therefore, such initiatives are an important vehicle for promoting social change processes [5] in Brazil, and have enormous potential to rebuild the social fabric, reduce inequality, and promote sustainable consumption and production patterns.

At the moment, Brazil does not have continuous policies requiring government agencies to support social innovation, but despite this, initiatives have always flourished. Universities and international networks are playing a role in these processes, but initiatives also grow based on diffused creativity, interpersonal relationships and the will to strive for a better quality of life.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ventura, Zuenir (1994): Cidade Partida. Companhia das Letras: Rio de Janeiro.
- [2] IBGE – Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (2010): Censo Demográfico 2010: Resultados da Amostra – Domicílios. IBGE: Rio de Janeiro.
- [3] Manzini, Ezio/ Coad, Rachel (2015): Design, when everybody designs: an introduction to design for social innovation. The MIT Press: Cambridge, MA.
- [4] Cipolla, Carla/ Manzini, Ezio (2009): Relational Services. In: Knowledge, Technology & Policy, 22 (1), pp. 45-50. doi:10.1007/s12130-009-9066-z.
- [5] Cajuiba-Santana, Giovany (2014): Social innovation: Moving the field forward. A conceptual framework. In: Technological Forecasting and Social Change, 82, pp. 42-51. doi:10.1016/j.techfore.2013.05.008.

This research has been conducted within the TRANSIT project, which has received funding from the European Union's "Seventh Framework Programme" for research, technological development and demonstration, under grant agreement no. 613169. The content of this publication does not reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Responsibility for the information and views expressed therein lies entirely with the authors.