



The role of innovation in the pursuit of sustainability of social businesses in Brazil

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SUMMARY: This research seeks to understand how innovation affects the sustainability of Brazilian social businesses, in order to help current and future social entrepreneurs who aim to perpetuate their companies and the environment in which they operate. Therefore, an exploratory research was carried out through bibliographic analysis, semi-structured online interviews with four social businesses located in Brazil and secondary data analysis. Data collection took place between August and October 2016. The survey results were qualitative, being divided into three pillars: characterization of social businesses; innovation practices; sustainability tripod. It comes to the conclusion that the influence of innovation varies according to the model and the segment of activity of the analyzed company, being relevant in all cases for the gain of competitive advantage, delivery of value and perpetuation of its activities.

Key words: Social business; Innovation; Sustainability; Brazil.

1 INTRODUCTION

Brazil is a continental country, which, despite having the seventh largest gross domestic product in the world (WORLD BANK, 2016), is also the seventeenth most unequal country according to its Gini coefficient (Central Intelligence Agencia, 2015). Although the government works in several instances to reduce social inequalities, the role of innovators and entrepreneurs in the face of the consequences of the unequal distribution of wealth in society becomes increasingly evident. These, who use market approaches to solve social problems, are divided into three main roles: social entrepreneurs, business leaders and philanthropists (REIS, 1999). The first of the three is highlighted in this work for being involved with the management of social businesses, a type of enterprise that seeks to solve social problems through market mechanisms (ROSOLEN et al., 2014) that has drawn global attention for its positive impact on social classes neglected by the traditional market. This business model began to be studied in academia in 1990, there is no consensus on the limits of the definition of this type of organization due to divergences on the distribution of dividends, the public reached and social responsibility (SERCONEK; VITORIANO, 2015).

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In the country, until 2009, there were no or few methodical studies on the subtleties of this type of management and, mainly, about its financial sustainability (SILVA, 2009). Currently, when looking in academic databases, it is clear that studies on the sustainability of these enterprises have been developed as a result of the growth of organizations with the objective of supporting, guiding, educating and training social entrepreneurs. Financial sustainability would be one of the three dimensions of sustainable development discussed in the Brundtland Commission report (CMMAD, 1991), which takes into account the inextricable connection of social, economic and environmental factors with the search for organizational and ecosystem continuity in which it is located. inhabits. According to Silveira et al. (2013), this is an integrative approach that requires excellent management, as it seeks the dynamic balance of the interests and needs of its stakeholders.³. This search requires constant adaptation to market volatilities, making the incorporation of innovation into the organization essential to ensure the interests of the social business. According to the authors:

Innovations, therefore, must provide the necessary conditions for the organization to dynamically readjust its level of competitiveness against other market forces, while meeting environmental and social demands. (SILVEIRA et al., 2013, p. 77).

In order to understand how innovation affects the sustainability of social businesses, In this research, we chose to adopt a contemporary concept, derived from a study carried out with Brazilian social businesses, Projeto Brasil 27, compiling academic theories and field observations in six areas of analysis: financial accessibility; value chain; technology; product and service; Law Suit; market (SERCONK; VITORIANO, 2015). We sought to explore the presence of innovation in different organizational scenarios, enabling a systemic view.

Given this scenario, the role of innovation in the pursuit of sustainability of social businesses in Brazil is questioned. Faced with this issue, this study aims to analyze the innovation strategies that enable the sustainability of social businesses in Brazil. To fulfill this general objective, this work proposes to: (a) identify existing innovation practices within the social businesses studied; (b) understand how such practices found impact on the three

³Stakeholders interested in and/or affected by the business, may be an employee, shareholder, customer or citizen.

dimensions of sustainability: social, economic and environmental development; (c) justify why these analyzed practices influence the sustainability of a company; (d) assist current and future social entrepreneurs to run their business.

Assuming that social enterprises have a social purpose, it is appropriate to understand how innovation affects the economic, social and environmental reality of both this type of organization and its relationship with society. It was chosen to scientifically study the management of social businesses, as the lack of knowledge of this issue can make it difficult, on the one hand, for new players to enter the market and, on the other hand, reduce the chances of those who already work in it to generate or maintain their sustainability. For the selection of the businesses studied, we chose to use two references: the base of companies accelerated by Artemisia, an organization that encourages the development and dissemination of businesses with social impact in Brazil, and companies already mapped by Projeto Brasil 27.

The relevance of this work comes from the strengthening of knowledge about a business model with the potential to improve social problems that are currently not fully addressed by the government. To fulfill the proposed objectives, an exploratory field study was carried out through data analysis and interviews with social business executives. The analysis of the collected data was made from the contrast with the theories studied in this article about innovation, social business and sustainability, reaching the conclusion that there is an influence of innovation on the sustainability of social businesses and, consequently, on their delivery of value, however it varies according to the model and business segment of the analyzed company. The work is divided into theoretical foundation, methodology, analysis of results and conclusion.

2 THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

2.1 Social Entrepreneurship and Social Business

The concept of entrepreneurship began to be explored academically between the 17th and 18th centuries. Initially seen as an adventurer (SAY, 1971)⁴, the entrepreneur came to be seen as the driving force of change and economic development, because through the exploration of new markets, he would teach the population to want new things (SCHUMPETER, 1997).

⁴The first edition of this work was published in 1821, in English, in the United States. This information is relevant due to the temporality of the material and its influence on the development of the academic field of entrepreneurship.

The concept began to be worked on and refined by several authors, with strong disagreements. Along this line, Druker (2002)⁵ argues that innovation would be the entrepreneur's fundamental tool in the creation of new businesses and services resulting from social and technological changes, among others, that is, it would explore the market in search of opportunities “to create value” for a target audience. With levels of inequality increasingly evident, public questioning about the adequacy of entrepreneurial exploitation becomes relevant (NORUZI et al., 2010).

Professor Gregory Dees (2001) was one of the pioneers in the academic field of social entrepreneurship, referring to it as an entrepreneurial genre. For the researcher, the main distinction of the traditional genre comes from the social mission of this entrepreneur, which would be explicit and central and would affect the way he would evaluate and detect opportunities. The impact of his mission would become the end of the activity and not the generation of wealth, as this would be a means to achieve his improvement goals. The line of argument by Martin and Osberg (2007) is in line with the studies by Dees (2001) in the defense that the distinction between entrepreneurial genres comes from their value proposition. While the entrepreneur anticipates and organizes himself in order to serve the market that can pay for innovation and generate profit for his investors, its social gender does not anticipate or organize itself to receive financial returns to investors, seeking scalable impacts that generate benefits for society (MARTIN; OSBERG, 2007). The audience of the latter type of entrepreneur are underserved, neglected or highly disadvantaged populations that do not have the financial means or political influence to acquire conventional products and services on their own, which does not imply charity and charitable actions (ROBERT; WOODS, 2005; MARTIN; OSBERG, 2007).

Regarding social enterprises, Dees (2001) and Martin and Osberg (2007) suggest in their studies that, even dealing with cases of extreme poverty, enterprises can generate income as long as the financial benefit is not present in the company's objectives. Peredo and McLean (2006) disagree with this definition and argue that social enterprises can have profit together with their social ends and that one does not necessarily overlap with the other. Johnson (2000, p.2, our translation) argues that “social entrepreneurship activities blur the traditional boundaries between the public, private and non-profit sectors and emphasize hybrid models of for-profit and non-profit activities”.

⁵The first edition of this work was published in 1985, in English, in the United States. REGMPE, Brasil-BR, V.7, N°2, p. 114-141, May./August.2022 www.revistas.editoraenterprising.net

Based on research carried out by Rosolen, Tiscoski and Comini (2014), with results from the national and international academic field over the last fifteen years, these authors infer that the term “social entrepreneurship” has come to encompass a great diversity of organizations due to its applicability in different contexts. Rosolen et al. (2014, p.87) point out that “the insertion of the economic dimension and the market logic opened up new possibilities for the performance of organizations that until then contemplated a single dimension (social or economic)”. In this way, the term “social entrepreneurship” would be the most comprehensive and which resulted in three new variations recurring in the academic environment: social enterprise, social business and inclusive business (including business).

The term “social business”, coined by Muhammed Yunus⁶, gained popularity in Brazil and Latin American countries, due to the possibility of combating social problems through market mechanisms (ROSOLEN et al. 2014). For Yunus, Moingeon and Lehmann-Ortega (2010), social businesses mix philanthropy with traditional market practices, measuring their success through value created to those impacted. These businesses have a social mission, are financially self-sustaining and do not pay dividends. According to the authors, every individual who designs and manages a social business is a social entrepreneur, however not all social entrepreneurs are involved in social businesses (models that include dividends for shareholders).

Like Serconek and Vitoriano (2015), Rosolen et al. (2014) argue that social entrepreneurship is a contemporary subject that is still in a development stage, both in the country and in the world, which would prevent the assertion that the concepts of this academic field have a formed and structured conceptual basis. According to Peredo and McLean (2006), it is up to those who use the concept of social entrepreneurship to make clear what meaning is attributed to it. It is understood that, nationally, the organization with the greatest representation and contact with small businesses is SEBRAE (2013)⁷, being coherent to use its definition for the Brazilian context, even if contrary, in certain aspects, to the definition of Yunus, Moingeon and Lehmann-Ortega (2010).

⁶“The term social business came to be highlighted with the prominence of Muhammed Yunus, social entrepreneur creator of Grameen Bank, winner of the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize and author of academic articles in the area. Not only was a new term used, but a new vision of social business also emerged.” (ROSOLEN et al. 2014, p. 89).

⁷The Brazilian Support Service for Micro and Small Enterprises is a private entity of public interest that has been in existence for over 40 years and operates in all states of Brazil, with 27 decentralized units that add up to 750 service stations.

They are enterprises that focus their main business on the solution, or minimization, of a social or environmental problem of a community. This objective is part of your business plan and is what will bring profit to the company. The economic viability of the business is crucial for its survival, which does not seek grants and sponsorships. Therefore, economic viability & social and environmental concern have the same importance and are part of the same business plan. [...] Social business clients will be people from the lowest income bracket, the so-called classes C, D and E. They can also be all those involved with minimizing environmental impacts, whether individuals or legal entities. (SEBRAE, 2013, p.4-6).

SEBRAE (2013) argues that economic viability and social and environmental concern have the same importance in the objectives of a social business, not having to seek subsidies and sponsorships for their livelihood and with the possibility of generating dividends or not. However, to be considered a social business, the company does not necessarily need to have a social and environmental impact. It would be utopian to say that companies can be classified into immutable concepts, because, as time passes, the format of performance of organizations changes. Thus, it is appropriate to use the definition of SEBRAE, since it matches the complexity of Brazilian business formats in the current conjuncture.

2.2 Commercial and social innovation

The discussion about the importance of innovation in the academic field has been going on for many years, gaining prominence in the academic studies of Joseph Schumpeter. For the author (1961), innovation would be the main force of economic and industrial development. It would guide, through a dynamic process known as “creative destruction”, the elimination of outdated agents and products and the propagation and survival of innovators. Replacement would be part of the cycle, making it clear that it is impossible for a company to remain competitive in the long term without innovating.

Another work of great importance for the academic field was the Oslo Manual (OECD, 2015), which demystified that business innovation results from the technological capacity of a department, such as research and development, or a group of people, as the scientific staff. His

vision extends the concept of organizational innovation to a more practical and present in everyday life, considering that innovation can result from changes in any of its basic functions: products, processes, organization or marketing. Needing to have been implemented to count as an innovation.

The concepts of innovation were worked on, complemented and expanded by several authors, as social businesses have, in their principles, both the creation of profit and social value, so more than one type of innovation should be studied.

According to Dees (2001, p.4, our translation), one of the defining characteristics of the social entrepreneur refers to innovation, in this way he should “commit himself to a continuous process of innovation, adaptation and learning”. In social enterprises, this factor gains greater weight, especially with regard to raising funds for the viability of their social mission. In view of this, innovation in social business would not only apply to the creation of new organizational models, but also to the application of unusual approaches in the sector and in the chain in which it operates, operational and product modifications and improvements.

The two types of innovation are not incompatible, however they differ in their purpose, strategy, locus, development and dissemination of knowledge, which leads to the belief that their management is different (BIGNETTI, 2011). Social innovation would be a type of innovation that is called social when it results in an improvement in the quality or quantity of life (POL; VILLE, 2009). They are replicable and measurable ideas, organizations or efficient operation models (KONDA, STARC, RADIC, 2015) that create a new concept or apply an existing one to create social and shareholder value (HERRERA, 2015), however, it is not every way to combat social problems that can be considered a social innovation (KONDA, STARC, RADICA, 2015). It is understood that, as much as an innovation understands the social aspect,

The authors of the Brasil 27 Project, Serconek and Vitoriano (2015) created a model for analyzing the types of social innovation based on their observations and on the work of Prahalad (2010) and Tripathi and De (2007), compiling 16 sources of innovation in six major areas: (a) innovation in affordability: product division, payment for use and not for possession, access to credit; (b) innovation in the value chain: inclusion of populations as labor or suppliers; physical accessibility to products and services, networking; (c) technological innovation: adaptation of technologies, development of new ones; (d) innovation in products and services: specific development for local needs, adaptation and simplification of existing products; (e) process innovation: standardization and simplification – favoring the inclusion of labor, development

of cost-effective processes; (f) market innovation: identification of new segments, new form of communication, access to markets. The model was applied in the analysis of 27 case studies of social business, proving to be adequate for the Brazilian reality.

In the present study, both the Schumpeterian view of economic performance and that of social innovation will be analyzed through Sirconek and Vitoriano's (2015) six areas of innovation, in order to understand how innovation affects the management of social businesses.

2. 3 Economic, social and environmental sustainability

The concept of sustainability addressed in this work is related to the structural and managerial aspects of organizations from three dimensions: economic, social and environmental. The approach adopted refers to organizational actions that impact the company's lifetime and enable efficient self-management, so that its social projects are perpetuated.

As far as we have records, concern for the environment began in 1798 with Thomas Malthus, an economist who believed that economic growth would be limited by the depletion of natural resources and environmental destruction (OLIVEIRA, 2013). However, the environmental aspect became widely connected with economic development from the 1980s onwards, in the face of several environmental catastrophes. The impacts of local destruction of the environment began to bother the world population, in the face of thousands of deaths resulting from business failures. The matter became a global concern, resulting in the union of several leaders and the creation of the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1983 by the United Nations (UN). In 1987, the commission published the report “Our Common Future”,

In 1998, John Elkington deepened this discussion, consolidating the triple bottom line management model: people, planet, profit. From his perspective, since society depends on the economy and the economy of the global ecosystem, for a company to be sustainable in the long term it needs to consider that development should not be based only on the economic bias, expanding its scope to the social and environmental spheres. environmental. The dissemination of this debate in society generated consensus that the achievements of human ambitions would have consequences that would become unsustainable in the long term for the ecosystem with which we live (ALMEIDA, 2002).

Although other dimensions have emerged in the academic discussion (cultural, ecological, territorial, national policy, international policy), the social, economic and environmental spheres are the most recurrent (OLIVEIRA, 2013). Munasinghe (2002) argues that organizations that consider at least these three analytical dimensions would bring greater benefits to society than models that only see the economic bias. The author proposes the model of the “Sustainable Development Triangle”, in which each of the three dimensions would correspond to a specific knowledge domain and system, with its own strengths, objectives and progress indicators. Thus: (a) the economic dimension concerns the improvement of human well-being through the efficient consumption of goods and services; (b) the social considers the enrichment of human relationships, as well as the achievement of individual and collective aspirations regarding equality and health; (c) the environmental one focuses on the protection, adaptation and integrity of the natural state of ecological systems, being in favor of pollution control.

The advance towards corporate sustainability incorporates the systemic view of cause and consequence between company and society, since, in order to obtain a sustainable society, a healthy environment is needed to provide well-being and a good economic functioning to guarantee survival. In this way, sustainability would be related to better living conditions and environmental conservation (LENGER; SILVA, 2008). The great challenge of making these concepts viable in the real world refers to the ability to reconcile the often opposing interests of different stakeholders, simultaneously in favor of multiple values (KATES; PARIS; LEISEROWITZ, 2005).

The local development of a community would be associated with innovative and mobilizing attitudes of society, developing its potential within the limits of its context (BUARQUE, 1999). Oliveira (2013) argues that innovative initiatives are associated with entrepreneurial activities that manage to contemplate economic, social and environmental advances at the same time.

Innovative initiatives are associated with the creation of alternatives to adapt to changes and with economic vocations, where actors, through an entrepreneurial vision, perceive opportunities and transform them into actions for the benefit of the community and for development. (OLIVEIRA, 2013, p. 43).

Once again, innovation, entrepreneurship and sustainability demonstrate the importance of their interconnection for advances in the quality of life, solving social, economic and environmental problems.

3 METHOD

We chose to carry out an exploratory research, which, according to Gil (2008, p.27), “has as its main purpose to develop, clarify and modify concepts and ideas, with a view to formulating more precise problems or researchable hypotheses for studies”. later”, since such familiarization is part of the path to achieve the proposed objectives. Data collection was carried out between August and October 2016. The procedure was divided into four parts: bibliographic analysis on Brazilian social businesses; mapping of social businesses located in Brazil; qualitative interviews via Skype with companies interested in the research; analysis of secondary data sent by the companies interviewed. Fifty-five companies were identified that would have the potential to be interviewed, of these thirty-five were counted from one to eight times and five showed interest in participating in the research. Of the five, four were suitable for this research, these are described in the following table:

Table 1: Presentation of the Interviews

COMPANY	MAIN ACTIVITY	INTERVIEWEE	LOCATION IN BR
company 1	Inclusion of people with disabilities in the labor market	a) Guilherme- Founder b) Paola- Human Resources Manager	Porto Alegre- RS Sao Paulo-SP
company 2	solar hearing aids	a) Howard- Founder	Sao Paulo-SP
company 3	Land regularization	a) Inaiê- Legal Manager	Curitiba-PR
company 4	Microinsurance and inclusive insurance	a) Thomas- Partner	Sao Paulo-SP

Source: Prepared by the author (2016).

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The selection of organizations was guided by the selection criteria of companies accelerated by Artemisia and studied by Projeto Brasil 27. At Artemisia, they are: focus on low income; intention to cause social impact within its mission; potential for scale via model expansion, replication to other locations and dissemination of key elements; have a profitable model that does not rely on donations or subsidies; have a social impact related to their main activity; whether or not to distribute its dividends. In this way, it can be seen that there is a complementarity between Artemisia's conception of a "social impact business" and Sebrae's concept of "social business", with a distinction made by the Artemisia concept not encompassing a possible socio-environmental concern in the business mission. . The Brasil 27 Project analyzed social companies that met the following six criteria: cannot be a corporate social responsibility initiative; has a social-environmental mission; causes social impact; causes socio-environmental impact in the value chain that financially sustains the business; obtains 50% of its revenue through the commercialization of products/services or the company has prospects of becoming financially sustainable without the need for donations; have more than one year of service.

The online interviews were carried out with the support of a semi-structured script based mainly on the concepts of social business from Sebrae (2013), innovation from the OECD (2015) and Serconek and Vitoriano (2015) and sustainability from Munasingue (2002), which helped in the qualitative and descriptive analysis on the topics of conversation (SILVA et al., 2012). As it is a conversation, this technique allowed flexibility, allowing the collection of detailed and in-depth data in different fields of study (GIL, 2008). This step was extremely important, as it facilitated the operational understanding of the organizations studied and what really matters to maintain the sustainability of these businesses. In addition to direct data, there was also the collection of secondary data, which, according to Silva et al. (2010), bring with them explanations and clarifications with greater precision of data that are often difficult to remember. In this research, the interviewees sent complementary documents, as well as Projeto Brasil 27, which contributed to this research by providing an e-book with in-depth information about the case studies of the project.

The collected data were analyzed in order to provide reliable information, following the logic of Silva et al. (2012): choice of information collected, disposal and organization of data; transformation, analysis and conclusions about the study. The topics and analysis were divided into three main pillars: characterization of social businesses; innovation practices; sustainability tripod. The second pillar was organized through the innovation categories of Serconek and REGMPE, Brasil-BR, V.7, N°2, p. 114-141, May./August.2022 www.revistas.editoraenterprising.net Page124

Vitoriano (2015) and the third through the concepts of Munasingue (2002). This division aimed to provide a systemic view of how innovation could be identified in the social businesses studied and how each type of innovation affects the dimensions of sustainability. The figure below illustrates the analysis procedure for this research.

Figure 1: Categories and analysis procedure



Source: Prepared by the author (2016).

4 RESULTS ANALYSIS

4.1 Characteristics of the social businesses studied

Four social businesses were studied that have positively impacted Brazil through their core activities, providing more accessibility and quality to the lower classes of the population. In all the cases studied, organizational adaptations were necessary to serve this audience, demonstrating that despite having traditional market activities, innovating is necessary (DEES, 2001; MARTIN; OSBERG, 2007, PEREDO; MCLEAN, 2006). It is important to note that in none of the cases is welfarism present, following the line of thought of Peredo and McLean (2006) and SEBRAE, in which it is possible to have social impact and financial return at the same time without necessarily overlapping one another. According to Guilherme (Company 1), “Inclusion not only can, but must bring results for people and for the company to maintain itself.”, in this way, the profit resulting from commercial activities allows the company to expand and perpetuate its impact on society. It is noted that, although relevant, the environmental concern is still not very recurrent and does not have the same importance as the economic and social sphere, in some cases, as defended in the definition of SEBRAE (2013).

Company 2's mission is to “reduce hearing loss and its consequences through the use of innovative technologies”. It originates in Africa, its main headquarters are located in Brazil and its products have an international reach. The product is aimed at the hearing-impaired of lower

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classes, impacting them not only through its product, but also through social inclusion by employing people with hearing impairment, providing training, offering quality, low-cost and sustainable products. It has a global structure, with 40 employees divided between Africa and Brazil and another 35 spread around the world.

Empresa 1 provides the inclusion of people with disabilities in the job market through an online platform. Its mission is “to establish a connection between organizations and people with disabilities with responsibility and security through the selection, training and monitoring of agents in this relationship, demonstrating to the market and society the value of equal opportunities”. It has the potential for national action, having already included more than 1,000 people. The company is from Rio Grande do Sul, its structure has 11 employees.

Company 3 carries out land regularizations, with the mission “to pacify and improve the quality of life of communities that live in precarious settlements in Brazil and in the world”. Its impact occurs throughout the chain connected to areas of irregular occupation. Today there are 30 projects and more than 22 thousand people impacted. Its structure is divided into the two states in which it operates, with 27 employees.

Empresa 4 operates through a micro-insurance and inclusive insurance platform, with the mission “to help people, especially those who need it most, in the most difficult moments and in the face of life's unforeseen events”. It has a national presence through a fully online service focused on low social classes. They currently have 650 users. It has a lean structure in São Paulo, with 5 employees.

During their careers, the companies demonstrated the need to develop strategic partnerships for the development of their activities. Organizations started from the identification of a market gap related to an audience that, somehow, was not served by the existing actors, including the opinion of this audience in the organizational format, product and process development, sales channels and communication, an aspect defended by Dees (2001) as essential for the perpetuation of social enterprises. According to the author, social entrepreneurs do not let their own resources limit their visions, finding alternative ways, collaborating and developing partners to complement their activity. For Inaiê (Company 3), focusing on what the company knows and outsourcing what is secondary would be important, in his view: “I think the best way for a social business to grow is to focus on what it is willing to do and count on partners, working with the 3rd sector or sector 2.5 is a challenge. ”

Not all companies needed external investment or intellectual capital to boost themselves, some were learning in trial and error, but in all trajectories there were partners, such as universities, investment funds, research programs, social impact organizations, among others. In the case of Company 4, the newest of the companies studied, the partnership with third parties is the organization's business model - merging products from different companies to create a new service -, which is also replicated in the current strategy of attracting customers, according to Thomas “We are focusing on reducing these customer acquisition costs, so the strategy that we are focusing on today is the White-label⁸, in developing partners to sell insurance together with them. ”. For the organizations studied, the Brazilian government is unstable and it is always preferable not to create dependency relationships with it, only to have it as an ally. Guilherme from Empresa 1 reinforces: “We will always try to get closer, but without a great dependence in this sense. ”

4.2 Identifying innovation practices

4.2.1 Financial accessibility

Social businesses serve a neglected public, usually low-income, who cannot acquire goods and services in the traditional ways of financial access (MARTIN; OSBERG, 2007). Those who work with this type of organization need to look for unconventional means to make their product accessible, which often implies leaving the traditional paradigms of collection and payment.

Among the companies analyzed, Company 1 is the only one that does not charge the directly impacted class for its services; who pays for social inclusion are the contracting companies, because in Brazil they are required by law to include people with disabilities. On the other hand, Company 4, Company 2 and Company 3 sell directly to the impacted public, using mainly alternative production methods to reduce the final price, split the price of the product and/or service into several installments and make the delivery time more flexible. payment.

To practice a lower price, different strategies are used. At Company 3, this is possible thanks to constant arbitration work between different market players, monitoring of contracts

⁸In Portuguese “white brand” the expression refers to a sales model where the product or service of one company is marketed by another without the same brand.
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and flexible payment time. Irregular residents pay a monthly fee to regularize their land, being totally flexible with the payment, with cases of regularization of up to 10 years. In Company 2, the low price is the result of the technology involved and organizational management, which allow the company to cover a lower margin and remain sustainable in the market. In addition to saving on the purchase of the device, being able to pay the amount in up to 60 interest-free installments, the customer also saves on replacing the batteries, as its rechargeable battery costs the same as the disposable and lasts from 2 to 3 years. In Company 4, the innovation comes from the connection between existing insurance companies to offer inclusive insurance products for the lower classes, residential insurance costs R\$ 9.90 per month. In this model, there is a small margin per product sold, however, you gain in quantity and recurrence. For businesses this means a new potential market and for people affordable security.

4.2.2 Value chain

Dealing with needy populations makes daily contact with precarious conditions of housing, education, health, among others. Through the core activity of social businesses, more than providing access to products or services, these companies are able to impact the social environment of their audience with jobs, informative content, workshops, close relationships, the possibility of an alternative source of income. In all the cases studied, the companies showed interest in developing and expanding their impact on their target audience through their value chain. In the conception of Porter and Kramer (2011), the configuration of the value chain can generate competitive advantage, encompassing creation, production, sales, distribution and support processes.

One of the most outstanding innovative features of Company 2 refers to its impact on its value chain. In addition to including their target audience within the workforce, all branches offer training to the local community and allocate part of their financial return to the improvement of their surroundings, such as campaigns against HIV and promotion of education, artistic expression and religious diversity. In Company 1 and Company 4, its impact comes mainly from the awareness of the Brazilian population about the importance of social inclusion and how to deal with it, as well as protecting the few assets that the needy population has. This occurs through its online platforms, in-person workshops, published articles and participation in fairs. Company 3's activity, on the other hand, shows more visible impacts on the community, such as the increase in land value, the possibility of accessing credit, the legal opening of health centers, schools and shopping centers, as well as access to water, electricity,

sewage and police. The company allocates part of the monthly fee so that the company's social sector, together with the local residents' association, continues to develop the community.

4.2.3 Technological Innovation

It is noticed that in all companies there is an investment of time and resources in the development and continuous improvement of their operations and technologies, as well as a constant search for updating.

Company 2 has technological innovation as a strong characteristic. As described in its mission, the company has already adapted and developed several versions of its hearing aids, reaching a rechargeable model, with a high-tech material, longer life and with a low cost for the final consumer. It is currently with an innovation project for the development of a project with alternative materials to the conventional, low cost and quality to meet the demand of needy populations, involving the collaboration of external agents that can add with money, content and manpower. In Company 1, investments in technology development are existing, but not as recurrent as in Company 4, which, being in a test period, constantly adapts the technology of its platform. Of all the cases studied, Company 3 is the company with the lowest investment in technological development, however it exists. Currently the company is developing an application to make the service of field agents more dynamic and sustainable, through the system it would be possible to digitize the service, reducing the use of paper and accelerating the transmission of data between the team.

4.2.4 Products and Services

In all cases, the products and services offered by the companies are the result of adaptations and reformulations of solutions that already exist in the national or international market. Some companies, more than others, have an active participation of the target audience in the development of products and services; however, in all cases there is an open channel to receive feedback and dialogue with customers.

By simplifying existing hearing aids and focusing on the most important features of the product, Company 2 was able to reduce its production cost considerably, enabling a faster process and consequently a cheaper product. The services of Company 1 and Company 4 also already existed in the market through other organizational formats, so their innovations are related both to the simplification of processes through an online format, and to the product

delivery format itself, which transformed a face-to-face and on-site service in an online and fully scalable service. In addition, Company 4 also innovated in the product itself. In Brazil there were no microinsurance companies and through the integration of different insurance companies in the same software a new insurance segment was created in the country.

4.2.5 Process

The impact of internal activities, such as purchasing, production, marketing, sales and distribution, directly affects the cost of goods sold. In order to provide products with a lower price than that practiced by competitors, it is necessary to develop processes with a better cost-benefit compared to what is practiced in the market. It is clear that the combination of technology, people, attentive feedback and flexible structure is essential to innovate in this sector.

In order to optimize its production activities, Empresa 2's strategy is to establish partnerships. This occurs both in product development (universities, engineers, employees, organizations) and in distribution and sales (health centers, doctors, universal health system). In a more indirect way, the company's marketing strategy is spontaneous appearances in the media (interviews, national and international articles, participation in events). It constantly trains employees, listens to feedback and invests in product improvement.

Regarding process innovation, in Company 1, the adoption and development of an online candidate screening platform facilitated its processes, since, in addition to performing the screening, the platform serves as a communication and teaching channel and expands its reach in the society. The company focuses on its end service, outsourcing the development of its system. It recently obtained a subsidy investment from SEBRAE for the development of new features. In contrast, Company 4, which also operates through an online platform connecting different market players, understands that, as the company delivers value to the customer through the internet, product development has to be internal and there is a high investment from company in this sense. Of the company's five employees, two are programming. In Company 3, almost the entire company is involved in organizational decision-making through weekly meetings, which, on the one hand, is good, as they achieve flexibility, but, on the other hand, it is bad, as there is no standardization of processes, the decision can be changed. . An external technology system is used to control customer data such as contracts and collections. It does not have defined partnerships with universities or external agents to innovate beyond contact

with suppliers. An external technology system is used to control customer data such as contracts and collections. It does not have defined partnerships with universities or external agents to innovate beyond contact with suppliers. An external technology system is used to control customer data such as contracts and collections. It does not have defined partnerships with universities or external agents to innovate beyond contact with suppliers.

4.2.6 Market

In Brazil, the majority of the population belongs to the low economic classes, totaling 70.5% in classes C, D and E (ABEP, 2015). Companies that are dedicated to delivering value to this market segment are few, which consequently makes social businesses reach this large market share. In the cases analyzed, three companies work specifically with the low-income population, which creates the need to adapt the means and language of communication, as well as make the product and/or service and after-service accessible.

Of the companies studied, mainly Company 4 and Company 3 innovated in the identification of new markets, which until then were completely non-existent commercially. In the case of Company 4, 95% of its customers purchased insurance for the first time. With regard to the communication of the four social businesses, it is understood that in all cases a high investment of time and money is needed in educating your target audiences about the importance of your business. To compete with the level of investment made by large traditional companies in marketing, as is strongly the case in the insurance industry, companies need to look for diversified ways of “showing up” to customers, as they cannot compete on equal terms. As a result, the cost of acquiring customers ends up being high, because you need to develop trust. Sales channels proved to be of great importance for all companies, whether online or offline. In the case of Company 2 and Company 3, both are looking for ways to increase their impact through the internet and are currently using their efforts to expand the channel of contact with customers through their partners, pamphlets, cars with loudspeakers, among others. . Empresa 4 and Empresa 1, on the other hand, invest heavily in attracting customers and the public online, mainly through investments in social networks. In all cases, there is an effort to “culturalize” lay people about the importance of each product and service. In all cases, there is a search for cost minimization through alternative marketing techniques.

4.3 Dimensions of sustainability

4.3.1 Economic

The economic dimension is of great importance in social businesses, since its model aims to cause social impact and maintain its self-sustainable structure. As three of these companies deal with lower class people, the companies looked for ways to make buying their products affordable. In one of the cases, in Company 3, customizable to the client's demands. In this way, these companies work with lower margins, increasing the time of return on investments and, consequently, their break-even point. According to SEBRAE (2013), it is common for social businesses to take longer, as they develop new markets, creating the need for new processes, products and services and many tests to find a suitable model. In none of these is the repetitive consumption of products encouraged, offering mostly single purchase products. Regarding the destination of the resources that return to the organization, it is noted that the investment is primarily intended for the maintenance of basic business activities and, after that, for improvements that positively impact society.

According to Howard (Company 2), all of its business units follow the organizational logic of a “tic tac toe” with three levels of support for efficient financial management, where profit is divided equally for each level: on the first level there are the basic business functions of a profitable company, such as production, sales, finance, marketing, distribution; on the second level is the social mission, which in Company 2 is mainly aimed at education and in each country there are local missions that complement this; in the third is the empowerment of employees through training. For the entrepreneur, it is essential to look at the three dimensions in all decision making, as all the pieces influence each other. Following this logic of thought, all activities that are connected with cost reduction,

Among the companies analyzed, the types of innovation that most affected this dimension were: financial accessibility; Law Suit; products and services; technology; Marketplace. The four companies received foreign capital in their operations, and, in some cases, this occurred with the entry of a new partner and/or subsidy lines for product development. All businesses showed interest in developing recurring revenue models to maintain their operation, a practice that, according to Guilherme from Empresa 1, makes the company economically sustainable to maintain its operation and increase its impact. While Company 4's difficulty is to reduce the cost of acquiring its customers, in Company 3 this is reflected in the high investment prior to receiving a project,

4.3.2 Social

In all organizations, the mission is connected with an improvement in the social sphere. Analyzing the data collected, it is clear that the social impact of each of the companies occurs in different parts of their value chain, affecting customers, employees and the population through their activities, content dispersion and training. The types of innovation that demonstrated strong relationships with the social sphere were: value chain; process; Marketplace.

In the case of Company 2, the company further enriches its relationships by employing its end customer, providing inclusion and empowerment for the hearing-impaired, and by sharing its knowledge with other companies so that they copy its model and increase the impact of its technologies. Company 1 also develops this aspect with its numerous publications and free online training. Currently, the vacancies available are no longer restricted to cleaning and maintenance, encompassing more qualified vacancy profiles. Unlike other companies, Company 3 has a sector responsible for the social aspect, which helps in the management of communities and the money raised, as well as developing projects to improve their quality of life and to build trust in the company. In addition to online advertising, Company 4 is developing a project to have more impact on its human relationships, the company wants to develop an insurance sales channel through commercial representatives from underserved communities. All cases provided lower class populations with greater access to markets.

4.3.3 Environmental

Although all models show a minimum of care with the waste produced regarding its separation and destination, only two organizations had a socio-environmental mission and practices related to reducing its impact on the environment. It is understood that four innovation practices are related to the environment: value chain; production; product and service development; technology.

In the view of companies operating online, Company 4 and Company 1, their activities do not have a negative environmental effect, so their attention must be fully focused on their social mission, as investing in specific sustainability practices would be expensive. Acting online would be the biggest impact reduction practice, as it reduces the amount of paper that would be needed in traditional companies in their markets for advertising, customer service and

information transfer. For Thomas (Company 4), making the operation more sustainable would be expensive, while Guilherme (Company 1) argues that, as the company does not have a “productive impact” that directly affects the environment, there is no need to invest in sustainability. In contrast, the two companies with “hands-on” operations understand that socio-environmental care is essential for the performance of a social business. For Inaiê (Company 3) this care would be intrinsic to all projects. Company 2 has rechargeable hearing aids, which extends the lifespan of its products, reduces the need for repurchases, and reduces residual waste from both batteries and hearing aids. As mentioned, Company 3 also has environmental concerns in its mission. They still do not have fully sustainable community projects, but it is a concern. reduces the need for repurchase and reduces residual waste from both batteries and appliances. As mentioned, Company 3 also has environmental concerns in its mission. They still do not have fully sustainable community projects, but it is a concern. reduces the need for repurchase and reduces residual waste from both batteries and appliances. As mentioned, Company 3 also has environmental concerns in its mission. They still do not have fully sustainable community projects, but it is a concern.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The objective of this work was to understand “how” innovation affects the sustainability of Brazilian social businesses, helping current and future social entrepreneurs to manage their organizations. Based on the data collected, it is understood that innovation affects the sustainability of these enterprises at different levels, varying its presence and intensity according to the model and market of the company studied. This study analyzed four cases of social business in order to explore the theme, understanding that this is an initial work and that more studies should be done to achieve mass results.

It is noted that the management of social businesses becomes more complicated than the conventional one, mainly due to the dichotomy of the search for profit and social impact, which implies thinking about unusual strategies for cost reduction and greater delivery of value to society. As with the “Clamic Tile” model, described by Howard, a systemic view of the whole is necessary to balance organizational activities so that the company achieves its objectives and remains in the market. It is noticed that different types of innovation appear in the same business, and these innovations are often innovations in the market where the company operates, already existing in other scenarios. Most of the innovations analyzed are not disruptive, but incremental, demonstrating that great creativity is not necessary to manage a

successful social business. Of the four companies analyzed, two showed greater maturity regarding the incorporation of sustainable management through the economic, social and environmental dimensions. It is understood that the environmental bias is still seen by many as a factor of high importance, but secondary, making products and services more expensive for companies that maintain environmentally sustainable thinking in their processes.

According to SEBRAE (2013), the capital available to social entrepreneurs has been increasing, creating the need to structure their organizations in order to demonstrate a real means of solving a social problem, a qualified team and a sustainable business model. It is understood that, along with innovation, other factors are essential for the sustainability and attractiveness of a social business, among which stand out: knowing the customer, their needs, consumption habits and difficulties; incorporate customer thinking into product and/or service development; understand the value delivered by the company; identify which activities should be internalized; formatting a business plan; create a plan for financial independence; map potential partners; measure results and social impact;

At the end of this work, it is understood that Porter and Kramer's (2011) statement that no organization is self-sufficient, with business success being affected by support businesses and the infrastructure that surrounds the organization, is true. Although three of the companies studied have already reached their break-even point and are generating profit and social impact, in all cases third-party support was necessary for the maintenance of the organization, through the search for knowledge, investors, financiers or of manpower. Outsourcing and collaboration with external agents have shown, in some cases, to help reduce fixed costs, streamline processes and structural flexibility for adaptation, which ultimately affects the price, quality and delivery format of the final product or service.

In contrast to the aspects that favor the sustainability of a social business, different obstacles were identified for the perpetuation of a social business in Brazil. According to Mariano et al. (2011), in addition to the traditional causes of business mortality, challenges specific to the third sector in the country are added to this list, mainly related to the lack of specific public policies for social businesses and the volatility of government resources. In contrast to other countries, Brazil has a disadvantage in terms of partnerships with the government and the promotion of entrepreneurial activity. The analyzed companies showed no interest in developing partnerships with the public sphere due to excessive bureaucracy, inconsistency in laws, unpredictability of management and payments. Furthermore, financial

management becomes a challenge when stakeholders have different interests. It is important that those involved are aligned with the business objectives, taking into account that part of the return of social businesses comes from its impact and part is financial, not serving individuals who seek only one of these results. Another point reported refers to the increase in the complexity of processes as the company grows, affecting organizational agility and flexibility. It is understood to be essential to keep the processes simple, creating methods to be followed, and the structure lean, outsourcing what is not essential. taking into account that part of the return of social businesses comes from its impact and part is financial, not serving individuals who seek only one of these results. Another point reported refers to the increase in the complexity of processes as the company grows, affecting organizational agility and flexibility. It is understood to be essential to keep the processes simple, creating methods to be followed, and the structure lean, outsourcing what is not essential. taking into account that part of the return of social businesses comes from its impact and part is financial, not serving individuals who seek only one of these results. Another point reported refers to the increase in the complexity of processes as the company grows, affecting organizational agility and flexibility. It is understood to be essential to keep the processes simple, creating methods to be followed, and the structure lean, outsourcing what is not essential.

Finally, both the favorable and the unfavorable aspects must be analyzed by social entrepreneurs and, for the perpetuation of their business, it is essential to find ways of expanding and replicating the business model. SEBRAE (2013) defends four strategies for this: replicating processes, products or services; partnerships between complementary product or distribution companies; franchises; merger between businesses that aim for social impact.

The limitation of this study is directly related to the methodology chosen, since it is exploratory and has a sample of four companies, making it impossible to generalize the results found. In addition, the data collected does not encompass the vision of those affected, having a one-sided view of the company and its impact. Thus, it is suggested that the study be replicated with a greater number of Brazilian companies, including their beneficiaries, in order to enable a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the results.

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