



# SOCIAL INNOVATION AS A PROCESS TO OVERCOME INSTITUTIONAL VOIDS: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL OVERVIEW

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The objective of this paper is to propose a theoretical framework to explore social innovation as a response to institutional voids in a multidimensional analysis.

**Originality/gap/relevance/implications:** Approaching the social innovation of the theoretical lens of institutional theory, in the institutional voids perspective. One of the gaps is to propose a multidimensional perspective that will occur through the examination of multiple actors in different institutional settings.

**Key methodological aspects:** To support the framework, six theoretical proposals were developed from theoretical gaps identified in a systematic literature review, started in Web of Knowledge database.

**Summary of key results:** Results indicate dimensions that can be investigated in social innovation initiatives that fill institutional voids. The following dimensions were found: dimensions of institutional contexts (considering different contexts and the interference of political, financial, education/work and cultural systems); dimension of multiple actors (giving voice to different actors who have complementary objectives); dimension of the institutional pillars (cognitive, normative and regulative) and dimensions of social innovation (modify/transform a social need; innovative solution, implementation of social innovation, involve actors and stakeholders and effective results).

**Key considerations/conclusions:** This framework can be further tested in comparative studies among countries with distinguished levels of development. We identified the importance to analyze different social contexts and the diverse actors who are involved in social innovation initiatives. We identify new areas that are influencing social innovation and we propose new possibilities to investigate this field.

## KEYWORDS

Social innovation. Institutional voids. Multidimensional analysis. Institutional context. Stakeholders.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Developing and emerging countries face huge poverty rates and social problems, such as social and economic inequalities, a clear consequence of the international scenario, in which the lack of equality in the market has been increasing over time. In such a fragile scenario, institutions and regulations might fail to properly act to protect and provide society. This situation led to the phenomenon known as “institutional voids”, mainly characterized by institutional failures that lead to severe social inequalities. In this context, companies and other types of organizations are seeking for innovative solutions to mitigate these social problems. Furthermore, the investigation of different theories that combines management practices and innovations for tackling social problems has been a growing area of research.

This paper focuses in proposing a theoretical framework to analyze social innovation as a response to institutional voids. Institutional voids can be understood as a failure, in which there is the absence of organizations or institutions that support market. We could approach the concepts of institutional failure, market failure or policy failure, which would come from different theoretical approaches. However, we chose to work with the concept of institutional void, which has its origin in Institutional Theory. The authors who are developing this perspective are Mair and Marti (2009) that consider institutional void as “institutional arrangements that support markets are absent, weak, or fail to accomplish the role expected of them” and when these voids are present is an opportunity space for motivated entrepreneurs.

In our perspective, we found an opportunity to expand this analysis and introduce the perspective of social innovation. Huybrechts (2013) establishes important definitions to better comprehend the context of this research area. There are different concepts such as social enterprise, social innovation and social entrepreneurship, which have been increased in the last decades. Social entrepreneurship is the dynamic process in which social entrepreneurs create and develop organizations that can be called social enterprises, aiming at trying new processes and/or to create results defined as social innovation.

In that sense, we are interested here in broadening the concept and analyzing this area in the social context, looking at the process. Therefore, social innovation is defined as “new organizational and institutional forms, new ways of doing things, new social practices, new mechanisms, new approaches and new concepts that give rise to concrete achievements and improvements” (Centre de Recherche sur les Innovations Sociales, 2004, p. 1). In a recent report, the Centre de Recherche sur les Innovations Sociales (Crises) identified social innovation as a process initiated by social actors to respond to a desire, a need, to find a solu-

tion or to seize an opportunity of action to change social relations, to transform a frame or propose new cultural orientations to improve the quality and community living conditions (Centre de Recherche sur les Innovations Sociales, 2015).

In a similar perception of process and actors, a commission of European Union understands social innovation as the participative process of social iterations among individuals to achieve results, involving these stakeholders to solve social problems and for their own empowerment (Bureau of European Policy Advisers, 2011). For this paper, it is important identify different stakeholders that participated in social innovation initiatives to solve institutional voids. In this sense, it can encompass both social entrepreneurs and social enterprises in different levels of analyzes.

Whereas the social innovation theory must advance in efforts to identify the different stakeholders and their roles, Mair and Marti (2009) also argue that the research in institutional voids has centered its attention on the role of the most powerful actors, such as governments and business groups, but other actors have received little attention.

This perspective that multiple actors participated in social innovations initiatives in different types of social contexts to fill institutional voids could be an important contribution to understand an inter-disciplinarian approach and the influence of different theories to social innovation theory.

Therefore, the main purpose of this paper is to propose a theoretical framework to investigate social innovation as an instrument to overcome institutional voids in a multidimensional analysis. This multidimensional perspective is due to the analysis of multiple stakeholders in different institutional contexts. To support the framework and to fulfill gaps found in the literature, theoretical propositions regarding social innovation and institutional voids are developed throughout the paper.

This paper is structured in six sections. After this introduction, the method applied for selecting the literature employed in the research background in presented in Section 2. Section 3 brings a brief introduction of institutional theory and institutional voids. In Section 4, the literature on social innovation is presented, its origins and theoretical applications. Finally, in Section 5, the theoretical framework is proposed, based on gaps identified in the literature and, in Section 6, the final remarks are outlined.

## 2 METHOD

In order to develop a framework to investigate social innovation as an instrument to overcome institutional voids, a thorough literature review in the follow-

ing topics is presented: institutional voids, social innovation and social entrepreneurship/social enterprise.

To analyze these issues, we started by identifying the keywords. We selected the keywords according to each study area, “social innovation”, “institutional voids” and “social entrepreneurship or social enterprise”. Our second step was to search articles in international databases.

The database used was the Web of Knowledge database platform bibliographic reference, produced by the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI). The platform consists of several reference databases, such as Web of Science, Current Contents Connect, the Derwent Innovations Index (Patent), and other web resources, such as the Journal Citation Report, Essential Science Indicators, Scientific WebPlus, BiologyBrowser, and ResearcherID, among others, covering thousands of periodicals in several areas of interest: science, social sciences, arts and humanities. The choice was also influenced by the fact that this database has tools that assist in the identification of citation indexes, enabling a more detailed analysis of historical article citations, including the most relevant journals, impact factor identification and direct links to other analysis tools (Web of Knowledge, 2016).

The search was conducted in January 2016, being refined as follows:

- Keyword: “social innovation”, “institutional voids” and “social entrepreneurship or social enterprise”;
- In the document type refinement, only papers was chosen;
- In one more refinement in the categories of Web of Science, we opted for the search domain “social sciences” in the area of “business economics”, because this paper aims to contribute to the business field;
- We opted for more current studies, and the analysis period was set from 2006 to 2016;
- Another option to refine the papers was the language. We opted for: English, Portuguese, French and Spanish.

Chart 1 brings the information about the survey conducted, its refinement and results. Due to the amount of the papers, the criterion to classify them was the highest number of citations. This criterion was used for choosing articles analyzed in full: the 24 most cited articles were analyzed in institutional voids; 36 in social entrepreneurship/social enterprise and 33 most cited articles in social innovation. Also, the figure presents the journals that have published two or more articles on the topics in the period surveyed.

CHART I

DATABASES' RESEARCH

	INSTITUTIONAL VOIDS	SOCIAL INNOVATION	SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE
<b>Database</b>	Web of knowledge	Web of knowledge	Web of knowledge
<b>Date of the research</b>	07/01/2016	07/01/2016	07/01/2016
<b>Keyword</b>	"Institutional voids"	"Social innovation"	"Social entrepreneurship" or "Social enterprise"
<b>Total result – unrefined</b>	75 documents	683 documents	672 documents
<b>Period</b>	2006 – 2016	2006 – 2016	2006 – 2016
<b>Search domain</b>	"Social sciences"	"Social sciences"	"Social sciences"
<b>Areas</b>	"Business economics"	"Business economics"	"Business economics"
<b>Type of document</b>	"Articles"	"Articles"	"Articles"
<b>Language</b>	"English", "Spanish", "French" and "Portuguese"	"English", "Spanish", "French" and "Portuguese"	"English", "Spanish", "French" and "Portuguese"
<b>Selected Articles</b>	54 documents	103 documents	217 documents
<b>Articles analyzed entirely</b>	24 documents (cited at least 4 times)	33 documents (cited at least 4 times)	36 documents (cited at least 18 times)

(continue)

**CHART I (CONCLUSION)**

**DATABASES RESEARCH**

	INSTITUTIONAL VOIDS	SOCIAL INNOVATION	SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE
<b>Journals</b>	Academy of Management Journal Asia Pacific Journal of Management Business and Politics Journal of Business Venturing Journal of European Integration Journal of International Business Studies Journal of International Management Journal of Rural Studies Third World Quarterly	International Journal of Technology Management Journal of Business Ethics Technovation Technology Analysis Strategic Management	Entrepreneurship and Regional Development Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business International Small Business Journal Journal of Business Ethics Journal of Business Venturing Journal of Enterprising Communities Journal of Social Entrepreneurship

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

After the selection of articles, we made a critical reading on selected articles and an extensive literature review was initiated on the issues. The search for references and authors was also held in books and other classic papers. We use the technique of “snowball”, that is, to read the selected articles and identify a new reference, we looked for new sources.

Based on these papers and references, it was possible to make a review of key concepts and research questions of these concepts.

### 3 INSTITUTIONAL THEORY AND INSTITUTIONAL VOIDS

Institutional theory is an established field of research in organizations studies. Several researches have demonstrated the complexity of the phenomena involving social, cultural and legal relationships of institutions in different contexts.

The classic definition of institutions by North (1990; 1991) states that institutions are man-made restrictions to structure the social, political and economic interaction. It also establishes that efficient institutions lead to superior economic performance, since they operate with lower transaction costs and guarantee property rights. Schrammel (2013) suggests that in less efficient institutional environments, transaction costs are higher, since they do not have formal constraints to ensure efficient execution of contracts. The lack of formal constraints is commonly replaced by informal settings, with higher transaction costs and poor guarantees of property rights, which leads to dependence on stronger personal ties.

Bruton, Ahlstrom and Li (2010) claim that the institutional theory is concerned with regulatory, social and cultural influences, promoting the survival and legitimacy of an organization rather than just focusing in company's efficiency. Institutional pillars are identified in several studies from sociology (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; 1991, Roy, 1997), organizational theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1991), political science (Bonchek & Shepsle, 1996) and economics (North, 1990). These studies are summarized by Scott (2007), in his famous formulation of three categories of institutional pillars: regulative (rules), normative (social norms) and cognitive (beliefs and cultural values).

Thus, it is necessary to understand the concept of institutions and its seminal studies, as well as analyze the institutional pillars developed by Scott, by understanding institutional voids, the main concept is this area analyzed in this paper.

Scott (1995) expanded North ideas and classified three institutional pillars. The regulative pillar involves formal rules, such as regulations and laws, which are used by the institutions as mechanisms for monitoring activities and sanctions. These processes can take place by means of diffuse and informal mechanisms or through highly formalized mechanisms. The normative pillar is associated with norms and values that establish how things should be done by creating a prescription, evaluation and mandatory social life, that is, institutions create expectations about the actors that follow to ensure social acceptance (Scott, 1995). The last pillar, called cognitive, emphasizes beliefs and values shared by the agents in social interactions, so the rules are constructed based on the perceptions that individuals perform on the social and natural world around them. This cognitive dimension considers the culture of society as an important factor for the analysis of established rules (Scott, 1995).

Thus, for the proper market operation, institutions must act efficiently within normative, cognitive and regulative context. However, when these institutions fail and/or are absent, there are gaps or institutional voids.

The term institutional voids became first known after Khanna and colleagues publications in the early 2000s, although authors' aim with this publication was initially to study business groups in emerging markets. Khanna and



his co-authors spread this idea, but only few researchers cited their work. Other researchers refer to North to define institutional voids in a more economic perspective, defining gaps and the lack of institutions, rules and regulations necessary for the economy. Literature in general do not define a clear concept and an understanding of what is an institutional void, but rather use it as a means to search for other subjects, such as family-owned, business groups or strategies in emerging markets (Schrammel, 2013).

Mair and Marti (2009) present a literature review on the topic and suggest a broader concept. They analyze the market as a specialized social structure that requires the specific rules for the existence and functioning of institutions. Thus, the authors identified that in developing countries, with high poverty rates, institutions become unable to participate in the market because of “institutional voids” in which the institutional arrangements that support the market are absent, weak or fail to fulfill its role.

Research in this topic emerges from different disciplines – economy, political science and sociology – to discuss how actors in this situation are solving these institutional voids. Mair and Marti (2009) identify that State or Governments meet these voids by means of regulations; where the state is weak, business groups assume this role by promoting self-regulation. They argue further that little is known about how voids happen and how actors with less power face them. Therefore, they have analyzed an NGO in Bangladesh, considering it as an institutional entrepreneur in fighting poverty in a region that is rich in informal institutions, but poor in institutions of modern market economies (Mair & Marti, 2009).

Therefore, “institutional voids” refers to different streams of research, identifying two major types of institutional voids: the first that hinder market functioning (vision of economists), and the second that hamper market development (political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists and economic sociologists). However, these authors note that there is a third point of view and propose that institutional voids might prevent market participation, considering this an opportunity for entrepreneurs (Mair & Marti, 2009).

Another factor important observed by Mair and Marti (2009) is that the absence of institutions does not imply the existence of a sort of institutional vacuum, but could be in contexts that are already rich in other institutional arrangements. In this sense, we propose an analysis about the social context and the identification of different types of perspectives.

A similar application of this perspective is the study developed by Barin Cruz, Aguilar Delgado, Leca and Gond (2015) that have the goal of analyze how institutional work contributes to institutional resilience in extreme operating environments. Such authors explore the implementation process of the institution of cooperative banking in Haiti before and after the earthquake in 2010. To ana-

lyze the fragility of the cooperative banking, they use the concept of institutional pillars: regulative pillar, because the cooperative banking requires legal formalization; normative pillar, to analyze the existence of control systems to perform the banking activities; and, cultural-cognitive pillar, to demonstrate the solidarity among the participants. The conclusion of this part of the study is the fragility of the cooperative banking, because none of these pillars were firmly established.

It was evident in this research that one of the theories that support institutional voids studies is the institutional theory, with an analysis about the context in which the institutional voids are formed and are filled. Thus, studies about institutional voids tend to use Scott's classification of the three institutional pillars (regulative, normative and cognitive) to analyze the institutional environments. As an example of this application, there are the studies of Mair and Marti (2009), Chakrabarty (2009), Puffer, McCarthy and Boisot (2010) and Barin Cruz *et al.* (2015). So, the first theoretical proposition states:

**Proposition 1:** Institutional voids are influenced by normative, regulative and cognitive dimensions of multiple stakeholders involved in a social initiative.

The existence of institutional voids leads to a debate about who can fill these gaps to build and maintain institutions guaranteeing the existence and functioning of the market. The first possibility, and widely accepted is that the State is responsible for the creation of these institutions. However, Mair and Marti (2009, p. 422) asked a question: “what happens if government structures are weak or corrupt – or both, as it is often the case in developing countries – and the rules and conditions under which economic actors organize, compete or cooperate, tend to favor some actors over others?”.

Thus, by analyzing previous literature about this topic, it was observed that there are different stakeholders performing activities to address institutional voids, from formal organizations to social entrepreneurs. This paper sums up in Chart 2 an overview of the stakeholders that have been identified in the literature reviewed above.

CHART 2

ACTORS THAT FULFILL THE INSTITUTIONAL VOIDS

CATEGORY	MEANING	AUTHORS	SOURCE
<b>State/ Government</b>	The state or governments can fill institutional voids using regulations.	McDermott, 2002; Stark, 1996; Fligstein; Mara-Drita, 1996; North, 1990	Mair and Marti (2009)

(continue)

**CHART 2 (CONTINUATION)**

**DATABASES RESEARCH**

CATEGORY	MEANING	AUTHORS	SOURCE
<b>Multinational companies in emerging countries</b>	In emerging countries' markets, multinational companies are well accepted when bringing institutional elements that are missing in the local environment.	Hoskisson, Eden, Lau and Wright, 2000; Meyer, 2004; Peng, Wang and Jiang, 2008	Cantwell, Dunning and Lundan (2010)
<b>Family business</b>	Close ties built by family businesses with stakeholders can also help to fulfill institutional voids in emerging economies.	Miller, Lee, Chang and Le Breton-Miller, 2009	Miller <i>et al.</i> (2009)
<b>Business groups</b>	Business groups take advantage of voids left by the missing institutions, filling it through product, capital and labor markets.	Khanna and Rivkin, 2001; Khanna and Palepu, 2000; Leff, 1978	Mair and Marti (2009); Khanna and Palepu (2000)
<b>Diverse set of actors</b>	A diverse set of actors that are experimenting with new and often provisional market institutional arrangements to fill institutional voids, e.g. social movement, public-private organizations, religious organizations.	McDermott, 2007	Mair and Marti (2009)
<b>Informal institutions</b>	Economies in transition are often characterized by underdeveloped formal institutions, often resulting in an unstable environment and creating a void usually filled by informal institutions.	Puffer <i>et al.</i> , 2010	Puffer <i>et al.</i> (2010)

(continue)

**CHART 2 (CONCLUSION)**

**DATABASES RESEARCH**

CATEGORY	MEANING	AUTHORS	SOURCE
<b>Social entrepreneur</b>	For these entrepreneurs markets are not an end in themselves or a means to appropriate value; markets are viewed as an important social structure and a mechanism to foster social and economic development.	Mair and Marti, 2009	Mair and Marti (2009, p. 422)
<b>Clusters</b>	Institutional voids affect the competitiveness of SMEs existing in transition economies. Cluster services can be effective measure to bridge these voids.	Schrammel, 2014	Schrammel (2014)

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Based in this literature review, it was possible to identify that when there are absences or institutional weaknesses that hinder the participation of communities in the market, automatically there will be social and economic inequalities, since not being able to participate is already an inequality.

Considering all the stakeholders identified in Chart 2, it is noted that there is a gap in analyzing the perspectives of multiple actors. The multiple stakeholders also involves a diversity of objectives in joining a social innovation, in which some are more likely to have an economic interest and others to be engaged social missions. In our literature review, we identify that papers published about institutional voids have little understanding of nonmarket strategies used by specific actors and how institutional voids are adopted by actors, including the nature of market strategies and nonmarket employed. It is also recognized that there are tensions within social innovation initiatives due to the distinguished political and social agenda from each stakeholder involved (Smith, Gonin, & Besharov, 2013).

In this sense, considering the argument by Mair and Marti (2009) that the research in institutional voids has giving voice to the role of the most powerful actors, and the other actors has received little attention, they suggest that analyzing all the participants and not only the most powerful actors can be a

fertile area for future research. Therefore, there is a need to investigate multiple actors who have different goals, but that can work together in a social project whose main strategy is not only the market. In that sense, the second theoretical proposition is:

**Proposition 2:** Institutional voids are filled by multiple stakeholders that have complementary objectives and which can act together in projects with a social mission.

Institutional voids are predominantly associated with emerging markets in the literature, but it does not mean that in developed economies there is no variation in efficacy of institutions. That is, the term institutional voids can mean a lack of institutions or an ineffective functioning of the institutions in any market.

Schrammel (2014) analyzes how the clusters, acting as intermediaries, may assist SMEs to gain competitiveness. Clusters for the author are networks of companies or institutions in the same area that foster regional development and are being used in the transition economies to support the restructuring of the market. Thus, the author analyzes within the concept of institutional voids factors such as: access to information, access to (venture) capital, availability of specialized human capital, compliance with the law (safeness of property rights). In other conclusion, the author identifies that, in all four areas, voids exist in the formal, as well as in the informal institutional environment.

In conclusion, Schrammel (2014) identifies that institutional voids affect the competitiveness of SMEs exist in transition economies and cluster services can be effective measure to bridge these voids. Additionally, the investigation demonstrated that the institutional voids differ in intensity and importance. To analyze this level of intensity, the author used five cases, with interviews and secondary data to evaluate the intensity of institutional voids in: no void, small, medium or large. And the author recommended for future research the analysis whether these propositions hold for other medium level institutions besides clusters and also in different environmental contexts.

In this same perspective, but considering a link with social entrepreneurship, Puffer *et al.* (2010) propose a research agenda to investigate the differences in the institutional voids in developing countries and developed countries, examining the informal institutions in several countries for gaining insight into how entrepreneurship can develop. Similarly, Bruton *et al.* (2010) argue that a large number of researches are analyzing only specific country in research on social entrepreneurship and institutional theory. However, every country can have

institutional voids in different levels that affect society as a whole or specific groups.

Thus, many empirical studies related to developing countries and countries with historically weak institutional arrangements, such as Russia, China or Bangladesh. However, it was not identified studies to draw up a comparative analysis between developed and emerging markets. So, considering the need to analyze different contexts and evaluate the intensity of these voids, we present the third proposition:

**Proposition 3:** Institutional voids occur in diverse levels of intensity in different environmental contexts, both in developing economies as in developed markets.

A similar theoretical reasoning, but in regard of Corporate Social Responsibility, Matten and Moon (2008) observe the CSR from the perspective of national institutional contexts to differentiate the reality in the US and Europe. The authors use two aspects of institutional theory to explain this phenomenon: the concepts of Institutional Isomorphism by DiMaggio and Powell and the four key characteristics of national institutional frameworks proposed by Whitley (1999): political system, financial system, education/work system and cultural system.

Thus, the authors explore that in the **political systems** the key feature that distinguishes Europeans from Americans is the power of the state, which tends to be higher in Europe than in the United States, since the European governments in general were more involved in economic activity and social. Whereas in the US there is a higher degree of discretion by the companies, as the government has been less active. About **financial systems** in the United States, the stock market is the central source for financial companies, which have to provide a high degree of transparency and accountability to investors. In the European model of capitalism, companies tend to be incorporated into a network of a few large investors, where stakeholders play an important role, sometimes even equivalent or superior to that of shareholders. In **education and work systems**, Europe and United States have differed in the regulation and production of human resources. In Europe, there is formation of active policies for the labor market, where corporations participate through regulations, while in the United States it has been an area where companies have developed strategically. In addition, European companies have shown a greater proneness to pursue collective interests through national federations and business associations. North American and European **cultural systems** have generated different assumptions about society, business and government. Compared with Europeans, the Americans are considered to have a relative capacity to participate, a capacity

relative to philanthropy and a relative ability of business people to philanthropy (Matten & Moon, 2008; Whitley, 1999).

So, we consider that to analyze social innovation initiatives that fill institutional voids it is important to understand the social context where these initiatives occur. To understand different contexts and their institutional systems, as proposed by Whitley (1999), we propose the fourth theoretical proposition:

**Proposition 4:** Institutional voids will be influenced by political, financial, education/work, and cultural systems.

Thus, this paper understood the importance of institutional theory in the analysis of environmental contexts that lead to the development of institutional voids. Furthermore, it identified the gaps in the theory to understand the perspective of multiple stakeholders and different markets. There was also a need to understand the relationship among different stakeholders when involved in an initiative with a social mission. As this study aims to propose a framework to analyze initiatives that have a social mission as a central goal, the next topic will be Social Innovation.

Yet, before conceptualizing and developing theoretical propositions on Social Innovation, we need to establish a relationship between the institutional theory and social innovation. Cajaiba-Santana (2014, p. 43) argues that it is fundamental to understand the critical dialogue between existing theories and social innovation to have a comprehension about the social changes. The first theory analyzed is the institutional theory and to this author “the institutional perspective sees social innovation as a result of the exchanges and application of knowledge and resources by agents mobilized through legitimization activities”. The second is the structuration theory “to describe how social innovation is created as a transformative force through the inter relationship between agents, institutional structures, and social systems”.

In this same sense, the European research group on transformative social innovation - Transit, provides that “so the institutions and structures of the social context define and constrain the behavior of actors and organizations, but actors and organizations are also able to exert agency and act to challenge, alter or replace establishment institutions and structures” (Haxeltine Kemp, Dumitru, Avelino, Pel, & Wittmayer, 2015, p. 21).

Then, it is important understand this perception about social context and the importance of this concept to this type of study. The relationships between multiple stakeholders in different contexts to fill institutional voids lead changes in the structures and in the society. This perception needs to be understood using

different theoretical lenses, and the researchers need to be open to discover new forms of relations/structures/institutions.

## 4 SOCIAL INNOVATION

The literature defines innovation as a creative process to implement a new idea, which can be a new product, process, market or organizational methods. Furthermore, some authors are developed news perspectives to analyze innovation in a new perspective, emerging the concept of social innovation.

Farfus (2008) considers that the existing cultural and business systems, that have arisen to serve economic development, are failing to meet the social needs, allowing the emergence of movements and initiatives to reduce social gaps experienced in different realities. Thereby, the author emphasizes

[...] the design of new strategies is a *sine qua non* condition for overcoming the challenges of the post-modern society, considered by many scholars as a moment of historical transition. One of the strategies to overcome the challenges posed is the concept of social innovation (Farfus, 2008, p. 36).

In that sense, some authors, in an attempt to comprehend social innovation, base their thoughts on Schumpeterian theory, as Howaldt and Schwarz (2010). Such authors observe beyond the perspective on technical innovation; they analyzed the innovation process, highlighting the need of combining social innovation with all other aspects (economics, cultural, political) in society.

Despite these remarks about the importance of the emergence of this thematic, Pol and Ville (2009) critically state that there is no consensus regarding social innovation's definition, relevance or significance in the field of social sciences and humanities. The lack of a consensual definition leads to the development of several overlapping meanings, invoking concepts, such as institutional change, social purposes and public good. In general, definitions take into account new ideas that lead to an improvement of human well-being.

Considering the discussion above, there is a need to bring the seminal concept regarding social innovation. By analyzing a group of specialists working on different multidisciplinary teams in psychological rehabilitation of deprived populations, Taylor (1970) addresses the theme and introduces the concept of social innovation as the search for responses to social needs through the introduction of a social invention, i.e. "a new way of doing things", a new social organization. Chart 3 brings different concepts and approaches for social innovation, as well as the emphasis of each idea.



CHART 3

SOCIAL INNOVATION CONCEPTS

AUTHOR	SOCIAL INNOVATION CONCEPT	CONCEPT'S EMPHASIS
<b>Taylor (1970)</b>	Social innovation as the search of responses to social needs through the introduction of a social invention, i.e., a "new way of doing things," a new social organization	Seminal concept addressing a new form of social organization.
<b>Cloutier (2003)</b>	Social Innovation as a new response to an unfavorable social situation that seeks the well-being of individuals and /or communities through action and sustainable change.	Innovative answers to create sustainable changes.
<b>Rodrigues (2006)</b>	Social innovations can occur intentionally or emerge from a process of social change without prior planning and they can occur in three levels: social actors; organizations and institutions.	Process of social change with different stakeholders.
<b>Mulgan et al. (2007, p. 8)</b>	Innovative activities and services motivated by the goal of meeting a social need and predominantly developed and diffused through organizations whose primary purposes are social.	Confirm actions taken by social organizations.
<b>Bignetti (2011)</b>	Social innovation is the result of knowledge applied to social needs through participation and cooperation of all stakeholders, creating new and lasting solutions to social groups, communities or society in general.	New durable solution for a wide range of stakeholders.
<b>Centre de Recherche sur les Innovations Sociales (2015)</b>	Social innovation is a process initiated by social actors to respond to an aspiration, fulfill a need, a solution or seize an opportunity of action to change social relations, to transform a frame or propose new cultural orientations to improve the quality and community living conditions.	Wider concept that highlights innovation as a process of change of social relations.
<b>Haxeltine et al. (2015)</b>	Transformative Social Innovation, as "change in social relations, involving new ways of doing, organizing, framing and/or knowing, which challenges, alters and/or replaces dominant institutions/structures in a specific social context".	Concept that evokes the concept of transformative social innovation.

Source: Elaborated by the authors, research data (2016).

Thus, with the identification of social innovation concepts and emphasis attributed by these researchers, it was possible to identify some characteristics present in the definitions. Social innovation is different from technological innovation; it is about the generation of new ideas; the creation of an impact (qualitative or quantitative) in people's lives; the solution of social problems; the promotion of changes in social relations; the innovation developed by different actors, the generation of social empowerment. Facing the literature review, the concept that this research adopts is presented: **Social innovation is the generation of new ideas and solutions that create an impact in solving social problems, involving actors and stakeholders in promoting change in social relations.**

## 4.1 SOCIAL INNOVATION DIMENSIONS

The diversity of concepts and definitions of social innovation were enlightened in the previous section. Some researchers have been trying to identify dimensions that enable the classification and identification of empirical social innovation cases and contexts for future research. Tardif and Harrisson (2005) analyzed 49 studies carried out by CRISES researchers and found that there are at least five essential definitions for the concept of social innovation leading to social transformation, namely: 1. newness and innovative character; 2. objective of an innovation; 3. innovation process; 4. relationships between actors and structures; and 5. constraints on innovation. Hence, the authors adapted the terminology and proposed, based on the analysis of the papers published by this referenced research centre, five dimensions of social innovation, namely: transformation, innovative character, innovation, actors, and process.

The project TEPSIE also aimed to clarify what are the elements to classify socially innovative projects, proposing five core elements of social innovation and eight common characteristics to projects of social innovation. Five elements that must be present to define a socially innovative practice were suggested: 1. Newness: social innovations are new to the field, sector, region, market or user, or should be applied in a new way; 2. From idea to implementation: there is a distinction between invention (development of ideas) and innovation (implementation and application of ideas); 3. Meet a social need: Social innovations are designed explicitly to meet a recognized social need; 4. Effectiveness: social innovations are more effective than existing solutions – creating a measurable improvement in terms of results; 5. Improve the ability of society to act: empowers beneficiaries by creating new roles and relationships, developing assets and capabilities and/or improving the use of assets and resources (The Young Foundation, 2012).

On the second layer of analysis, we can identify a number of common features of social innovation. Some of these features are overlapped and interrelated. Even

more, social innovations may not have many or any of these features. The common features are: 1. Cross-sectorial – they occur in the interfaces between sectors and involve actors from all sectors; 2. New social relationships and capabilities – social innovations are developed “with” and “for” users and not delivered “by” and “for” them; they can be identified by the type of relationships they create with and among its beneficiaries; 3. Open, collaborative and tentative: production by the masses – a large number of people work independently in collective projects without structures and normal market mechanisms; 4. *Prosumption* and coproduction: poorly defined boundary between producers and consumers; 5. *Grass-roots, bottom-up*: distributed systems, where innovation and initiative are dispersed to the periphery and connected by networks; 6. Mutualism: the notion that the individual and collective well-being is achieved only through mutual dependence; 7. Better use of assets and resources: recognition, operation and coordination of latent social media; 8. Development of capabilities and features: participatory approach allowing beneficiaries to meet the long term needs (The Young Foundation, 2012).

By analyzing the two models presented, it is observed that there is a connection between five dimensions of the first model and dimensions and characteristics of the second model. Based on these similarities, the fifth theoretical proposition is presented:

**Proposition 5:** Social innovation initiatives shall have at least these five dimensions: 1. Modification/transformation of a social need; 2. Innovative solution; 3. Implementation of social innovation; 4. Involvement of actors and stakeholders; 5. Effective results.

## 4.2 SOCIAL INNOVATION X SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP X SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Through the analysis carried out in the literature, it is identified the lack of accuracy in social innovation as well as a confusion with similar themes, such as social enterprise, social entrepreneurship, social economy, among others. Thus, it is important to clarify some of these concepts and explain the definitions that will be adopted.

Social innovations can take place in both public and private sectors. When it occurs through social enterprise or social economy, one might erroneously think that all those concepts overlap, while they differ as presented in the Guide to Social Innovation prepared by European Commission. **Social enterprise** refers to a company whose main objective is to achieve social impact rather than generate profit for owners and shareholders. It operates in the market through production of goods and services in an entrepreneurial and innovative way. It uses

surplus to achieve these social objectives and it is run by social entrepreneurs in a responsible and transparent manner, in particular by involving collaborators, customers and stakeholders (European Commission, 2013).

**Social entrepreneurship** is the term used to describe behaviors and attitudes of individuals involved in the creation of new businesses for social purposes, including the willingness to take risks and find creative ways to use underutilized assets. The European Commission also points out that there are frequent misunderstandings between the terms social enterprise and **social economy**. Social enterprises are part of the social economy, which also includes foundations, charities and cooperatives. Social enterprises are commercial enterprises for social purposes in the context of the economy (social) (European Commission, 2013).

Phills, Deiglmeier and Miller (2008) also consider social innovation the most appropriate term to be employed. Entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship focus on the personal attributes of who starts a new organization and stress characteristics such as kindness, ambition and persistence. In contrast, social enterprise emphasizes the organization, and many investigations have been focusing on commercial activities and activities operating for profit which provide financial and operational support for traditional social programs. Thereby, unlike the terms social entrepreneurship and social enterprise, social innovation transcends sectors, levels of analysis and methods to discover processes – strategies, tactics and change theories – that produce an everlasting impact.

Figure 1 shows that conceptual differences between the definitions are in the scope of each of them. The focus of social entrepreneurship is in an individual or in a group, whereas social enterprises focus on organizations. Social innovation is likely to act over the whole system (systemic approach recognizes different actors and their interactions within institutional contexts – composed, for example, of rules, regulations, norms and habits) (Westall, 2007).

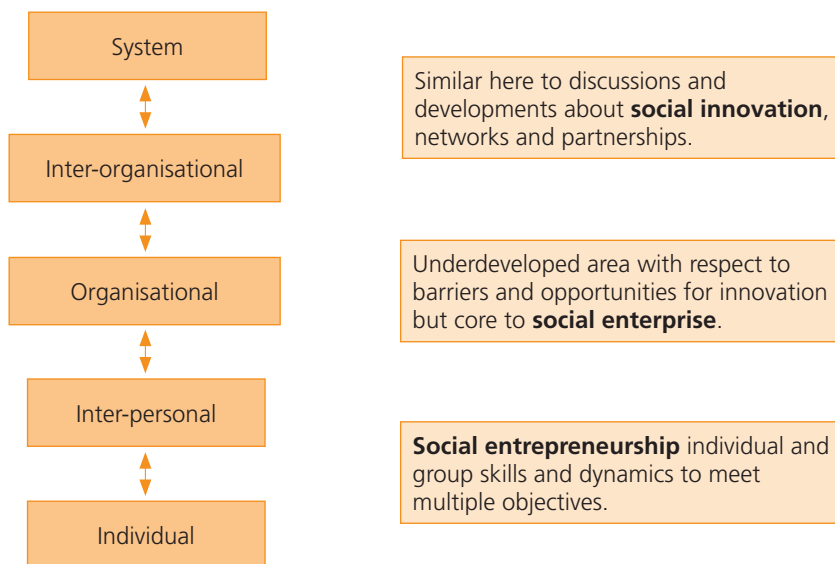
Therefore, in a discussion on social innovation it is worthwhile to sum up by saying that not all social enterprises are innovative, not all social enterprises are led by social entrepreneurs, and not all social entrepreneurs drive social enterprises. No sector has a monopoly on new ideas and perhaps the most fruitful areas are where the limits are outdated (European Commission, 2013).

Considering this literature review, this research chooses to work with the concept of social innovation as a platform of change in the system, but it does not exclude the analysis of social enterprise and social entrepreneur to assess the involvement of different actors in social innovation initiatives. Accordingly, it is concluded that there is a connection between the terms and that they can be easily mistaken, but it is important to consider that they should be investigated under different levels of analysis (individual, organization and system). Thus, for this study, it is defined that social innovation is a broader process, with a

systemic view that encompasses the concepts of social entrepreneurship (individual) and social enterprise (organization), and the latter two can boost the first.

FIGURE I

### A SYSTEMIC VIEW OF INNOVATION



Source: Westall (2007).

Another important definition for this research is the multitude of actors involved in social innovation initiatives. It stands out the definition of Cloutier (2003) that identifies in social innovation a cooperation between an assortment of actors as a process of collective learning and knowledge creation, requiring the participation of users at different levels throughout the process of creating and implementing social innovation.

Horta and Bignetti (2014) classify social innovation actors in four groups:

1. the individual (composed by citizens, such as a social entrepreneur);
2. the public non-state organization (composed by social movements and non-governmental organizations - charities, non-profit organizations and community-based organizations);
3. the state organization (composed by the government); and
4. the hybrid organization (composed by non-governmental organizations with activities that generate income, by social enterprises and socially responsible enterprises).

Having that said, the sixth theoretical proposition is presented, encompassing the terms seen so far (social innovation, institutional voids, social entrepreneurship and social enterprise), as well as the dimensions of multiple actors and different contexts:

**Proposition 6:** Social innovation initiatives involve multiple actors, including social enterprises and social entrepreneurs, having a systemic approach to solving institutional voids in different contexts.

## 5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SOCIAL INNOVATION AS A RESPONSE TO OVERCOME INSTITUTIONAL VOIDS

Considering the literature review mentioned above and the six theoretical propositions, this section aims to propose the theoretical framework that can be seen in Figure 2, pointing out that social innovation can be a response to overcome institutional voids in a multidimensional perspective.

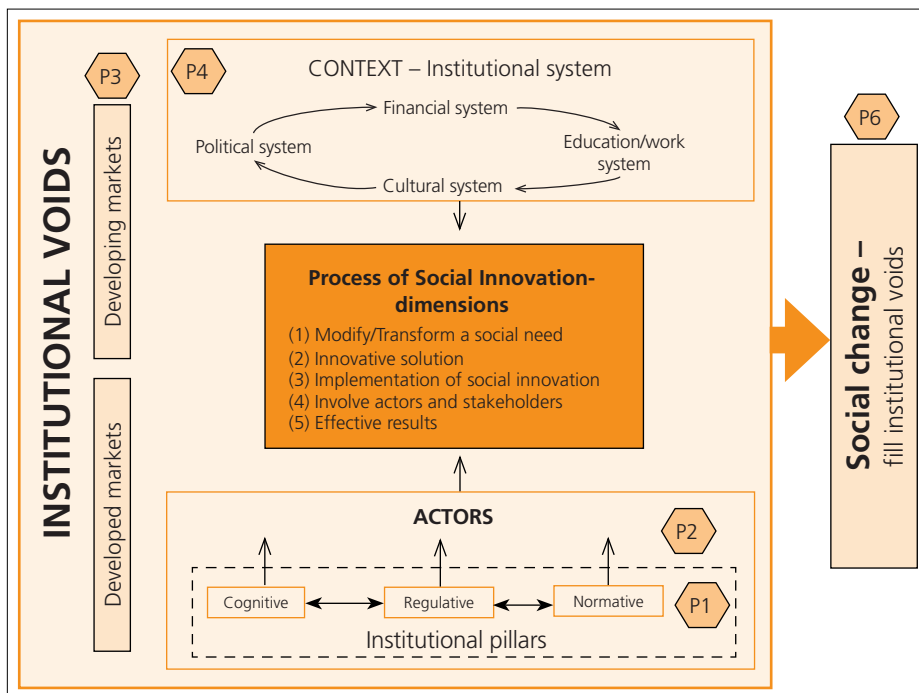
Thus, the previous discussion point out that when there are failures or institutional gaps that do not fully support a given market, there are “institutional voids”. These voids can cause several economic and social inequalities to communities, since they are prevented from accessing basic life conditions, such as access to quality education, health and decent employment. These situations occur due to several institutional weaknesses, including a lack of appropriate public policies and different economic and political contexts.

Different stakeholders, such as companies, NGOs, local community, social entrepreneur, social enterprises, government, suppliers, international institutions, among others, can fill these gaps. However, it appears that each of these actors will act in accordance with their own objective, which may be more focused on market actions or social missions. The management of existent conflicts among the multiple stakeholders is part of any initiative which engage public, private and third sectors (Smith *et al.*, 2013; Moog, Spicer, & Bohm, 2015). It is assumed, nevertheless, that everyone can work together in initiatives whose primary mission is to meet a social need, as stated by Proposition 2.

Thereby, there is a significant number of actors and a diversity of possible relationships among them that need to be understood. In addition to all these factors, institutional theory is an important basis to understand the characteristics of these institutions, which can be analyzed by three institutional pillars: cognitive, regulative, and normative (as stated by Proposition 1).

FIGURE 2

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SOCIAL INNOVATION AS A RESPONSE TO OVERCOME INSTITUTIONAL VOIDS IN A MULTIDIMENSIONAL PERSPECTIVE**



Source: Elaborated by the authors, research data (2016).

Having that said and identifying that there is a diversity of actors involved in these initiatives and a multitude of relationships established among them, it is assumed that these projects are allocated in specific institutional contexts, with particular characteristics to the environment in which they were developed or employed. Thus, these projects occur in different institutional systems composed of distinguished political, financial, educational and cultural characteristics. Considering that each project has a different context, to understand how these contexts affect these projects can be an excellent opportunity of research. Furthermore, the investigation of developed and developing markets could further clarify how the context can act as an influential factor to overcome institutional voids and in the success of those social projects, as stated by Propositions 3 and 4.

In the view of these multiple actors filling institutional voids and being influenced by institutional contexts, the concept of social innovation is suitable for

analyzing this phenomenon. Retaking the concept, for this paper, social innovation includes the generation of new ideas and solutions that create an impact in solving social problems, involving actors and stakeholders in promoting a change in social relations. In addition, it identifies five dimensions of social innovation that should be present in the initiatives to be featured in this perspective (as stated by Proposition 5).

Finally, integrating all propositions, it is believed that social innovation projects involve multiple actors, including social enterprises and social entrepreneurs, having a systemic approach to solving institutional voids in different contexts (as stated by Proposition 6).

Through these theoretical propositions, the main purpose of this paper is reached. The analysis of social innovation projects might be undertaken under a multidimensional perspective, encompassing dimensions of institutional settings (considering different contexts and the interference political, financial, educational/work and cultural characteristics), dimension of multiple actors (giving support to different actors who have distinct objectives), dimension of institutional pillars (cognitive, normative and regulative) and dimensions of social innovation (modification/transformation of a social need, innovative solution, implementation of social innovation, involvement of actors and stakeholders and effective results).

## 6 FINAL REMARKS

This paper aimed the development of a theoretical framework to encompass social innovation and institutional voids based on the gaps from the literature review and through theoretical propositions. These two subjects were identified as emerging in academic literature and should be further investigated, through empirical studies to establish and enhance discussions in those areas.

Studies of social innovation can advance in the identification of new theoretical lenses for their analysis. As identified by the research group, Transit modern theoretical approaches have been adopted to understand this phenomenon, such as: theory on transformative change, social practice theory, power and multi-actor perspective, narratives approaches, institutional theory, institutional logics and institutional entrepreneurship and structuration theory (Haxeltine *et al.*, 2015).

Another important factor of social innovation theory that has emerged is the most critical understanding the context in which each initiative develops. In this study, we identified the importance of knowing the institutional system in which innovations are developed. The institutional system consists of political, cultural, education and financial aspects that might influence the creation and success of



social innovation projects. In addition, we understand the importance of social context, considering the multiplicity of actors and structures that are part of this system.

Different studies can come up with new theoretical lenses on this perspective. We suggest this approach with institutional voids because we believe that social innovation can be developed in the midst of an absence of institutions that help the market structure. Another point raised is the possibility of future studies to advance in the identification of an institutional voids scale, in which different institutional settings may influence the social context, and consequently the social innovation initiatives that are developed.

On a more critical theoretical lens, future studies may investigate the causes of social inequalities and the relations with the dominant institutions (state and market organizations). Researchers of this theory understand that social inequalities are caused by a systemic process in which the dominant institutions cause more social inequalities in that increase their market participation and power. In this sense, we encourage future studies to think about a more critical view of the institutional voids and social innovation, covering harder the Proposition 4, which analyzes the social context, including political and cultural variables.

Although the framework is not claimed to be final nor categorical, since other propositions can arise about those concepts, the main contribution of this research is to bring institutional voids and social innovation together as a theoretical basis for future research, under a multidimensional analysis. This research presents a limitation to the further analysis on the approach of social innovation with a theoretical lens, institutional theory through the theme of institutional voids. To overcome this limitation, we have pointed out throughout the text, possible new theoretical lenses that can be further developed in future studies.

This study also identified that it is necessary to further investigate different actors involved in social innovation projects, not only the ones that are perceived as more powerful. In addition, two other important gaps need more investigation, first, to further study different institutional contexts and second, to understand how different systems can interfere with tensions within social innovation projects.

In that sense, the following questions can serve as a guide for future research through the use of the study framework:

- How the different actors interact in social innovation projects to address institutional gaps in a multidimensional context?
- How different institutional systems (political, financial, educational/work and cultural) influence in social innovation projects?
- What are the main differences between the social innovation processes in emerging/developing markets and in developed countries?

- Are there differences on results from institutional voids overcome by social innovation projects in different contexts?
- What are the main governance strategies for multiple actors? Could they be different in different contexts?

## A INOVAÇÃO SOCIAL COMO RESPOSTA AOS VAZIOS INSTITUCIONAIS: UMA PERSPECTIVA MULTIDIMENSIONAL

### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** O objetivo deste trabalho é propor um arcabouço teórico para explorar a inovação social como uma resposta aos vazios institucionais em uma análise multidimensional.

**Originalidade/lacuna/relevância/implicações:** Aproximar a inovação social da lente teórica da teoria institucional, na perspectiva dos vazios institucionais. Uma das lacunas é propor uma perspectiva multidimensional por meio da observação de múltiplos atores em diferentes contextos institucionais.

**Principais aspectos metodológicos:** Para suportar o *framework*, seis proposições teóricas foram desenvolvidas a partir de lacunas teóricas identificadas em uma revisão sistemática de literatura, iniciada no Web of Knowledge.

**Síntese dos principais resultados:** Os resultados indicam as dimensões que podem ser investigadas em iniciativas de inovação social que preenchem vazios institucionais. As seguintes dimensões foram encontradas: dimensões de contextos institucionais (considerando os diferentes contextos e a interferência do sistema político, de educação/trabalho, sistema financeiro e sistema cultural; dimensão de múltiplos atores (dando voz a diferentes atores que têm objetivos complementares); dimensão dos pilares institucionais (cognitiva, normativa e regulativa); e as dimensões da inovação social (modificar/transformar uma necessidade social; solução inovadora; implementação da inovação social; envolvimento dos atores e partes interessadas; e resultados efetivos).

**Principais considerações/conclusões:** Este *framework* pode ser testado em estudos comparativos entre países com níveis distintos de desenvolvimento. Identificou-se a importância de analisar diferentes contextos sociais e os diversos atores que estão envolvidos em iniciativas de inovação social. Além disso, foram identificadas novas áreas que estão influenciando a inovação social e foram indicadas novas possibilidades para investigar esse campo.

## PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Inovação social. Vazios institucionais. Análise multidimensional. Contexto institucional. Stakeholders.

## INNOVACIÓN SOCIAL COMO UN PROCESO PARA SUPERAR LOS VACÍOS INSTITUCIONALES: UNA VISIÓN MULTIDIMENSIONAL

### RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** El objetivo de este trabajo es proponer un marco teórico para explorar la innovación social como una respuesta a los vacíos institucionales en un análisis multidimensional.

**Originalidad/laguna/relevancia/implicaciones:** Acercar la innovación social de la lente teórica de la teoría institucional, en una perspectiva de los vacíos institucionales. Una de las brechas es proponer una perspectiva multidimensional que se producirá a través del examen de múltiples actores en diferentes entornos institucionales.

**Principales aspectos metodológicos:** Para apoyar el framework se desarrollaron seis proposiciones teóricas identificadas en una revisión sistemática de la literatura, con datos de la base Web of Knowledge.

**Síntesis de los principales resultados:** Los resultados indican dimensiones que pueden ser investigados en iniciativas de innovación social que llenan los vacíos institucionales. Se encontró las siguientes dimensiones: dimensiones de los contextos institucionales (que tiene en cuenta los diferentes contextos y la interferencia de la política, la educación/trabajo, el sistema financiero y los sistemas culturales); dimensión de múltiples actores (dando voz a los diferentes actores que tienen objetivos complementarios); dimensión de los pilares institucionales (cognitiva, normativa y reguladora); y, las dimensiones de la innovación social (modificar/transformar la necesidad social; solución innovadora, la aplicación de la innovación social, actores y stakeholders; y, los resultados efectivos).

**Principales consideraciones/conclusiones:** Este framework se puede testar en estudios comparativos entre países con niveles distintos de desarrollo. Se identificó la importancia de analizar los diferentes contextos sociales y los diversos actores que participan en iniciativas de innovación social. Además, se identificó nuevas áreas que influyen en la innovación social y se propone nuevas posibilidades para investigar este campo.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

La innovación social. Los vacíos institucionales. El análisis multidimensional. Contexto institucional. Stakeholders.

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