



FEDERAL UNIVERSITY  
OF CEARÁ

# CONTEXTUS

## REVISTA CONTEMPORÂNEA DE ECONOMIA E GESTÃO

Contextus – Contemporary Journal of Economics and Management

ISSN 1678-2089  
ISSNe 2178-9258

[www.periodicos.ufc.br/contextus](http://www.periodicos.ufc.br/contextus)

## Social entrepreneurship ecosystem: The case of the state of Paraíba

*Ecosystema de empreendedorismo social: O caso do estado da Paraíba*

*Ecosistema de emprendimiento social: El caso del estado de Paraíba*

<https://doi.org/10.19094/contextus.2023.81548>

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### ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the configurations of the Social Entrepreneurship Ecosystem (SEE) in Paraíba from the model described by Isenberg (2011) adapted by Audretsch et al. (2022). The case study had a qualitative approach of a descriptive and exploratory nature. The techniques were non-participant observation and semi-structured interviews. The units of analysis were the actors involved in the SEE of Paraíba. The SEE brings together a set of talents with transformative potential. However, the main challenges encountered are the lack of public policies and training. With this, the SEE of Paraíba proved to be an environment still in development, lacking interaction between the actors for the ecosystem strengthening of the region.

**Keywords:** entrepreneurship ecosystem; social entrepreneurship; social enterprises; social impact; case study.

### RESUMO

Este artigo tem como objetivo analisar as configurações do Ecosystema de Empreendedorismo Social (EES) na Paraíba a partir do modelo descrito por Isenberg (2011) e adaptado por Audretsch et al. (2022). O estudo de caso teve abordagem qualitativa de natureza descritiva e exploratória. As técnicas foram a observação não participante e entrevistas semiestruturadas. As unidades de análise foram os atores envolvidos no EES da Paraíba. Foi constatado que o EES reúne um conjunto de talentos com potencial transformador. Entretanto, a falta de políticas públicas e de capacitação são os principais desafios encontrados. Com isso, o EES da Paraíba mostrou-se um ambiente ainda em desenvolvimento, faltando a interação entre os atores para o fortalecimento ecossistêmico da região.

**Palavras-chave:** ecossistema de empreendedorismo; empreendedorismo social; empresas sociais; impacto social; estudo de caso.

### RESUMEN

Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar las configuraciones del Ecosistema de Emprendimiento Social (EES) en Paraíba a partir del modelo descrito por Isenberg (2011) adaptado por Audretsch et al. (2022). El estudio de caso tuvo un enfoque cualitativo de carácter descriptivo y exploratorio. Las técnicas fueron la observación no participante y la entrevista semiestructurada. Las unidades de análisis fueron los actores involucrados en la EES de Paraíba. Se constató que la EES reúne un conjunto de talentos con potencial transformador. Sin embargo, la falta de políticas públicas y capacitación son los principales desafíos encontrados. Con eso, la EES de Paraíba demostró ser un ambiente aún en desarrollo, carente de interacción entre los actores para el fortalecimiento ecossistémico de la región.

**Palabras clave:** ecossistema de emprendimiento; el emprendimiento social; empresas sociales; impacto social; estudio de caso.

### Article Information

Uploaded on 30/08/2022  
Final version on 28/12/2022  
Accepted on 29/12/2022  
Published online on 14/03/2023

Interinstitutional Scientific Committee  
Editor-in-chief: Diego de Queiroz Machado  
Evaluation by the double-blind review system  
(SEER / OJS - version 3)



### How to cite this article:

Ramos, A. O., Vasconcelos, T. B., & Oliveira, V. M. (2023). Social entrepreneurship ecosystem: The case of the state of Paraíba. *Contextus – Contemporary Journal of Economics and Management*, 21, e81458.  
<https://doi.org/10.19094/contextus.2023.81548>

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Society has been facing difficulties linked to various social inequalities. Since the mid-1990s, Latin American countries have been trying to boost economic growth with income distribution policies. In Brazil, social policies associated with, for example, conditional cash transfers, increased real growth rates of the minimum wage, and increased public spending on health, education, and infrastructure stood out (Azevedo *et al.*, 2022). However, inequalities, whether economic, social, environmental, educational, or of other natures, are problems that continue to affect a large part of the population.

Unemployment is a reality for part of the population. The lack of opportunity or lack of qualification forces them to seek self-employment. Furthermore, the discourse that makes the individual responsible for his employability condition is driven by increased competition between economic agents, producing technological advances to obtain a competitive advantage (Tavares & Rodrigues, 2015).

In this context, entrepreneurship has proven to be an element that drives the development of countries and an alternative in response to crises, given that the Entrepreneur has taken on the role of promoting transformation in society through the introduction of new products, production patterns, or processes, being seen as a revolutionary agent (Schumpeter, 1943).

In recent decades, new forms of enterprise have emerged. According to Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) studies, entrepreneurship includes creating new businesses, any attempt at a new venture, and self-employment or expansion of an existing business (Reynolds *et al.*, 2000). However, entrepreneurship has expanded to incorporate new forms and contours. Among these new designs, social entrepreneurship emerges as a response to the various challenges of society (Ashoka, 2021; Sassmannshausen & Volkmann, 2013) that considers the interests of investors, customers, the community involved, and sustainability (Lipkin *et al.*, 2017).

Social entrepreneurship has become relevant in research in recent years (Dionísio, 2019). Despite being worked on in the literature recently, it has been attracting the attention of researchers, spreading rapidly and considerably increasing the number of research, publications, and specific conferences on the subject (Carmona *et al.*, 2018). This finding demonstrates the interest in the subject. However, for social enterprises to be developed and implemented, a favorable environment is necessary where they can, together with all interested parties, carry out their activities successfully to develop the locality and have their ideas made viable.

These spaces or environments are called the entrepreneurship ecosystem or related terms. The term came from biology and was first used in 1996 by James

Moore in his work entitled "The death of competition" (Gobble, 2014). Moore's work (1996) defined the business ecosystem as economic communities supported by individuals and organizations in which companies occupy niches like species in biomes, and the various members of the ecosystem evolve. This concept establishes a parallel with natural biological ecosystems, where life is created, adapted, and evolves from the interaction and synergy inherent in each system (Audy & Piqué, 2016).

In this way, entrepreneurial ecosystems (EEs) have won their place as a topic of interest on the agendas of researchers and political leaders (Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017; Isenberg & Onyemah, 2016; Schäfer & Mayer, 2019; Spigel, 2017; Stam, 2015). However, despite the increase in the number of studies focusing on this field. Despite the increased number of studies focused on this field, the literature is in the theoretical development phase (Fernandes & Ferreira, 2022). The speed and incidence of publication of these new studies led to the need for systematization and an adequate theoretical framework. (Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017; Spigel, 2017; Spigel, & Harrison, 2018; Stam, 2015).

Social entrepreneurship ecosystems are based on creating an environment to strengthen this type of enterprise, including actors from different sectors of society in an articulation network to discuss demands, exchange support, and disseminate entrepreneurial opportunities. The ecosystem is based on organizations that relate interdependently. These business ecosystem agents share knowledge and resources because they consider that in this way, they can achieve the objectives in a better way than if they worked individually (Ikenami, 2016).

Thus, even if making a profit, in social entrepreneurship, the focus of the activity should be the social impact, while the main objective in commercial entrepreneurship is to obtain financial returns. Thus, as Dees (1998, pp. 2-3) proposed, "wealth is just a means to an end for social entrepreneurs."

The agency of the actors and elements present in social entrepreneurship ecosystems is essential for local impact and transformation. Thus, understanding the elements that make up these ecosystems and how they complement each other is essential for these changes to be developed and perpetuated over time. Thus, it is essential to know what these elements are, how they are related to promoting a virtuous dynamic of local development in the region/sector in which they are positioned, and what impacts can be generated regarding social transformation.

Given this context, this article seeks to answer the following research problem: What is the configuration of the social entrepreneurship ecosystem in Paraíba? Therefore, this article aims to analyze the configuration of the social entrepreneurship ecosystem in Paraíba. The specific objectives were: 1) Identify the elements of the existing social entrepreneurship ecosystem in Paraíba; 2) Check the

actors involved and roles played by them; and 3) Understand the prospects for the development of the social entrepreneurship ecosystem in Paraíba.

The concept of "business ecosystems" or "entrepreneurship ecosystems" has recently become one of the topics of most significant interest in the academic community and emerging as one of the most promising research approaches in entrepreneurship research (Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017; Schäfer & Mayer, 2019; Spigel, 2017; Spigel & Harrison, 2018; Stam, 2015). However, there is still a gap concerning social entrepreneurship ecosystems, their elements, and how they configure from a contextual analysis level.

Stam (2015) emphasizes that approaches to managerial aspects of the entrepreneurial ecosystem need to be revised. It is because they only provide a list of components (Isenberg, 2011) or pillars (Forum, 2014), generally remaining on the surface, while their explanations end up being tautological, such as: "business ecosystems are systems that produce successful entrepreneurship" (Stam, 2015, p. 5). Lévesque (2016) emphasizes that a list of elements or factors without a well-identified link does not distinguish the causes and their effects. Furthermore, it is also important to highlight that the level of analysis (e.g., cities, regions, countries) is rarely specified, and the distinction between necessary and contingent is never clearly made (Lévesque, 2016).

In addition, raising awareness about the subject makes knowledge about the social entrepreneurship ecosystem essential for the development of systemic and structural approaches that support the development of these enterprises, which seek to contribute to the reduction of social inequalities, as well as, with the resilience of environmental and economic issues in the places.

Thus, the work is justified by the need to analyze the configuration of the ecosystem of social entrepreneurship in Paraíba and the local development these enterprises provide for society.

Structurally, this article is organized into five sections. In addition to this introduction, it presents the theoretical framework that addresses discussions on the definition of ecosystem, the entrepreneurial ecosystem model most used in the literature, and the ecosystem model of social enterprises. In the third section, the methodological procedures are detailed. The fourth section presented the results and discussed them. Furthermore, finally, there are the final considerations.

## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social entrepreneurship has attracted significant interest over the past two decades. Social entrepreneurship studies have become a phenomenon, and its appeal has grown enormously among socially conscious groups (Hidalgo *et al.*, 2021). People have become more skeptical

about the ability of governments and companies to solve pressing social problems such as poverty, social exclusion, and the environment (French *et al.*, 2021).

The main feature is their motivation to solve issues related to poverty, health, education, or any other social and environmental problem (Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern, 2006; Neck, Brush, & Allen, 2009). Environmental problems, as they are considered today's severe adversities, are also part of the domain of the social Entrepreneur (Neck, Brush & Allen, 2009).

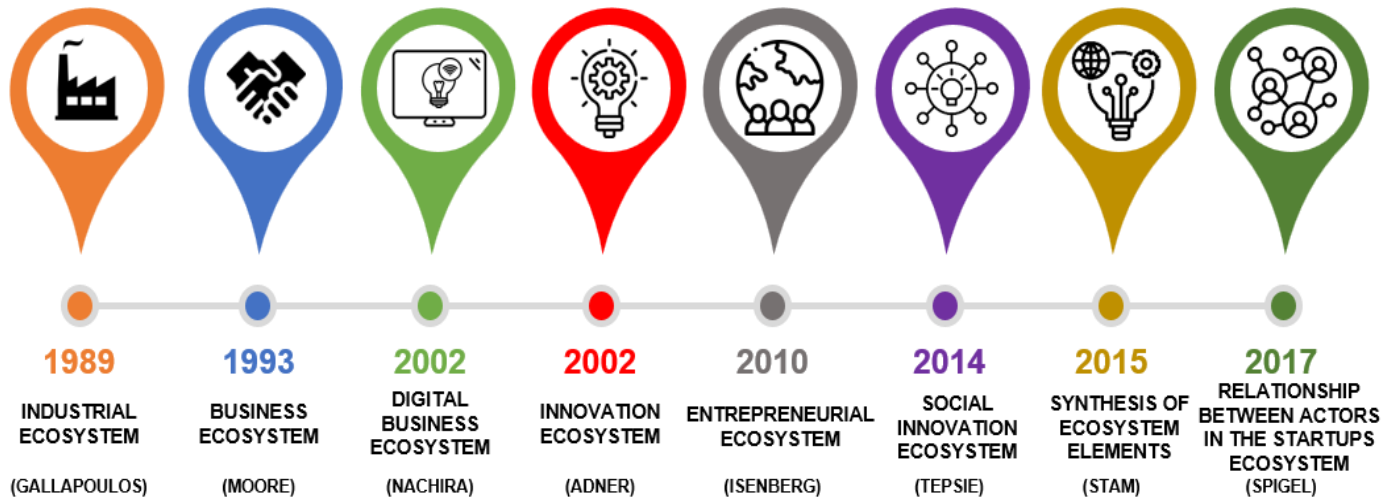
Thus, entrepreneurship has been understood as a multidimensional process involving social (social mobility, culture, society), economic (market incentives, public policies, venture capital), and psychological variables as influencers in the act of undertaking (Minuzzi, Belinazo & Lezana, 2005).

The term social entrepreneurship begins to be associated with an environment for its development called ecosystem, worked in the literature and approached by several authors as "entrepreneurial ecosystem," "entrepreneurial ecosystem" among other denominations, further working not only on the economic issue but bringing the discussion on social issues, thus called "social entrepreneurship ecosystem" or "social innovation ecosystem."

In this way, according to Dees (1998), the social Entrepreneur needs to operate outside the logic of donations, of living on government subsidies to support himself, breaking paradigms and acting as an agent of economic and social development of the communities he serves. It must be oriented to promote significant social changes that generate a high social impact for society. The social Entrepreneur must go beyond innovative non-profit activities and encourage profitable activities with social objectives (Bittencourt *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, to promote and develop social entrepreneurship, it is necessary to build an efficient and integrated ecosystem that favors the performance of the roles of stakeholders (Kabbaj *et al.*, 2016). However, the success of an entrepreneurial project depends not only on the characteristics of the enterprise but also on the environment or ecosystem in which it is imagined, developed, and cultivated (Elia *et al.*, 2020). This is because individuals usually choose to undertake.

### 2.1 Approaches to the term Ecosystem

The term ecosystem was approached in several areas until it reached Administration. Initially, it was created by the biologist Tansley in 1935, referring to the idea that organisms should not dissociate themselves from their natural habitat. According to Tansley, the ecosystem concept is based on a superorganism capable of evolving. In the field of Administration, the term has been molding itself into several new approaches (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Timeline of Approaches to the term Ecosystem in Management.

Source: Elaborated from the theoretical review.

In principle, the term was used as an industrial ecosystem (Frosch & Gallopoulos, 1989), where the objective of the analysis was to minimize the input of virgin material and energy in industrial operations. Subsequently, the idea was introduced to parallel the business economic environment and the natural ecosystem. This appears evidently in the studies carried out by Moore (1993) on organizational behavior. Since then, the author has been inspired by the ecosystem concept and applied it in the field of strategy and business.

Explaining the uncertainties and risks associated with innovation management activities would be fortuitous. Nachira (2002) directs the discussion to digital business ecosystems. In addition, Adner (2006) adopted the concept of an ecosystem that focuses on a focal innovation and the set of components (upstream) and complements (downstream) that support it and sees the ecosystem as "the collaborative arrangements through which companies combine their offerings into a coherent, customer-oriented set" (Adner, 2006, p. 98).

Isenberg (2010) then brings the most used concept to date about an entrepreneurial ecosystem, in which he states that the ecosystem is composed of some domains, which are: a set of entrepreneurial actors, including potential customers and suppliers, universities and research centers, social and cultural operators, institutions and policymakers, large companies, startups and innovative entrepreneurs, specialists and professionals, investors and a group of talented people. The pillars and domains of the entrepreneurial ecosystem elaborated by Isenberg (2010; 2011), therefore, show a change in the paradigms of economic thinking about companies and markets by

proposing a new economic perspective based on individuals, formal and informal institutions, and networks.

Some researchers have proposed expanding the concept of the social innovation ecosystem to more explicitly include demand-driven organizations, such as those from the research group Theoretical, Empirical and Policy Foundations for Social Innovation in Europe (TEPSIE). Their research project involves researching trends and developing theories of social innovation in Europe (Tepsie, 2014). A diagram was created that positions organizations related to supply and demand without forgetting the intermediaries that try to link them to a whole, where the concept of a plural economy predominates.

Stam (2015) proposes a synthesis of the elements of the entrepreneurial ecosystem. By combining the pillars of business literature, Feld (2012) and World Economic Forum (2013) bring a specific view on structural and systemic conditions. Structural conditions include the presence and participation of formal institutions, supportive culture, adequate physical infrastructure, and demand for new goods and services. On the other hand, systemic conditions refer to the promotion of networks, strong leadership, trained professionals and support services, access to financing, and new knowledge.

The report by the European Commission highlighted that "the characteristics of an ecosystem for social enterprises, necessary to overcome barriers to growth, tend to be immature in most countries, with slow emergence and scarce formal support structure and supportive policies" (European Commission, 2014, p. 10). In this sense of differentiation analysis, Table 1 presents the main characteristics of the entrepreneurship ecosystem and the social entrepreneurship ecosystem.

**Table 1**

Characteristics of the entrepreneurship ecosystem and the social entrepreneurship ecosystem

Character	Entrepreneurial ecosystem	Social entrepreneurship ecosystem
Approach	Economic development.	Economic and Social Development.
Role	Facilitator of immersion of new companies and entrepreneurs aiming at profitability.	Facilitator for developing new ventures whose purpose is to cease some demand from society.
Context	Entrepreneurial strengthening environment.	Environment for strengthening social enterprises.
Objective	Market focus.	Seeks innovative solutions to social and environmental problems in the community.
Principles	Engagement in pursuit of more significant gains.	Engagement around a common cause.
Results	Grow and maintain profitability.	Create and maintain social value.
Procedure	Produces goods and services for the market.	It produces goods and services for the local and global community.

Source: Elaborated from the theoretical review.

Stam and van de Ven (2019) stated that the concept is problematic, and the rush to employ it ran ahead of answering several fundamental conceptual, theoretical, and empirical questions. The phenomenon seems somewhat tautological: entrepreneurial ecosystems are systems that produce successful entrepreneurship. With that, where there is much successful entrepreneurship, there is an excellent entrepreneurial ecosystem.

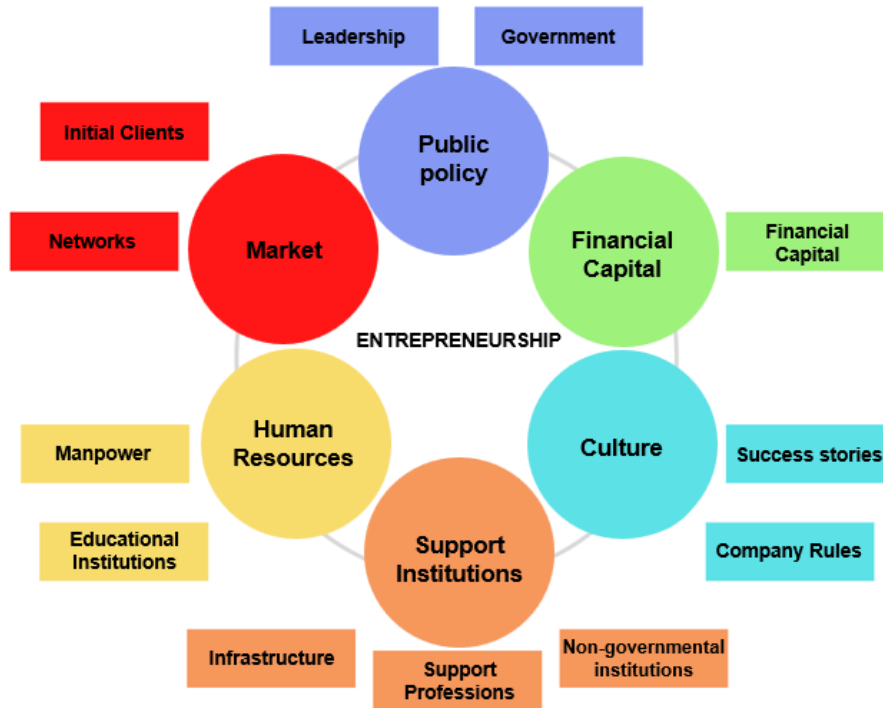
For this reason, current thinking on entrepreneurial ecosystems can be seen as the result of developments in various related literature (Wurth *et al.*, 2021), bearing in mind that the concept of the entrepreneurial ecosystem (EE) has become widely known and disseminated through from Professor Daniel Isenberg's article published in the Harvard Business Review (Isenberg, 2011). For Isenberg (2011), an entrepreneurial ecosystem consists of six significant constructs: Policies, Finance, Culture, Support, Human Capital, and Markets. For the author, each isolated element is favorable to entrepreneurship but insufficient to sustain it. Together they boost the creation and growth of enterprises.

## 2.2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

As already discussed, an entrepreneurial ecosystem consists of all the elements necessary to sustain entrepreneurship in a given territory (Stam & Van de Ven, 2019). It can be defined as a "conceptual umbrella for the

benefits and resources produced by a community cohesive, typically regional, group of entrepreneurs" (Spigel & Harrison, 2018, p. 152) where institutions and entrepreneurs are interdependent, influencing and being influenced by each other (Brush *et al.*, 2018).

About specific aspects of the "entrepreneurship ecosystem" or "entrepreneurial ecosystem," Isenberg (2011) advanced in his research on the subject. For Isenberg (2011), an entrepreneurial ecosystem consists of six significant constructs, namely: 1) Policies (factors related to government regulations, tax incentives, and other strategies to encourage entrepreneurship); 2) Finance (structures to attract small investors, angel investors, significant private equity funds, among others); 3) Culture (how is the tolerance for error, how valued are successful entrepreneurs, what is the ambition of the population to undertake, among others); 4) Support (how support is given from the point of view of infrastructure and professional services to startup companies); 5) Human Capital (addresses issues related to professional training for entrepreneurship and training) and; 6) Markets (parameters related to the regionalization of the economy, diversification, among others). For the author, each isolated element is favorable to entrepreneurship but insufficient to sustain it. Together they boost the creation and growth of enterprises (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Domains of the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Source: Isenberg (2011).

In this context, the entrepreneurial ecosystem represents a self-organized and self-sustainable socioeconomic system based on the actors' pursuit of their interests, in which there is relative independence from central control. However, policies can influence the actors' interaction structures (Isenberg, 2016).

One of the main domains of entrepreneurial ecosystems that Isenberg (2011) focuses on is human capital, such as the presence of serial entrepreneurs. However, in addition to those traditional entrepreneurs, or even those who seek economic gains as a central goal, other types of entrepreneurs act and can also be part of an ecosystem that is seen as a promoter of development.

From this perspective, the social Entrepreneur is an actor who can contribute and attract investments, given his economic and social dealings, so these other types of entrepreneurs must be approached within these ecosystems, leveraging and contributing to a better society. In this way, it is essential to work to unify social entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial ecosystem literature and understand the interaction between these two phenomena (Villegas-Mateos & Vázquez-Maguirre, 2020).

### 2.2.1 Social Entrepreneurship Ecosystem

Faced with the inexistence of a model that worked from the social perspective, the European Commission (2011) proposed some elements or characteristics that would form an ecosystem to promote social enterprises at the heart of the economy and social innovation. The idea is to be a tool that includes stakeholders within a structured ecosystem that is clear about its financial sustainability and social impact.

According to Lévesque (2016), the social enterprise ecosystem is an environment in which social enterprises are seen as entities to be supported and not as actors capable

of collectively providing development tools. In this way, the political framework is placed at the center, while networks and mutual support mechanisms are characteristics that operate around the development process of social enterprises. In this way, they address the demands, that is, the dynamics of social innovation and their consequences on public problems or social needs around which the different actors of social innovation ecosystems mobilize to promote incidence.

In this sense, the work by Audretsch *et al.* (2022) adapts Isenberg's model (2011) to adapt it to social entrepreneurship. The authors address changes in Isenberg's (2011) business ecosystem model, proposing a new social innovation ecosystem model, bringing an addendum on the characteristics of social innovators, their needs, and how they can be supported in the development and implementation of social innovation ecosystems. social innovation.

It aims to explore the characteristics of social innovators and their emerging needs in a region where the innovation ecosystem is still lacking. A model is developed to overlay traditional ecosystems and to discuss possible synergies and tensions between the two ecosystems. This suggested new model offers policymakers and practitioners, in general, a framework to provide a supportive environment for social entrepreneurs.

Thus, the model developed by Audretsch *et al.* (2022) departs from the six dimensions created by Isenberg (2011), adding the indicators of the social innovation ecosystem and the needs of the social innovator primarily neglected by the literature. Table 2 exposes the six dimensions and the indicators that comprise each dimension. Each dimension was composed of indicators shared with the traditional business ecosystem and elements of the social innovation ecosystem, except for the "Market" dimension, which only

has indicators shared with the traditional business ecosystem. Furthermore, the indicators in bold are the

emerging needs of social innovators, largely neglected in the literature.

**Table 2**

Social Innovation Ecosystem Model

Categories (Isenberg, 2011)		Indicators (Audretsch <i>et al.</i> , 2022)
Policy	Shared	Tailored political activities Legal setting
	Owned by the social innovation ecosystem	Social innovation education Political contact point* Long-term oriented socio-political focus*
Finance	Shared	Easier access and fewer formalities Common financial sources
	Owned by the social innovation ecosystem	Suitable measures for evaluating Sis's impact Own government SI budget * Social and demographic change
Market	Shared	Environmental Protection Niches
	Owned by the social innovation ecosystem	Strong personal traits Specific Knowledge Non-local and hands-on experience
Supports	Shared	Social, communication, and project management skills* Public outreach Infrastructure and physical space Project specific support Centre/hub
	Owned by the social innovation ecosystem	Social problem pool*
Culture	Shared	Encouragement from society Entrepreneurial culture
	Owned by the social innovation ecosystem	Social sensibility and Ethics Participating society International horizon* Suitable communication and discussion*

Source: Based on Audretsch *et al.* (2022).

The elements pointed out by the authors have fundamental roles within the ecosystem that is inserted. When dealing with government and public initiatives, it is essential to say that almost everything is part of this element, whether at the municipal, state, or federal level. According to Carvalho *et al.* (2016), the government plays a key role for companies in regulating a set of rules and regulations that can facilitate the entrepreneurial process and reduce bureaucracy. That said, public policies must be more firmly implemented and evolve, bearing in mind that ecosystems are complex and dynamic and need to grow and develop.

Moreover, according to Gitman (2004), virtually all individuals and organizations are involved in financial activities, as they constantly receive, raise, spend and invest money. Therefore, this domain is essential for the development of projects (Santos Filho *et al.*, 2019).

Sequentially, it is essential to bring future entrepreneurs and companies closer together for the availability of people with talents, forming networks of contacts in the markets (Santos *et al.*, 2016). Markets facilitate the creation of new companies through the exchange of knowledge and information, in addition to providing the first contact between new business actors (Ghazali *et al.*, 2013).

Human capital refers to entrepreneurs willing to develop ventures in a given region. It is the primordial element for the existence of the entrepreneurial ecosystem that without the human role, there is no way to develop this ecosystem. Stam and Van de Ven (2019) state that perhaps the most essential element of an effective entrepreneurial ecosystem is the presence of a diverse and qualified group of workers.

The dimension of institutions and support organizations deals with elements that are responsible for offering quality education and training professionals, critical citizens capable of working in the labor market, with the mission of inserting social entrepreneurship in primary education, as well as organizations that bring the objective of social change within society through the programs and services they offer. Finally, the prevalence and forms of entrepreneurship are affected by the specific institutional structures of the place and by cultural factors (Acs *et al.*, 2017). The adequate culture of communication and discussion necessary for the development and implementation of social innovation, as well as a culture open to new products and services (innovation has no meaning if it is not acquired and used), is necessary to encourage society to participate in the mitigation of social problems through the development of innovative ideas (Audretsch *et al.*, 2022).

The model most commonly used in research is the one proposed by Isenberg (2011). Some authors, such as Kabbaj *et al.* (2016), use the dimensions proposed by Isenberg to carry out the analysis in a study on the social entrepreneurship ecosystem: the case of Morocco. The authors conclude that more efforts are needed to increase the efficiency of social entrepreneurs, as well as social entrepreneurs needing more support in the availability of funding sources. They point out that policymakers need more effort to develop the social entrepreneurship ecosystem.

Therefore, this model has been used in the literature to analyze entrepreneurial ecosystems. Later Audretsch *et al.* (2022) adapted this model, explaining the specific needs of the social innovator, and was the model chosen for data analysis.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

The objective of this research was to analyze the configurations of the Ecosystem of Social Entrepreneurship (EES) in Paraíba from the model proposed by Audretsch *et al.* (2022), an adaptation of the model created by Isenberg (2011). Audretsch *et al.* (2022) adapt the six dimensions created by Isenberg (2011) after a case study and add to this model the dimensions of the social innovation ecosystem and the needs of the social innovator, largely neglected by the literature.

This study is characterized as qualitative research of descriptive and exploratory nature. The method chosen was the case study because it is a method that allows the detailing of a single object of study or multiple objects and because it is used to understand little-studied phenomena and the specific aspects of a theory (Pesce & Abreu, 2019).

The State of Paraíba has consolidated itself as a fertile environment for innovation and technological production through startups, innovative companies, incubators, educational and development institutions, among other actors that are part of the local ecosystem. The

state is experiencing a unique moment to strengthen and integrate this network of actors, aiming at the maturation of the ecosystem and consolidation of the culture of entrepreneurship and innovation.

Paraíba is one of the 27 federative units of Brazil located in the east of the Northeast region. Its territory is divided into 223 municipalities with a population of 3.996 million. In addition, over the years, Paraíba has become a national reference in the area of innovation, with around 320 companies in the digital business and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) segment, mainly in the cities of João Pessoa, Campina Grande, Patos, and Cajazeira (A Paraíba - Ibal@io, [n.d.]).

As for the definition of research subjects, from a non-probabilistic sampling, it was decided to carry out semi-structured interviews with key actors, directly and indirectly, involved in the Paraíba Social Entrepreneurship Ecosystem. The semi-structured scripts were built from the dimensions that make up the model proposed by Isenberg (2011) with the indicators proposed by the framework model by Audretsch *et al.* (2022), who were chosen from the literature review according to Table 2.

The subjects of this research were those who actively participated in the ecosystem development process and had access to information about the functioning of an association or cooperative that develops activities in the region and has positive results within the entrepreneurship ecosystem. With that, the research subjects were the main actors involved in the EES of the State of Paraíba incorporated in the following categories: institutional (represented by seven interviewees), social (represented by two interviewees), and organizational (represented by two interviewees) (Table 3). The interviews had two types of semi-structured scripts—a script for institutional and organizational actors, and another for social actors only. The choice criterion was accessibility, also using the snowball technique. The sample, therefore, was non-probabilistic, intentional, and accessible.

**Table 3**  
Summary of Actors

Type	Definition	Actors
Institutional	The institutional actors involve the institutions, the State, the identity, and the norms or values of each actor (Tardif & Harrison, 2005).	Represented by professionals from UFCG, PaqTcPB, PEASA, and ITCG who play the role of coordinators of projects that foster entrepreneurship.
Organizational	Organizational actors refer to companies, Social Economy organizations, collective organizations, and beneficiaries or recipients (shareholders) of private organizations (Tardif & Harrison, 2005).	Represented by Sebrae and by a professional from Banco do Nordeste.
Social	Social actors involve actors from civil society, cooperative and associative movements, unions, or associations (Tardif & Harrison, 2005).	Represented by the artisans and members of the Cooperativa Arteza located in the District of Ribeira de Cabaceiras - PB and by the manufacturers and representative of the community bakery "Bolos das Oliveiras" of the Association of women family farmers of Várzea Comprida dos Oliveiras in Pombal - PB.

Source: Research Data.

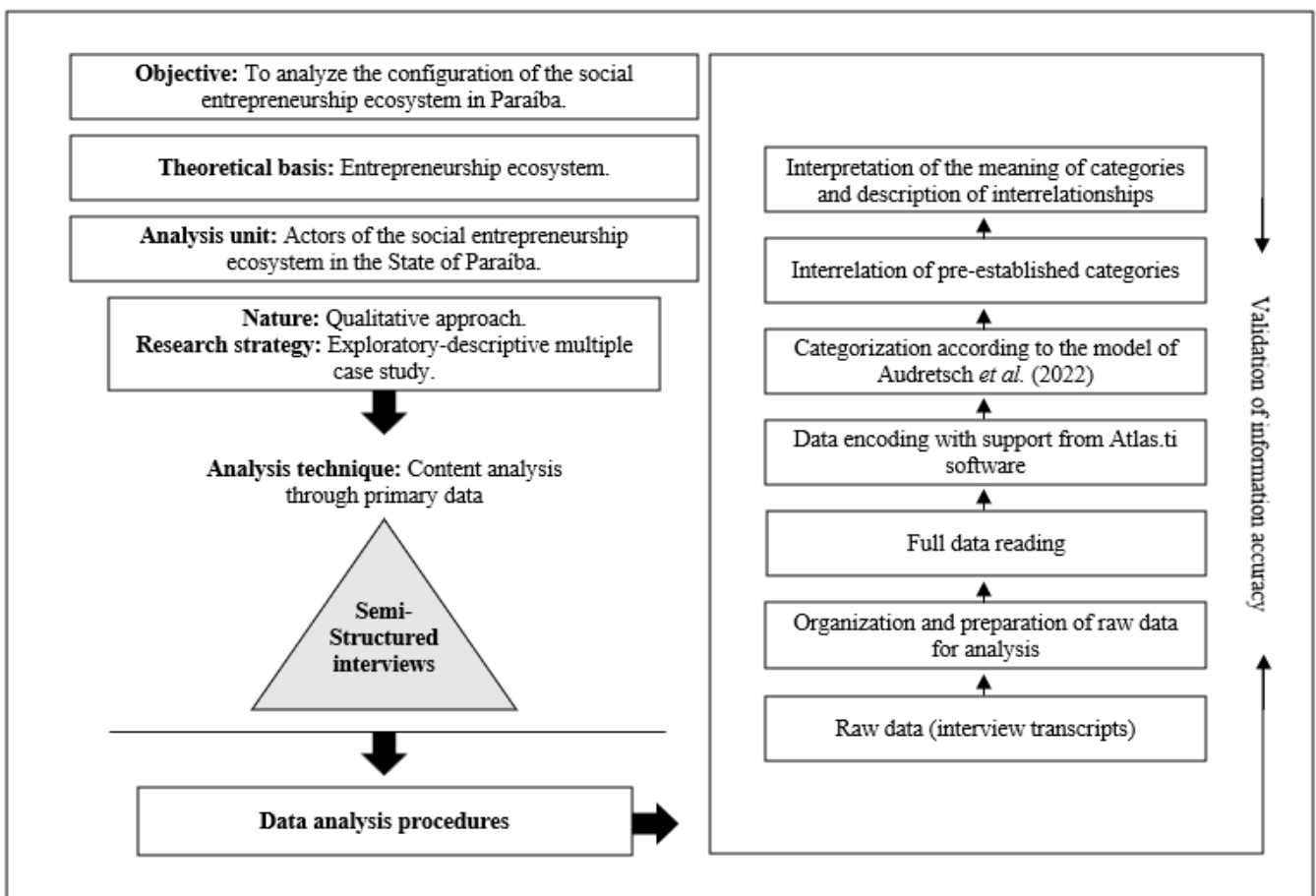


Data collection techniques were chosen according to the approach of the work and its corresponding specific objectives. Thus, the study's qualitative approach collected primary data from multiple sources: semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation.

The interviews with the research subjects were carried out using a semi-structured questionnaire built from the six dimensions described by the Isenberg model (2011): Politics, Finance, Markets, Human Capital, Support, and Culture. In sequence, the indicators were based on the framework proposed by Audretsch *et al.* (2022), where 27 indicators were addressed. The indicators are allocated in the six dimensions proposed by Isenberg (2011) and are divided into two categories: 1) Indicators that are specific to the SEEs; and 2) The indicators that are inherent to both ecosystems (social and traditional).

A total of 12 interviews were carried out between March, April, and June 2022. The interviews were carried out in person and online through Google Meet, and the number of interviews was defined using the saturation point (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). Most respondents work at public universities and are part of programs to encourage entrepreneurship. However, there were also respondents from other types of institutions that contribute to the promotion of social entrepreneurship, such as, for example, representatives of associations and cooperatives.

Data were analyzed using content analysis (Bardin, 1977) following the validity and reliability criteria proposed by Larrinaga (2017). The methodological design of the research was based on the model adapted from Creswell (2010) and Larrinaga (2017) (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Methodological design.

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on Creswell (2010), Villarreal Larrinaga (2017), and Vasconcelos (2022).

The Atlas.ti software assisted in the organization, integration, and synthesis of the information obtained. The software facilitated the categorization and interpretation of data based on the analysis of the magnitude of each indicator that indicates the number of quotations attributed to a given code. The greater the number of quotations, the greater the indicator's relevance for respondents. The software was chosen due to its ability to provide researchers with the creative and systematic organization, assembly,

and management of materials for qualitative analysis (Atlas.ti., 2022).

#### 4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This section presents the results of the interviews with the actors that are part of the Paraíba Ecosystem, identifying within the dimensions the most apparent indicators and how they relate to each other. Thirty-seven codes were created from the framework created by

Audretsch *et al.* (2022), and 407 quotations were made in total.

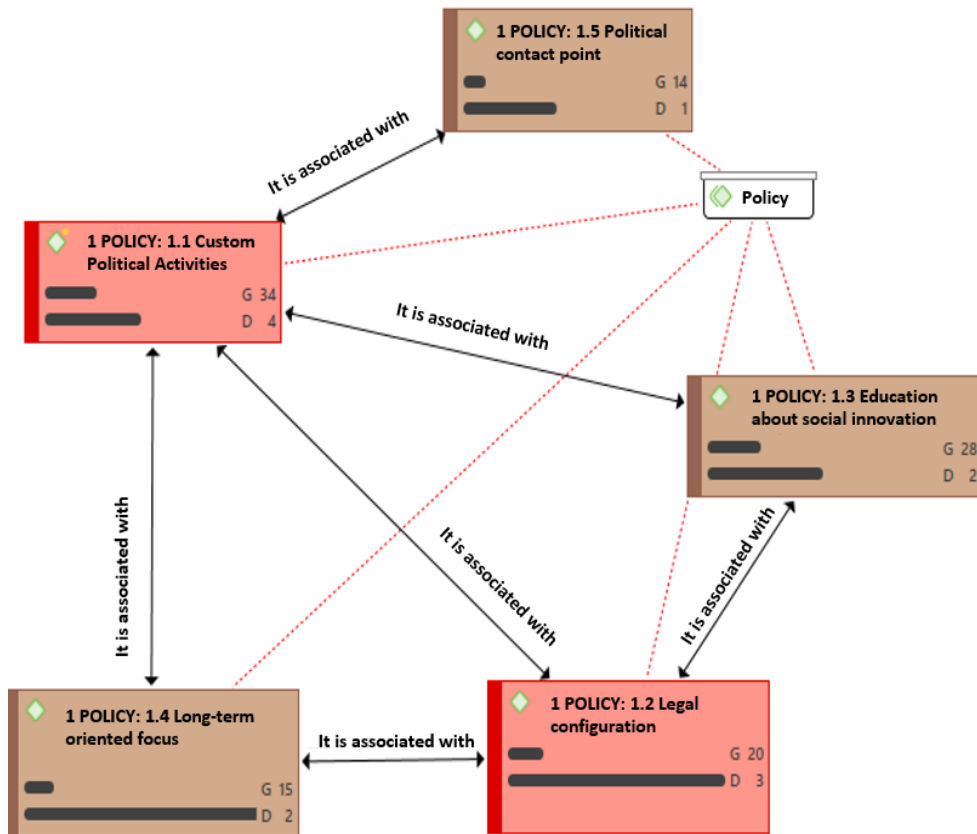
#### 4.1 Political Dimension

The objective of the "Policy" for Isenberg (2011) should not be to have a high rate of enterprises but to have enterprises with a high potential for survival and enterprises with a low potential for failure. The sooner, the better. He addresses several policy implications in his research, including that entrepreneurship needs different policies and environments, i.e., a suitable environment with implemented policies is needed for these types of ventures. Isenberg (2011) makes it clear that "if you do not know where you are going, any road will take you there; you need to know which way is true north if you want to navigate" (p. 9). Therefore, it is necessary to define the type of entrepreneurship and how much it needs to achieve its goals.

In their work, Audretsch *et al.* (2022) address the six pillars established by Isenberg (2011), oriented towards profit as a structure to analyze, according to the existing

literature, the needs of social innovators. Starting with the "Politics" pillar, which according to the author, can allow these new organizational forms (social enterprises with social and economic objectives) to be even more advanced and promoted, which can receive specific funding at the local, regional, and national level. Moreover, even internationally, and due to their hybridity, social entrepreneurs have access to funding from both the for-profit and non-profit sectors (Battilana *et al.*, 2012). The results presented in Figure 4 indicate that this dimension has five indicators and some association with each other.

The analysis variables listed in the framework addressed by Audretsch *et al.* (2022) have five indicators that make up the "Politics" dimension, personalized political activities, and legal configuration relevant to social innovators and profit-oriented entrepreneurs. Therefore, they represent an overlap of the two ecosystems and the specific neglected needs of the social innovator: social innovation education, long-term oriented socio-political focus, and political point of contact.



**Figure 4.** Political Dimension.  
Source: Network generated in Atlas.ti, based on field research data.

Based on the analysis of these two indicators that are necessary for both ecosystems, addressing with the interviewees these perspectives linked to social entrepreneurship in Paraíba, which is the focus of the study, most interviewees emphasize that it is currently necessary to create public policies aimed at social entrepreneurs who bring awareness of social issues through direct linkage with society and introducing education on social innovation.

This dimension had the highest magnitude of all analyzed dimensions (118 quotations). It should be noted that personalized policies are associated with Legal configuration, education on social innovation, and other indicators, which are essential for access to resources (capital and human). There will likely be tensions and access to these resources will be a point of tensions between themselves. As emphasized by Audretsch *et al.* (2022) when saying that the term resources should be

understood in a broad sense and include finance and human capital. They also address the importance of equality in the legal configuration, where the legal scenario is more suitable for one actor than for the other.

Among the various positions on the creation of personalized public policies and already bringing this discussion, interviewee E1 states that "[...] it is necessary to formulate public policies with the participation of the beneficiaries, that is, it is fundamental that society actively participates in this formulation process so that they come to try to remedy the problems existing in society". Furthermore, it is possible to identify which programs established to serve the public of family agriculture are addressed in practically all interviews and even mentioned. So this need identified by Audretsch *et al.* (2022) in their work is present in the entrepreneurship ecosystem of Paraíba, making it necessary to create public policies that encompass other types of enterprises, other markets, and different audiences, a valuable criterion to be reviewed by the legal configuration indicator, which is the scenario available for these enterprises to access these resources.

It is authoritative that the dimensions initially addressed by Isenberg (2011), and later the needs visualized within these dimensions addressed by the author Audretsch *et al.* (2022) bring evidence from the interviews that all are facts and needs present in the social entrepreneurship ecosystem of Paraíba. Logically, some points are already in a specific evolution, such as public policies implemented, a particular legal configuration already established, and political support points. However, these are necessary for the EES's development, strengthening, and growth.

According to E6, "We have fantastic SE cells in Paraíba, and if you had a more generous look with bolder public policies to serve these communities, you would have a wonderful success here in Paraíba." This leads to the observation that, in order to act more effectively, policies need to be developed with determination and intensity, aimed at improving the well-being of society, specifically in the Paraíba region, and that it is clear that the government has a special responsibility when it comes to of changing this scenario. He further exposes that:

[...] every ecosystem works with the triple helix, the community (the people it undertakes), the governmental entities (the government) and the third sector, so this governmental helix is fundamental in a country like ours, where you have a substantial dependence on government social programs, so in this area of social entrepreneurship, the role of the government is fundamental (Interviewee 6).

In sequence, Audretsch *et al.* (2022) identify the neglected needs of the social innovator. Education on social

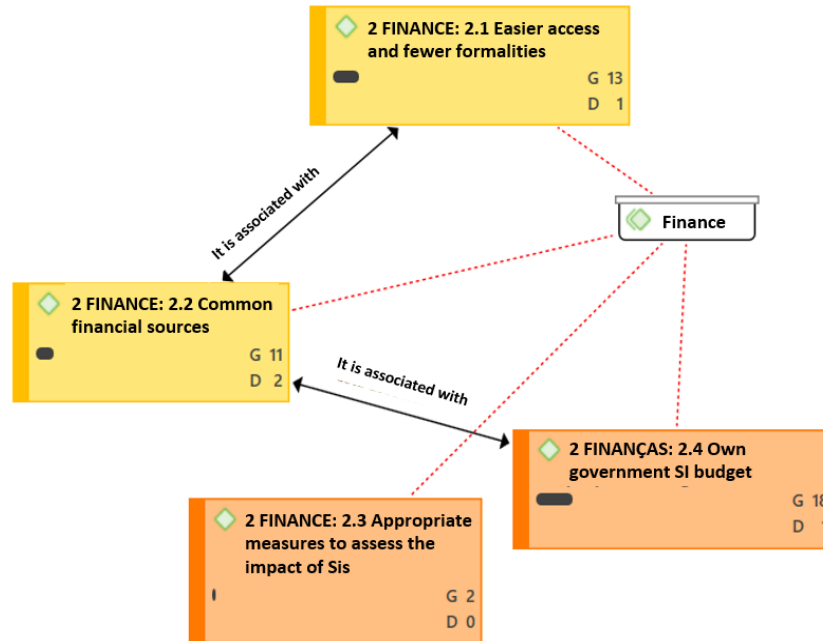
innovation is a crucial point within this policy dimension. It is explicit that if it is not understood by this political mass that before any step towards strengthening the EES in Paraíba, there must be education focused on entrepreneurship and innovation from the beginning of the chain, or there will be no advancement of this ecosystem. There is, therefore, under this gap not filled by institutions and policymakers a concern and formation of a discourse of search and appreciation for other forms of education that go beyond formal education, aligned with the need to invest in entrepreneurial training already from the first years of school (Vieira, 2019). As highlighted in the following statements: E10 "[...] start at the base, in elementary school, because once this exists there in elementary school, you take it to the rest of school. life" (E10); "Necessary qualification of community leaders [...] training and extension projects" (E1); and, "[...] individual understanding of the concepts of innovation" (E3).

It was found that when it comes to policies for social enterprises, it is still very incipient in practice. In an ideal ecosystem, policies would be defined in a way that involves both actors, but this is only sometimes possible (Audretsch *et al.*, 2022). The actors interviewed recognize the importance, for example, of some policies that have already been implemented, but there are no programs aimed at higher education as a whole. It is very restricted, for example, to the rural production chain, and there still needs to be more synergy between the layers of the Triple Helix.

#### 4.2 Finance Dimension

Most ventures go through several stages of raising financial resources between their initial stage and maturity due to limited access to capital (Mack & Mayer, 2016). The primary sources of this funding are self-financing, family, friends, banks, angel investors, venture capital, and incubators, being essential to promote the availability of different types of financing in the environment (Acs *et al.*, 2017; Isenberg, 2011; Spigel, 2017).

Financial capital becomes more readily available and easier to access as investors develop trust in evolving entrepreneurial ecosystems (Mack & Mayer, 2016). Audretsch *et al.* (2022) identify four needs in this dimension, two of which are easier access and fewer formalities and common financial sources as being common to entrepreneurship in its traditional form as well as social entrepreneurship and identified needs that represent an update of the traditional business ecosystem, which are adequate measures to assess the impact of social innovations and own social innovation budget (Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** Finance Dimension.

Source: Network generated in Atlas.ti, based on field research data.

Addressing these needs related to the EES of Paraíba, the respondents explicitly emphasized that easier access and fewer formalities for financial support to social enterprises in the State are essential. Interviewee E11 mentioned that despite all the benefits, "there is still this difficulty, sometimes the issue of understanding with this bureaucracy, how it works, is very harmful." With the bit of knowledge of some entrepreneurs, the bureaucracy to access some resource is still a pressing difficulty seen in the ecosystem by the actors that compose it. In addition, the lack of access to credit was highlighted by some respondents.

Furthermore, the lack of access to credit was highlighted by some respondents. Interviewee E6 stated, "What is lacking is federal funding in a more democratic, more transversal way, and you would significantly expand this EES infrastructure here in the northeast region and Paraíba, not to mention it." Another factor that is seen as a bottleneck in the ecosystem is access to these resources, whether offered by the government or even through lines of credit by financial institutions, which in most cases is very complicated and bureaucratic, interviewee E10 says:

[...] One of the difficulties is the lack of access to credit. The money factor always weighs heavily, even though today we know that there are banks with specific lines of credit for these projects, even though these are often enterprises that cannot gain access due to bureaucracy (Interviewee E10).

Because of the facts, there is evidence that social entrepreneurs in Paraíba need sources of financing with fewer formalities, such as less bureaucracy, for example, "in terms of documents, laws, rules imposed on all benefits" (E11) mainly for startups" it is as if they could only walk to the corner, not being able to see that after the corner there is another street, so I think this is an imposed difficulty"

(E11). Even when entrepreneurs desire to grow, "they start to regularize, but are afraid of bureaucracy, of formalizing" (E9).

Common financial sources are directly associated with a government budget for social innovation, as stated by respondent E5, "all part of the government, it is the great driver of all this." Furthermore, it is noticeable that the difficulty in accessing resources is enormous in Paraíba; research and extension institutions play a crucial role in this endeavor. Audretsch *et al.* (2022) emphasize that although the government currently provides some support sporadically, this type of support is very much related to projects and that its availability is expensive given the current political composition. Therefore, this problem is solved by creating a permanent government budget for social innovators (Audretsch *et al.*, 2022). financial support for communities." According to E6, it is necessary to "return to federal programs that support social entrepreneurship" with specific budgets s for this group of entrepreneurs.

Therefore, it is essential in the ecosystem panorama in Paraíba that government budgets are directed to social entrepreneurs/innovators with measures to evaluate the impact generated and that, like these programs that show to be contributory to changes in communities, the products/services offered can be inserted by social entrepreneurs. This bottleneck within this dimension needs to be seen by the government layer and worked on in other spheres that are interconnected with the rural environment. Audretsch *et al.* (2022) emphasize the need to implement a government budget for social innovation to offer social innovators the possibility of more easily accessible funding. Therefore, more potential entrepreneurs willing to innovate would have the incentive to dedicate themselves to their innovative projects.

### 4.3 Market Dimension

Successful entrepreneurship is a force for better regulation and governance, as it stimulates the development of traditional capital markets (Isenberg, 2011). The sphere of markets addresses the need for consumers ready to absorb new products and disseminate them through a network of contacts both nationally and internationally (Arruda *et al.*, 2013) (See Figure 6). Zahra *et al.* (2014)

believe that markets facilitate the creation of new companies through the exchange of knowledge and information, in addition to providing the first contact between new business actors. Isenberg (2011) argues that entrepreneurship development will only happen if these different elements of the ecosystem are worked together, even though it is optional to develop all elements on a large scale at once (Isenberg, 2011).



**Figure 6.** Market Dimension.

Source: Network generated in Atlas.ti, based on field research data.

The first market indicator is the markets linked to social and demographic changes. They are related to changes in society and regions, having as a positive asset the visualization, understanding and exchange of adequate information with society. This indicator is so that it is prepared to evacuate the products offered on the market to meet its needs, in addition to meeting another indicator, environmental protection. Thus, interviewee E6 states that:

[...] the social impact of social entrepreneurship is like this, this is the objective of social entrepreneurship; it is the type of entrepreneurship that causes the most social and environmental impact as well because you are concerned with all aspects when you are working on entrepreneurship social (Interviewee E6).

The third indicator, niches in traditional markets, offers many alternatives for social entrepreneurs (Audretsch *et al.*, 2022). In the region of Paraíba, where the study was carried out, these niches include several markets, for example, the food market, “women who produce cakes, bakery products, fruit pulp enterprises” (E10), in the leather market “there are almost 400 people involved in the leather activity” (E7). So, it is the most diverse entrepreneurs who are part of these niches, among them the “popcorn seller who is on the sidewalks, the popcorn vendor, the guy who sells soft drinks, mineral water, the one who sells fruit over there at the stand” (E5).

For Audretsch *et al.* (2022), the market pillar is the only one that does not require updates in the traditional entrepreneurial ecosystem. All three identified markets offer great potential for social innovators and for-profit entrepreneurs. It is clearly understood that, given the results of the interviews in the region of Paraíba, there is a need for a market study. For example, interviewee E6 makes an

addendum relating the importance of a market study for the rural environment:

It is fundamental to encourage rural community organizations and the settlement to transform it into an agro-industrial social enterprise. You have to have a market for that, so the issue of market research and opening up the market for agro-industrial products in these communities is also another crucial aspect of social entrepreneurship (Interviewee E5).

His statement in dealing specifically with a rural community organization is also necessary for other enterprises. For the interviewees, market conditions signal a positive point for the output of products within the entrepreneurial ecosystem of Paraíba. Interviewee E9 states that “it changes reality, they start to evolve” E7 mentions a reality found in his city that transformed the community as a whole after this identification of the niche market and differentiation of products adopted by those who believed that would work:

[...] the cooperative started with 28 members. Today it already has more than 100 people in its corporate structure and with the generation of jobs here within the Ribeira district community of more than 300 direct and indirect jobs only here in the district, where we have approximately 1200 people, so there are almost 400 people involved in the leather activity (Interviewee E7).

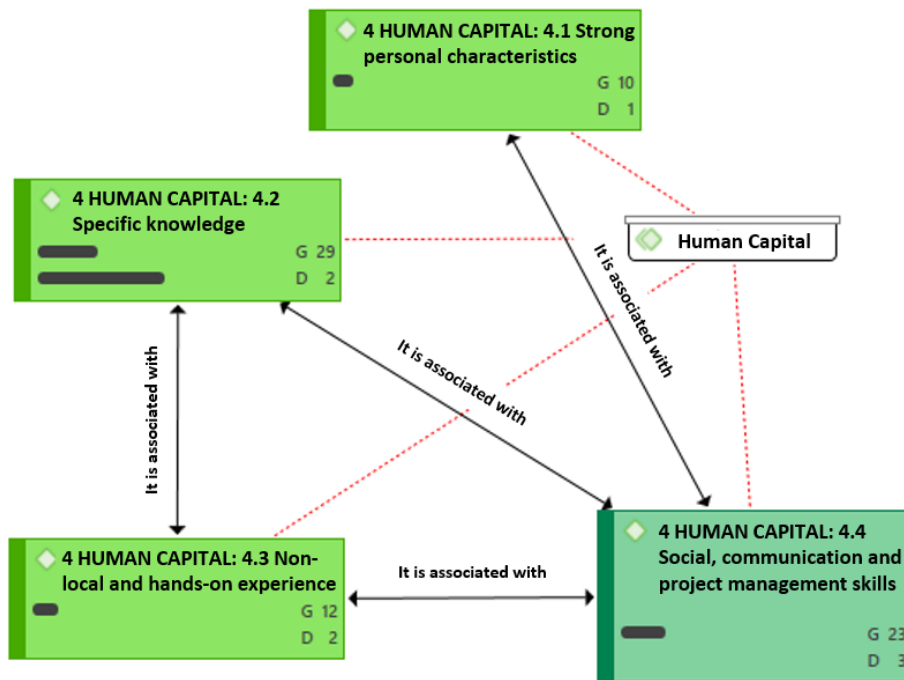
With this, it is brilliant how these pillars, the market study, the personalized public policies aimed at developing this initiative, care for the environment, political contacts, and society actively participating, among other associated indicators, manage to change the reality of an entire region. Examples like this should be adapted to other regions as development models within the social entrepreneurship ecosystem in Paraíba.

#### 4.4 Human Capital Dimension

Analyzing the literature, a diverse and qualified group of workers is the most essential element of an effective entrepreneurial ecosystem (Stam, 2015; Stam & Spigel, 2017). Human capital is updated through training and experience, and success stories inspire new generations and make society more tolerant of risks, failures, and wealth creation (Isenberg, 2011).

Four indicators form part of this dimension. The specific knowledge indicator had greater magnitude to the other indicators (29 citations). Audretsch *et al.* (2022)

identified four emerging needs within the human capital dimension. Three of these are relevant to for-profit entrepreneurs and social innovators: personal solid characteristics, specific knowledge, and non-local, hands-on experience are crucial to the emergence of social innovation. Therefore, it represents an upgrade from the traditional business ecosystem to the social one, including communication and project management skills. Thus, the size of the network generated by the software is shown in Figure 7.



**Figure 7.** Human Capital Dimension.

Source: Network generated in Atlas.ti, based on field research data.

The specific knowledge indicator refers to the individual's knowledge about a specific subject or project. This indicator was described as an essential element for developing the social entrepreneurship ecosystem in Paraíba (E1, E5, E6, and E8) and a difficulty encountered for this development. E5 says that "knowledge is fundamental, it is crucial, entrepreneurship starts from the principle of the idea, but in most cases, they have the idea, but do not have the necessary technical knowledge to make the idea run."

It can be identified that some partner institutions have contributed as holders of this specific knowledge and have been making this bridge to social entrepreneurs to insert them into the programs and actions that they develop or that the government offers through their social skills, communication, and project management.

Among the interviewees' answers, we can identify some educational institutions that hold specific knowledge in a significant and valuable way. Interviewee E8 says, "without knowledge, we cannot achieve anything, the greatest social revolution that can have is knowledge, so within universities, UFCG, UEPB, and IFPB are very

important." Research institutions such as INSA are very relevant in the ecosystem development process and as the holder of professionals and partners with specific knowledge about certain projects.

Given the exposed facts, it is possible to corroborate that needs addressed by Audretsch *et al.* (2022) within the human capital dimension are perceptible within the social entrepreneurship ecosystem in the State of Paraíba and that mechanisms are needed to address these needs. In this way, there is greater integration and development of the ecosystem.

According to the speeches of the respondents of this study, Paraíba is a place with people qualified to develop businesses and provide services to social enterprises. There is human capital that is worth a lot. However, it is visible that: a) there is still a lack of integration between these people who hold knowledge, b) Managers lack interest in absorbing innovative ideas that impact society, and c) the dissemination of knowledge to social entrepreneurs/social innovators is lacking. As can be seen in E2's speech, "Currently everyone plays their role, Sebrae does its part, FIEP, now integration is missing so that we

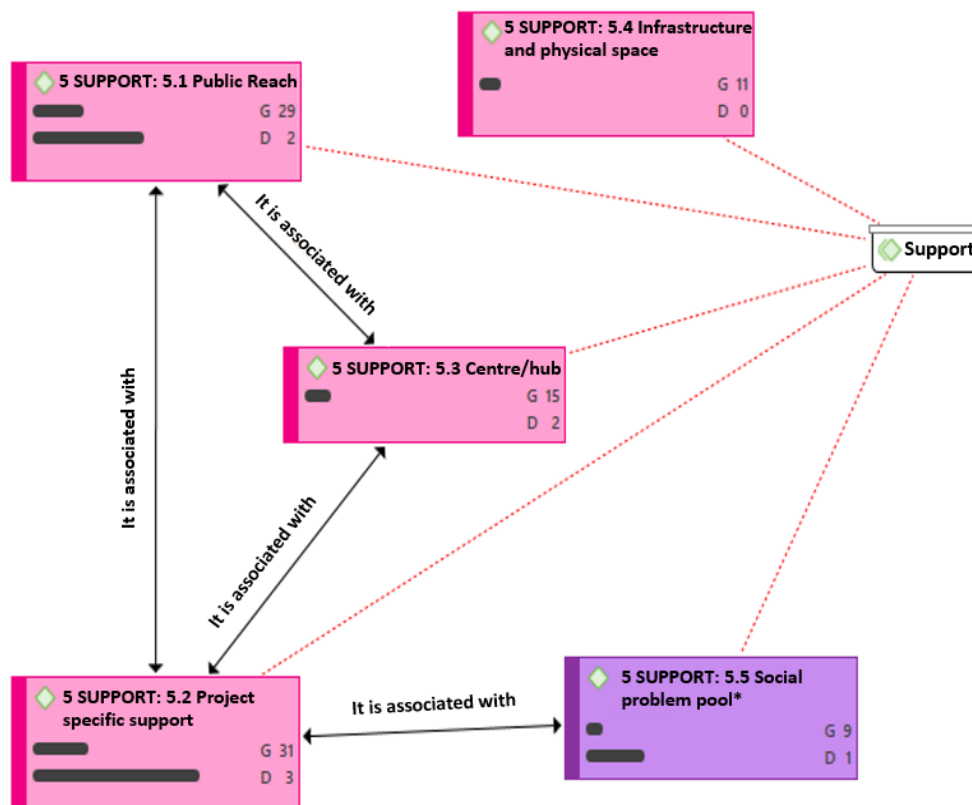
can work on the development of the project to consolidate the ecosystem with a cooperation agreement, for that each one does his part alone". The emphasis of the speech is precisely about the integration of the actors that make up the ecosystem of social entrepreneurship in Paraíba, they are seen as actors who work in their individuality.

#### 4.5 Support Dimension

Of an ecosystem of social innovations and requires a substantial update of the traditional business ecosystem. The support category contains assistance with public outreach, such as raising awareness of the social issue and giving visibility to successful social innovators Audretsch *et al.* (2022). The support dimension is composed of five needs identified in their study, four of which are identified additional

needs relevant to profit-oriented entrepreneurs and overlap with the traditional entrepreneurial ecosystem and a need for a pool of social problems that seem unique to the field.

A central need for social entrepreneurs in Paraíba is the availability of adequate actions on some social issues that seek assistance in public dissemination that can be supported through events, concerts, and various media contributions Audretsch *et al.* (2022). According to Audretsch *et al.* (2022), although social problems are at the core of social innovation, this pool is not yet addressed in the literature. By bringing together social problems, this support institution would assume many important tasks (Figure 8). So, it is clear that the media can foster social entrepreneurship.



**Figure 8.** Dimension Support.  
Source: Network generated in Atlas.ti, based on field research data.

E5 states that "they lack much access to official commercialization points, they cannot place, for example, what they produce in retail chains, they cannot find space in environments such as malls, they cannot penetrate these more sophisticated commercialization points, so they have this difficulty precisely because of the lack of organization" It is possible, then, in the face of the interviews, to observe that there is a lack embedded in this indicator, which is marketing, associated with the center/central indicator, which is the need for a center/hub. This physical location serves a point of contact and information, well-publicized and easily visible. It is noticed that in the entire chain of enterprises, there is still a problematic flow of the product in the market, and often because they do not have adequate

infrastructure and an easily accessible place for information that provides this, bearing in mind that many social entrepreneurs do not have financial conditions to have their place of commerce and do not have the necessary knowledge.

It is also versed, and the interviewees always return to the touch of entrepreneurs in rural areas. Family farming is an example of organization, considering that the government has made available mechanisms for adequate infrastructure for these enterprises through support from municipal governments.

Support in accessing specific networks was listed as fundamental by the 12 interviewees and was the most commonly mentioned within this dimension. They state that

this support can be offered in different ways, as they mention E1 "extension projects, training," E6 "monitoring, consultancy and technology transfer" and through different partners with specific support as stated by E6 "the support institutions to transfer technology, provide follow-up, carry out market surveys, there should be more universities, more support institutions giving more support for these social enterprises.

It is impressive the change that entrepreneurship can generate in a community and therefore contribute to remedying existing social problems. One interviewee brings in one of his speeches about the impact generated by the entrepreneurial initiative through a cooperative, "a bombastic impact because if it were not the cooperative and its income, the district of Ribeira was destined to have no more people living there, except for retirees and some civil servants, it was unable to survive, here before people only lived from agriculture" (E7).

And the association of indicators specific support of a project, public and central reach is evidenced in the speech of the interviewee E8, who is part of a technological incubator:

We are going to try to solve the main problems of society, and when I say central, I mean problems like hunger, housing, security, and public health, because if we cannot solve these problems, how can we go to others, then how can we people will know how to solve a problem if we do not talk directly with those who are experiencing these problems daily (Interviewee E8).

This central point was needed where innovators could access it so institutions that offer programs and actions

according to their needs could support them. So, it is clear that the needs addressed by Audretsch *et al.* (2022) in the support dimension, facts are present in the Paraíba social entrepreneurship ecosystem, requiring observation points and decision-making that change this ecosystem scenario, so in this way, it can effectively develop and reach an audience, bringing changes social, economic and environmental.

#### 4.6 Culture Dimension

According to the study carried out by Fundação Getúlio Vargas (2012), a culture for innovation assumes the "presence of elements of culture that favor innovation, such as encouraging learning, ease of sharing ideas and criticism, conflict resolution" (p. 48). Audretsch *et al.* (2022) comment that for social innovators, a culture of support for entrepreneurship and innovation, in general, is necessary and a culture of social sensitivity.

Consisting of 6 indicators, as shown in Figure 9, adequate communication is the most cited indicator. The "Culture" dimension represents the field where the author Audretsch *et al.* (2022) states that more (four) updates of the traditional entrepreneurial ecosystem are needed. He cites the development and implementation of social innovation as the first place, thus raising the need for an adequate culture of communication and discussion, which is still little discussed in the literature. Innovative solutions most often come from conversations and discussions between individuals.

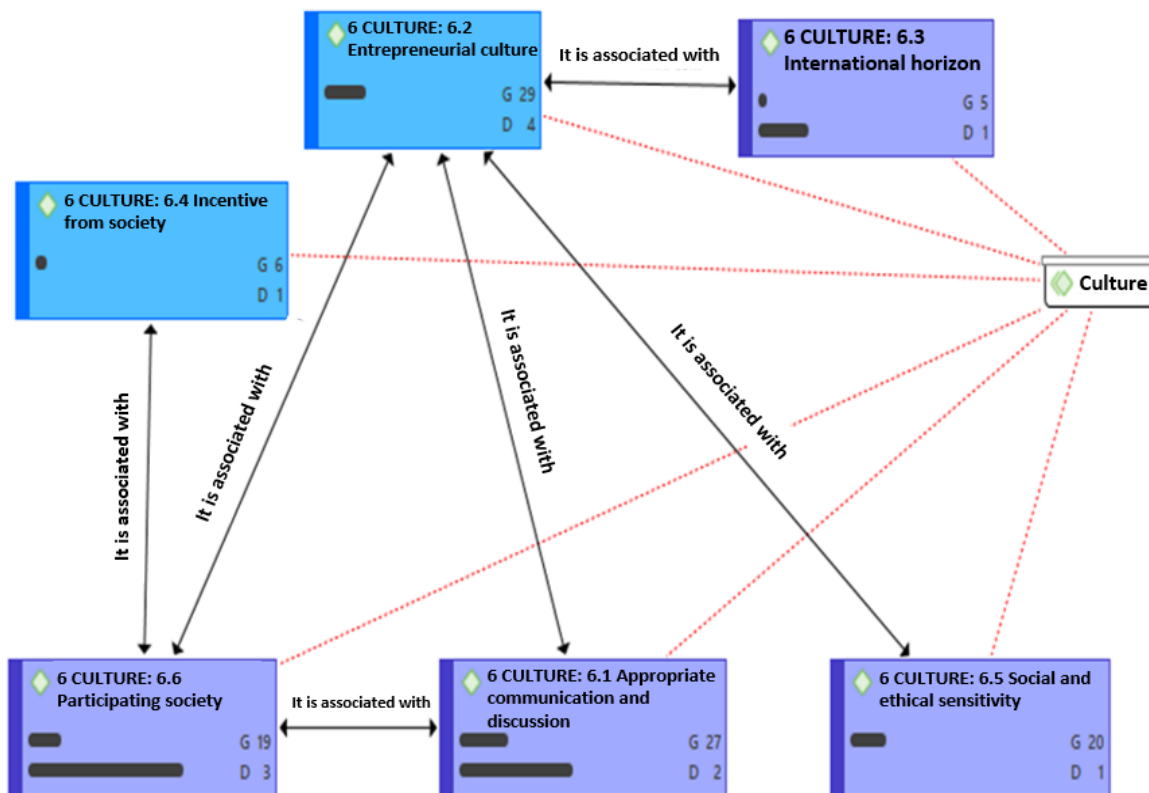


Figure 9. Culture Dimension.

Source: Network generated in Atlas.ti, based on field research data.



This culture of communication and discussion means that it is fundamental for individuals to communicate and discuss social problems so that they can express their opinion and create solutions to solve these problems, with mutual respect being paramount. According to the interviewees, communication and discussion in the ecosystem of social entrepreneurship in Paraíba are not yet effective, "It needs to have planning, evaluation, continuity" (E1), lacking this integration and discussion in a way that all actors do part, as E5 points out: "the integration so that we can work on the development of the project to consolidate the ecosystem with a cooperation agreement because each one does his part separately."

The ecosystem proves to be an ideal environment for this culture of communication and discussion. According to interviewee E5, "the ecosystem is a great space for people in this work of interaction, discussion, and opportunities. We identify, dialogue". However, it is evident that, as much as it is relevant for the development of the ecosystem, it is an indicator that needs to be worked on in practice. It is necessary to integrate the actors that make up the ecosystem. Communication with other actors:

[...] currently, the way the bank does its work, all the others do theirs, SEBRAE does it, FIEP does it, the municipal secretary here in Campina Grande do hers, in short, everyone do your part, now, this junction, this integration is missing, where we can even work on the development of a project, to consolidate the ecosystem with agreements, cooperation agreements that this is very important, for now, each one does his part, each one in his square, each one following his objectives, his mission, but this integration did not happen so that we can act in an integrated way (Interviewee E5).

E10 about ecosystem actors addresses this same difficulty:

[...] they need to organize themselves more because they work a lot individually, which makes it very difficult for them, and we have some associations here, some cooperatives. However, there is little connection between them. They work a lot in isolation, and so I think that even a way of trying to solve these bottlenecks that exist would be for them to organize themselves more, they support each other, and help each other to see if they at least reduce these difficulties they have (Interviewee E10).

Thus, it is clear that this indicator is a difficulty found within the Paraíba Entrepreneurship Ecosystem. It is essential to work on this perspective that is directly associated with a well-established entrepreneurial culture and a participatory society.

The relevance of the triple helix in the ecosystem context is also brought from the interviews, this breaking down of barriers through communication, interviewee E9 gives an example of a hypothetical situation that constantly happens in our society:

There is! A leader of a neighborhood where they are developing an improvement for basic sanitation, there are companies willing to invest in that there. There are city halls that also want to invest but cannot make public policies because they do not have direct contact, that is the question that we always talk about the triple helix, we break down the walls and barriers between the triple

helix, academia, the state as a whole (Interviewee E9).

So this indicator linked to others that make up the cultural dimension is essential for developing and leveraging this ecosystem in the State of Paraíba. It is essential that these actors that make up the entire ecosystem work the entrepreneurial culture so that society stimulates initiatives and social innovators. Given this scenario, interviewee E3 states that it is necessary to "[...] review the installed culture on entrepreneurship and renew the participation of institutions in the formation of an entrepreneurial mind". The interviewees also see the entrepreneurial culture as a relevant element for the development of EES in Paraíba. In the literature, authors say that entrepreneurial culture and values are related to valuing the figure of the Entrepreneur and choosing entrepreneurship as a career (Isenberg, 2010; 2011; World Economic Forum, 2013).

Another point made in the interviews that is very important, and I believe that if adopted by several municipal managers and not only managers but by those who, in a way, have the means to put ideas into practice and have a social and ethical sensitivity that is one of the indicators that make up this dimension is a brilliant element of social transformation, as stated by E5 "[...] when mayors are visionaries, they manage to combine a public policy like this with another program, and this manages to leverage human and economic development indices significantly". These initiatives are crucial for developing and implementing social enterprises/innovations. Interviewee E11 states, "From the moment one works out, the others can visualize that the others will also succeed, then they can unite, and there is a growth yes through some individual actions you can have a mobilization."

In today's society, difficulties are evident, and entrepreneurship is a way of changing this scenario, "people are forced to invent, reinvent something to try to survive, people are trying to produce something and make what they produce important for the future. Their sustenance throughout the northeast region" (E2). In this way, it is fundamental to intensify the entrepreneurial culture so that society can be actively participative "it is willpower, wanting to change" (E7), that there are adequate communications within the entire ecosystem extension, that there is social and ethical sensitivity and that it is internationalized these initiatives.

As highlighted by E11, "many people do not even know what social entrepreneurship is. They do not know what a social impact business is, so I believe we need to talk more about it, sensitize more people in the ecosystem to talk about it so that people know about these projects". Therefore, this set of indicators that address the needs within this dimension is crucial from the point of view of the EES of Paraíba for the maturation of education on entrepreneurship and innovation and thus consequently generating the integration of the parts that make up the social entrepreneurship ecosystem, if worked on, discussed and implemented jointly, the result will be surprising.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

This research aimed to analyze the configuration of the social entrepreneurship ecosystem in Paraíba. To do so, we went through the theoretical perspectives that conceptualized the six dimensions of the entrepreneurial ecosystem proposed by Isenberg (2011): Politics, Finance, Markets, Human Capital, Support, and Culture. To define the indicators, the model proposed by Audretsch *et al.* (2022) addresses the existing needs of traditional entrepreneurs and the needs of social innovators within each of the dimensions proposed by Isenberg (2011). This model was chosen due to its importance in the literature on entrepreneurial ecosystems. Thus, 27 indicators distributed in 6 dimensions were analyzed.

When analyzing the indicators of the social entrepreneurship ecosystem in the State of Paraíba, we verified the authors and their roles. We sought to understand the development perspectives of the social entrepreneurship ecosystem. However, the analyzed dimensions were present in the statements of all respondents, with different proportions.

The "Politics" dimension results showed the highest magnitude about all the analyzed dimensions. They indicated the need for public policies to raise awareness about social issues and introduce education about social innovation in various areas of society. The interviewed actors recognize the existence of implemented public policies. However, they also recognize their fragility due to the lack of synergy between the layers of the Triple Helix, the absence of programs aimed at social entrepreneurship as a whole, and the fact that they are strictly directed to the production chain rural areas, lacking policies for other areas of activity.

Regarding the financial aspect of the ecosystem, the bureaucracy to access some resource and the lack of access to credit are difficulties perceived by the actors that make up the ecosystem. Furthermore, bureaucracy is also among the barriers to commercialization, the output of goods manufactured by social entrepreneurs, and this was the main gap found in the "Market" dimension. With this, it is noticeable that a government budget for social innovation is needed to offer social innovators the possibility of more accessible funding.

In addition, Paraíba proved to be an ecosystem where there are people trained to develop social entrepreneurship. However, the lack of integration of these key authors is noticeable. As a result, the need to seek to develop a well-established entrepreneurial culture through the maturation of education on entrepreneurship and innovation to generate integration of the parts that make up the social entrepreneurship ecosystem was perceived. The EES of Paraíba can develop if the authors work, discuss and implement actions in an integrated way.

In addition, research institutions and universities, as holders of knowledge, have sought programs that work from the perspective of social entrepreneurship—for example, offering postgraduate courses with lines of research linked to entrepreneurship and social innovation. However, it was identified that specific knowledge needs to reach the bases so that, in this way, it reaches the tip to bring about changes in society. Institutions such as SEBRAE SENAI, among others, have shown themselves to be important in interconnecting and offering knowledge through various actions for social entrepreneurs, thereby addressing some of these needs in the ecosystem.

From work carried out, we understand that the EES of Paraíba brings together a set of talents, can be a transforming ecosystem, and should be understood as an environment providing innovation and evolution. However, for this cycle to happen in an ideal way, the action of the actors must seek solutions to remedy the needs encountered and stimulate the knowledge-holding layers and talent-holding producers. In this way, this research served to analyze and mention the necessary paths in the face of the difficulties encountered to achieve the functioning of a prosperous social entrepreneurship ecosystem and enrich and contribute to theories about social entrepreneurship ecosystems.

This research, like all studies, has limitations. Despite striving to select representatives from institutions other than the State of Paraíba, it is believed that the study would have been richer if more institutions and even government representatives had participated, which provides a comparative analysis. However, further interviews in this classification were not possible due to the unavailability of these actors. Another factor we could have been more successful with would be integrating this network of contacts into the ecosystem. Maybe if everyone cooperated, we could even access documents to improve the research.

Finally, it is recommended for future studies expand research to analyze other actors that are part of the ecosystem, such as representatives of ecclesiastical leadership and members of some churches that operate in this ecosystem. In addition, it stands out as a suggestion to increase the universe of research on social entrepreneurship, taking the negotiations to the academic public, to the rulers, to society, and investigating to what extent the formation and development of the EES in Paraíba are essential from the perspective of undergraduate and graduate students, governments and even the actors responsible for producing these social innovations, which are coming full of impact within society.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Paraíba State Research Foundation (FAPESQ) - Grant nº 3131/2021.

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CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF ECONOMICS AND MANAGEMENT.

ISSN 1678-2089

ISSNe 2178-9258

1. Economics, Administration and Accounting - Journal  
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