


## **PUBLIC AND SOCIAL INNOVATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD: THE CASE OF THE COURT OF AUDITORS OF THE STATE OF TOCANTINS AS A TRANSFORMATIVE MODEL**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Public innovation has been increasingly recognized as a critical area for addressing complex societal challenges such as climate change, public health crises, and economic inequality. Public policies aimed at promoting social innovations in regional contexts are highlighted as essential instruments to address local challenges and promote the well-being of communities. Public and social innovation plays a fundamental role in building effective and sustainable solutions. This article observes the experience of the Tocantins Commitment for Early Childhood, an initiative of the Court of Auditors of the State of Tocantins (TCE/TO) of external public and social innovation for the integral development of children between 0 and 6 years old. The research uses a qualitative approach, based on the documentary analysis of institutional materials of the TCE/TO, such as the booklet "Active Participation", technical reports and related regulations. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with public managers and technicians from the municipalities of Tocantins, seeking to understand the perceptions about the impact of the initiative on local governance processes. It was identified as an initiative articulated with several actors, promoting the efficiency of public administration and achieving significant social impacts for

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the municipalities of Tocantins. The challenges, solutions, and possibilities of the project serving as a replicable reference for other regions of the country are highlighted.

**Keywords:** Public Innovation. Social Innovation. Early Childhood. Court of Auditors. Public Policies.

## INTRODUCTION

In the context of Tocantins, the "Tocantins Commitment for Early Childhood" is an example of public innovation. The action brought together new strategic actions by various actors from the public authorities, civil society organizations and international organizations around specific goals around health, education, basic sanitation and social assistance for children. The coordinated action included activities such as "Early Childhood Day" and technical development workshops with mayors. The initiative aimed not only at the inclusion of budget credits, but at the implementation of long-term policies. The action through the city halls was carried out with the state government and other agencies, and materialized through credit bills and optimization of services. In this way, guardianship counselors must be trained and the action intends to occur in an intersectoral way, with the use of technology for monitoring and with the opening of daycare centers and schools. The social innovation fostered by the project goes beyond the geographical limits of the state of Tocantins and becomes an inspiration for other locations with similar challenges. The "Tocantins Commitment for Early Childhood" and the "Budget Shift for Early Childhood" are examples of actions that act to mobilize public managers to envision investments for early childhood and facilitate possible resources to be applied.

The "Mãos à Obra" project, which focuses on helping municipalities to resume dormant works in the construction of schools that serve the initial phase of education, serves as clear examples of how the Court of Auditors of the State of Tocantins – TCE/TO – acts directly in overcoming obstacles to collaborate with child development. The TCE/TO agency is powerful and thus manages to integrate the Three Powers at the municipal and state levels to work with a common purpose: to prove the resources and structure necessary for the development of the initial phase of life. Despite this, challenges persist and are exceptional from innovation to solutions such as political parties. School dropout and the lack of infrastructure in schools are examples of situations that occur from a stronger performance; it is also about the State's attention to the mental health of guardianship counselors.

In this sense, public and social innovation plays a fundamental role in building effective and sustainable solutions. The question, however, persists: how can initiatives of this type be structured and have their impact maximized for systemic and sustainable change in the long term? In this sense, the present research seeks to analyze how the "Tocantins Commitment for Early Childhood" is configured as public innovation and

promotion of social innovation. In short, the objective is to analyze how the state of Tocantins becomes an example for other locations in the country about public policies aimed at early childhood.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **PUBLIC INNOVATION**

Public innovation refers to the development and implementation of new ideas, processes or services in the public sector, improving efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness to the needs of citizens. It has been increasingly recognized as a critical area for addressing complex societal challenges such as climate change, public health crises, and economic inequality. Public innovation encompasses a wide range of activities, from introducing new technologies to reshaping service delivery models. The literature suggests that an innovation in the public sector can increase job satisfaction, improve the quality of public services, and increase citizen participation (Pradana et al., 2022). Public innovation can be defined as the process by which public sector organizations develop and implement new ideas, practices, or policies that improve their ability to serve the public.

This innovation can take many forms, including: Product Innovation (Pradana et al., 2022), Process Innovation (Tate et al., 2018), Organizational Innovation (Bloch; Bugge, 2013), Social Innovation (Massey; Johnston, 2016). Public innovation is essential for several reasons, including: improvement in Service Delivery (Pradana et al., 2022); enables governments to tackle multifaceted issues that disable creative solutions (Zhao, 2019); increased Transparency and Accountability (Jalonen; Helo, 2020); as well as innovative approaches that can facilitate greater citizen participation in governance, resulting in more responsive policies (Pradana et al., 2022).

It occurs through various mechanisms, including: Collaboration and Partnerships, Collaborative governance models such as public-private partnerships (PPPs) (Roberts; Schmid, 2022); Technology Adoption (Zhao, 2019); Policy Experimentation (Tate et al., 2018). Training (Santoso, 2023). Despite its potential, public innovation faces challenges, such as: Bureaucratic Resistance (Jalonen; Helo, 2020); Budget Constraints (Sutriadi et al., 2022); Risk Aversion (Jalonen; Helo, 2020); Measurement Difficulties (Tate et al., 2018). Public innovation is a vital component of modern governance, enabling governments to respond effectively to the evolving needs of society. By adopting innovative practices, public sector organizations can improve service delivery, increase citizen

engagement, and address complex challenges. However, overcoming barriers to innovation requires a concerted effort to foster a culture of experimentation, collaboration, and continuous improvement.

Organizational innovation in the public sector is an essential tool to increase administrative efficiency and achieve public policy objectives. This form of innovation is shaped by internal factors, such as organizational culture and leadership, and external factors, such as social demands and political dynamics, requiring clear strategies, collective contributions, and strong leadership to promote competitive advantage, especially in turbulent contexts (Guernoub, 2024). In this sense, public innovation is not just a technical process, but a creative and adaptive response to the complex challenges facing the public sector.

Fred and Mukhtar-Landgren (2024) highlight that public innovation involves the introduction of new actors, services, and solutions, as well as the integration of innovative forms of knowledge within the public sector. These authors emphasize the cognitive and narrative struggles among stakeholders, particularly in the early stages of implementation, marked by predictability and governance challenges. This perspective underscores the importance of aligning institutional efforts with social expectations. In addition, the role of government as an active agent of innovation is essential. According to Demircioğlu and Audretsch (2024), to solve social problems effectively, governments need to reevaluate strategies, reorganize processes, and transform their approach to human resource management and organizational culture. This vision positions the public sector as a protagonist in promoting structural changes that generate significant social impacts.

However, the effectiveness of public innovation depends on interrelated factors that create an environment conducive to experimentation and creativity. Open organizational culture, managerial support, access to technologies and the adoption of open innovation practices are fundamental elements in this process (Edward; Frinaldi, 2024). These factors not only encourage innovative behavior, but also provide the necessary foundation for overcoming institutional and organizational barriers. Such barriers, such as strict regulations, limited resources, and the absence of strategic leadership, are common challenges in implementing innovative practices in the public sector (Saragih, 2024). In countries with centralized administrative traditions, such as Brazil, these difficulties are even more pronounced, especially in regional contexts, such as the municipalities of Tocantins (Liarte et al., 2024). According to Moussa (2020), the lack of adequate funding

and budget constraints prevent the execution of innovative projects, while resistance to change reinforces outdated practices. Despite this, tailored strategies, such as organizational reforms and open innovation practices, can contribute to overcoming these limitations and enabling the advancement of public innovation (Khanal, 2022).

Public innovation, therefore, needs to balance creativity and regulatory compliance. While institutional rigidity can pose an obstacle, it also offers stability and accountability, suggesting the need for a strategic approach that harmonizes innovation with sustainable governance (Kiwi, 2024). This balance is crucial for initiatives, such as the "Tocantins Commitment for Early Childhood", to be successful in addressing local challenges and generating lasting social impacts.

## SOCIAL INNOVATION

Social innovation (SI) has emerged as a critical paradigm for addressing complex societal challenges, encompassing a range of activities aimed at creating new solutions to societal problems. The concept of social innovation is multifaceted, often defined as the processes and outcomes that develop new approaches to social issues, particularly those that are not adequately addressed by traditional methods or market solutions (Dees, 2015; Hizarci-Payne, 2020). This innovative approach is not limited to the creation of new products or services, but extends to the transformation of relationships and social structures, thus promoting community engagement and empowerment (Martins et al., 2023; Hizarci-Payne, 2020). A significant aspect of social innovation is its collaborative nature, which involves multiple stakeholders, including public authorities, civil society organizations, and market partners. This interaction between different actors is crucial for the co-creation of institutions and the successful implementation of innovative solutions (Purtik; Arenas, 2017; Edwards-Schachter et al., 2012). The concept of "distributed agency" highlights how social innovation emerges from the collective efforts of these actors, emphasizing the importance of social capital in facilitating innovation processes (Shu-wang et al., 2022; Doh; Ács, 2010). Multi-stakeholder engagement not only increases the legitimacy of social innovations, but also increases their potential for scalability and sustainability (Mildenberger et al., 2020). In addition, social innovation is increasingly recognized for its potential to contribute to the sustainable development goals (SDGs) by addressing pressing issues such as climate change, inequality, and public health (Repo; Matschoss, 2019; Sanzo-Pérez et al., 2015). The integration of social innovation across

various sectors, including nonprofits and corporate social responsibility initiatives, reflects its versatility and relevance in contemporary society (Edwards-Schachter et al., 2012; Imamoğlu, 2019). For example, social entrepreneurship, which focuses on creating social value rather than profit, exemplifies how innovative practices can lead to significant social change (Imamoğlu, 2019; Weerawardena; Mort, 2012). This shift toward prioritizing social impact over financial gain underscores the evolving landscape of innovation, where the traditional boundaries between economic and social goals are increasingly blurred (Lubberink et al., 2017). Social innovation represents a transformative approach to addressing societal challenges through collaborative efforts and innovative practices. By fostering partnerships among diverse stakeholders and emphasizing social value creation, social innovation not only addresses immediate social needs but also contributes to long-term sustainable development. As the field continues to evolve, ongoing research and practice will be essential to refine the frameworks and methodologies that underpin social innovation, ensuring its effectiveness in creating meaningful change.

Social innovation is another key pillar for addressing complex social challenges, offering solutions that integrate economic sustainability, social inclusion, and environmental responsibility. According to Zapata-Aguilar (2024), social innovation is not limited to the creation of new solutions, but also prioritizes the strengthening of social cohesion and environmental management, promoting profound transformations in the communities where it is implemented. A striking feature of social innovation is its focus on community. Oliveira (2024) argues that it must meet local needs, involving community members themselves in the development of solutions. This requires collaboration between public, private, and civil society organizations, ensuring that the results are financially sustainable and generate long-term impacts (Zapata-Aguilar, 2024; Oliveira, 2024). In addition, environmental considerations play a crucial role, as emphasized by Zakharchyn (2021), in promoting ecosystem restoration and ecological balance as an integral part of social initiatives.

Reddy et al. (2023) complement by highlighting that social innovation not only responds to immediate needs but also empowers marginalized groups by providing them with the tools to overcome challenges independently. Among the skills developed are critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration, which are essential for problem solving. These characteristics make social innovation a powerful approach to transforming communities into active agents of change.



While promising, social innovation also faces significant challenges. Bissel and Becker (2024) discuss the importance of initiatives such as the "*Commons Cargo Bikes*" in complementing traditional services, highlighting that scalability and sustainability remain critical difficulties. Similarly, Yoon and Ho (2024) explore the need for formal collaborative frameworks to amplify the impact of social solutions. In the context of India, Verma (2024) describes how social entrepreneurship, driven by government initiatives such as *Startup India*, contributes to solving issues in priority sectors such as health and education. This example underscores the importance of a systemic approach that unites governments, businesses, and citizens in a social innovation ecosystem.

Therefore, social innovation not only complements public innovation, but also offers an essential basis for promoting sustainable development in diverse contexts. For initiatives such as the "Tocantins Commitment for Early Childhood" to be replicable and effective, it is essential to consider the challenges of sustainability and scalability, ensuring the continuity and impact of the actions carried out.

## PUBLIC POLICIES IN THE PROMOTION OF SOCIAL INNOVATIONS IN REGIONAL CONTEXTS

Public policies aimed at promoting social innovations in regional contexts are highlighted as essential instruments to address local challenges and promote the well-being of communities. To be effective, these policies need to be anchored in a deep understanding of the region-specific socio-economic and cultural landscapes. This allows solutions to be tailored to local needs and strengthen efforts to foster social innovation.

A differentiated approach is crucial when dealing with rural and urban areas, considering that each context faces specific challenges. Polman (2019) emphasizes that rural areas require strategies that take into account their limitations, such as scarcity of resources and poor infrastructure. On the other hand, urban areas require solutions that address social complexity and growing demands for efficient public services. The use of local cultural assets emerges as a powerful undertaking for the success of social innovations, promoting community engagement and a sense of belonging.

However, policymakers face challenges when seeking to balance broad interventions with targeted initiatives. Jacobi et al. (2019) highlight that the balance between the inclusion of marginalized groups and the overcoming of institutional barriers is crucial to achieve effective change. In addition, reforms that promote intersectoral



collaboration – between government, civil society and the private sector – are indispensable to make social innovation policies viable. These reforms allow for the construction of collaborative networks that are key to implementing sustainable solutions. Practical examples illustrate how local governments can incorporate social innovation into regional policies. Ates (2019) described how digital platforms and tools such as participatory budgeting expand citizen engagement, addressing local problems with agility and transparency. In addition, social entrepreneurship, when integrated into public policies, can generate significant social changes, without overloading public budgets. In this sense, impact investing presents itself as an effective strategy to align economic and social objectives (Nadezhina; Kosobokov, 2023). Even so, it is essential to consider that public policies for social innovation can, if poorly adjusted, deepen existing inequalities. Policies that do not consider the needs of marginalized communities risk excluding those who most need the benefits of social innovations. Therefore, the balance between innovation and inclusion must be a central priority for policymakers, ensuring that the benefits are broad and equitable.

In addition, harnessing local cultural resources can significantly strengthen community engagement in social innovation initiatives. According to Omelyanenko (2021), involving residents in decision-making processes turns them into active participants, and not mere recipients of initiatives. This approach strengthens community ties, promotes the preservation of cultural heritage, and encourages sustainable local development. Initiatives such as the "Queijeiras Project" in Portugal demonstrate that community involvement can result in positive economic and social impacts, based on local resources (Silva; Santos, 2022).

Another example is the co-creation model, which encourages collaboration between various stakeholders, such as local businesses, educational institutions, and community members, to address local challenges. This model not only leverages existing resources, but also stimulates the development of innovative and viable solutions (Mazaj et al., 2018). ECAS (Entrepreneurial Cultural Affinity Spaces) can be a strategic approach to leverage social innovation and promote sustainable social change. As highlighted by Savva et al. (2019), ECAS focuses on creating inclusive learning ecosystems, which leverage diverse community assets to foster innovation, entrepreneurship, and social transformation. This model presents an inclusive instructional paradigm that can be adapted to different regional contexts, especially in innovative initiatives for vulnerable communities.

Public policies play a crucial role in promoting social innovations in regional contexts, especially when considering the interaction between different social actors and the need to meet local demands. The literature points out that the implementation of external public policies for innovation not only facilitates economic development, but also promotes social inclusion and sustainability in various spheres of community life. For example, the study by Bastos et al (2023) on the Innovation Policy of the Federal Institute of Bahia (IFBA) reveals that innovation has been inserted into the institutional agenda, following the phases of the public policy cycle. However, the study also highlights the need for greater dynamism for these policies to materialize into effective actions, which suggests that practical implementation is as important as theoretical formulation. In addition, research by Ronconi et al. (2021) on urban agriculture in Florianópolis illustrates how social innovation can be fostered through collaboration networks between different actors, such as the Center for the Study and Promotion of Group Agriculture (Cepagro). This center has promoted discussions and actions that have resulted in legal provisions that favor urban agriculture, demonstrating that the articulation between public policies and local practices can generate significant results in terms of social innovation. The ability to mobilize local viewers and create an environment conducive to innovation is a central element that must be considered when analyzing the impact of public policies. The interaction between public policies and local dynamics is a recurring theme in the literature. Gonçalves (2024) argues that the structuring of municipal science, technology, and innovation policies is essential for the investigation of the innovation ecosystem in cities like Sorocaba. The participation of civil society is highlighted as a crucial factor in the creation of an innovative environment, showing that the inclusion of different voices and perspectives can enrich the process of policy formulation and implementation. This is corroborated by Sabourin et al. (2021), who discuss how public policies impact the local dynamics of family farming in Mato Grosso, emphasizing the importance of considering regional specificities when developing policies aimed at innovation. The literature also points to the need for an alignment between public policies and local social and economic realities. The work of Mazzetti et al. (2019) analyzes the relationship between innovation and the productive system in Brazil, highlighting that science, technology, and innovation (PCTI) policies must be adapted to local needs to be practical. The implementation of strategies that consider regional particularities can facilitate the creation of a more favorable environment for innovation, promoting not only economic growth, but also social

cohesion. On the other hand, an analysis by Arbix et al. (2017) on innovation policies in Brazil reveals that, despite the advances, there are still important challenges that need to be faced. The research indicates that the lack of focus on technological innovations and the instability in policies can compromise the effectiveness of initiatives. This suggests that for public policies to truly promote social innovations, there needs to be a sustained commitment to and critical evaluation of innovative strategies. The articulation between different levels of government and civil society is also fundamental for the success of public policies. The study by Dantas (2024) on health policies for the elderly population highlights that, despite the advances, the implementation of the guidelines still faces significant challenges. This reinforces the idea that collaboration between different sectors and the active participation of the community are essential to ensure that public policies meet the real needs of the population. In addition, Elias' (2017) research on science, technology, and innovation policies in health emphasizes the importance of partnerships for productive development, which can be seen as a model for other areas. Building collaborative networks between universities, businesses, and governments can facilitate the transfer of knowledge and innovation, promoting more sustainable and inclusive development. The analysis of public policies must also consider a long-term perspective. The work of Martins and Martins (2018) on the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) highlights the importance of structuring policies that promote the translation of knowledge and the articulation between different social actors. This integrated approach can be instrumental in addressing global and regional challenges, promoting social innovations that meet the needs of the population. Finally, the literature suggests that the effectiveness of public policies in promoting social innovations depends on several factors, including the ability to adapt to local realities, the inclusion of diverse actors in the formulation and implementation process, and the continuous commitment to evaluating and improving the strategies adopted. The interaction between public policies and local dynamics is therefore a fertile field for research and practice, with significant implications for social and economic development in regional contexts.

## **METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES**

To achieve the proposed objectives, this study adopted the case study methodology, having as its object the initiative "Tocantins Commitment for Early Childhood", promoted by the Court of Auditors of the State of Tocantins (TCE/TO). The research uses a qualitative

approach, based on the documentary analysis of institutional materials of the TCE/TO, such as the booklet "Active Participation", technical reports and related regulations. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with public managers and technicians from the municipalities of Tocantins, seeking to understand the perceptions about the impact of the initiative on local governance processes. The collected data were analyzed through the content analysis technique, according to Bardin (2011), with the objective of identifying the main contributions of the initiative as a model of public and social innovation. This approach allows us to capture deep qualitative aspects and draw a comprehensive picture of the impacts and challenges faced. In addition, the triangulation of methods between document analysis, interviews and field observation contributed to ensure greater rigor and validity of the conclusions presented.

## **CASE STUDY: THE INITIATIVE OF THE TCE/TO.**

### **DETAILED PRESENTATION OF THE INITIATIVE "TOCANTINS COMMITMENT FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD"**

The 'Tocantins Commitment for Early Childhood', led by the Court of Auditors of the State of Tocantins (TCE/TO), is a pioneering action aimed at the implementation of public policies aimed at the integral development of children from 0 to 6 years old in the State of Tocantins. Structured based on a multidisciplinary and intersectoral approach, the commitment brings together municipal, state and federal public managers, as well as civil society organizations, to address the critical challenges that impact early childhood.

#### **Objectives and Guidelines**

As described in the official document of the "Tocantins Commitment for Early Childhood", the main objective of the initiative is to guarantee children's access to the areas of health, education, basic sanitation, security and food, promoting conditions that favor their integral development. This commitment is aligned with normative frameworks such as the Legal Framework for Early Childhood, the Federal Constitution, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In addition, the initiative aims to:

- Reduce social inequality and promote social inclusion through specific actions for early childhood.

- Articulate the Three Powers (Executive, Legislative and Judiciary) and the governmental and community instances in favor of the allocation of resources for early childhood.
- Train public managers and public policy agents to implement efficient and sustainable projects.

#### Main Actions Developed by the TCE/TO

##### 1. "D-Day for Early Childhood"

- An event that marks the formal delivery of bills to the Legislative Branch, consolidating the commitment to the public budget aimed at actions related to early childhood.
- Mobilization of 139 municipalities in Tocantins to review and adjust the Multi-Year Plans (PPA), the Budget Guidelines Laws (LDO) and the Annual Budget Laws (LOA).

##### 2. "Early Childhood Budget Shift"

- Technical and personalized service to mayors and municipal management teams, focusing on guidance on how to prioritize early childhood in municipal budgets.
- Provision of technical support for the inclusion of programs and actions aimed at early childhood in planning instruments.

##### 3. "Hands to Work" Project

- Partnership between the TCE/TO and the National Fund for the Development of Education (FNDE) to resume paralyzed works in daycare centers and early childhood education schools.
- Conducting technical visits and training with municipal managers to ensure document regularization and compliance with the requirements for completion of the works.

##### 4. Training for Guardianship Councils and Councilwomen

- Training of guardianship councilors to strengthen political and technical protagonism in actions aimed at children.
- Addressing topics such as the Legal Framework for Early Childhood, intersectorality, social and budgetary indicators, and community articulation strategies.

##### 5. Monitoring and Auditing Systems

- Implementation of tools such as SICAP/LCO, SICAP/Accounting and the Municipal Management Effectiveness Index (IEGM) to monitor, in real time, the execution of public policies aimed at children.
- Periodic reports that evaluate the allocation of resources and the implementation of actions in 100% of the jurisdictional units.
- 6. Proposed Constitutional Amendment (PEC) for Early Childhood
  - Suggestion to update state legislation to better meet the needs of early childhood, consolidating rights and expanding the impact of public policies.
- 7. Strategic Partnerships
  - Partnerships with UNICEF, FNDE, and non-governmental organizations to enhance the results of the actions and expand the reach of the initiative.

#### Observed Impacts

According to the TCE/TO reports and interviews conducted with managers linked to the proposal, the implementation of the "Tocantins Commitment for Early Childhood" has already shown tangible results, such as Increase in the supply of daycare centers and preschools; Resumption of paralyzed works; Improvement in the inclusion of children in situations of social vulnerability in the educational system; Training and strengthening of child protection networks in all municipalities of Tocantins.

For public and social innovation to become effective policies, they need to be institutionalized within a well-structured legal and administrative framework. The Tocantins Commitment for Early Childhood is an example of how a public policy can be planned and implemented in a regionalized way, considering the different realities of the municipalities of Tocantins. This initiative is a relevant case of public and social innovation, characterized by the implementation of governance strategies, use of technologies and inter-institutional articulation aimed at promoting public policies aimed at early childhood in Tocantins. Its development reflects the adoption of integrated approaches for the formulation and execution of actions aimed at strengthening state capacities in this field. In addition to the impacts observed in the state context, the Tocantins experience has the potential to be replicated in other regions of Brazil, especially in those that seek structured and intersectoral solutions to challenges related to childhood.

## **DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

### **ARTICULATION BETWEEN THE CONCEPTS AND THE CASE OF THE TCE/TO**

The detailed analysis of the practices of the Court of Auditors of the State of Tocantins (TCE/TO), especially in the context of the "Tocantins Commitment for Early Childhood", reveals a clear articulation between the concepts of public and social innovation. This initiative represents a concrete application of the theoretical ideas presented in the framework, highlighting the strategic use of resources and the integration of multiple actors to overcome structural challenges in the context of early childhood.

### **Public Innovation: Dynamics and Impacts in the Case of the TCE/TO**

One of the greatest challenges of public innovation is bureaucratic resistance and risk aversion (Jalonen; Helo, 2020). The performance of the TCE/TO as an active agent of innovation, in addition to its traditional role of overseeing public spending, reflects a change in the paradigm of public administration. This institutional reconfiguration, however, requires a continuous process of sensitization and engagement of municipal managers, in order to ensure the sustainability of public policies and mitigate the risks of discontinuity associated with the alternation of mandates

If public innovation structures the path, social innovation ensures that it is traveled effectively and sustainably. Social innovation involves the creation of new models of collective action, often driven by collaborative networks that include civil society, the public sector, and private actors (Dees, 2015; Hizarci-Payne, 2020). In the Tocantins Commitment for Early Childhood, this principle is manifested in the active school search and in the mobilization of guardianship councils to guarantee the rights of children.

The Active Participation for Early Childhood Booklet presents concrete methodologies for guardianship counselors and local agents to identify and monitor children out of school, promoting an evidence-based educational reintegration process (Active Participation Booklet, 2024). Active search is a classic example of the concept of distributed agency within social innovation, where multiple actors share responsibility for solving a collective problem (Shu-wang et al., 2022; Doh; Ács, 2010).

As described by Guernoub (2024), organizational innovation in the public sector is essential to promote administrative efficiency and achieve public objectives in scenarios of increasing complexity. The TCE/TO exemplifies this perspective by using monitoring systems such as SICAP/LCO and the Municipal Management Effectiveness Index (IEGM).



These technological tools promote real-time monitoring of the execution of public policies aimed at early childhood, in line with what Edward and Frinaldi (2024) highlight as fundamental elements to create environments conducive to innovation: open culture, managerial support, and open innovation practices.

Additionally, Fred and Mukhtar-Landgren (2024) point out that public innovation involves the introduction of new services, actors, and forms of knowledge in the public sector. This is evident in the way TCE/TO mobilizes municipal and state managers, as well as international organizations, around shared goals for early childhood. The "D-Day for Early Childhood", for example, integrates collaborative innovation practices, creating a favorable environment for intersectoral dialogue and budget prioritization for children aged 0 to 6 years. This strategic alignment reflects the principles pointed out by Demircioğlu and Audretsch (2024), which emphasize the role of government as a catalyst for significant structural changes.

The literature highlights that the sustainability of social initiatives is one of the main challenges faced by innovations of this nature (Mildenberger et al., 2020). A common risk is that many innovative actions are successful in the short term, but lack institutional structures that ensure their continuity. In order to mitigate these challenges, the TCE/TO implements continuous training strategies and formulates normative guidelines to strengthen the performance of the guardianship councils. These actions aim to expand the reach of social innovation, ensuring that its practices are institutionalized and are not restricted to specific initiatives.

In addition, cross-sector collaboration plays a crucial role in social innovation, as it allows resources, knowledge, and experiences to be shared for the creation of more robust solutions (Purtik; Arenas, 2017). In Tocantins, this approach is manifested in the integration between different sectors – education, health and social assistance – within the child protection network, which reinforces the view that social innovation cannot be thought of in a fragmented way.

Jacobi et al. (2019) argue that the effectiveness of regional policies is directly linked to the ability to adapt strategies to local needs. The TCE/TO applies this principle by providing standardized budget management models, allowing cities with different technical capacities to be able to carry out structured actions for early childhood. This approach strengthens equity within the state, ensuring that smaller municipalities have access to resources and technical support.

The use of technology for monitoring and auditing also demonstrates what Tate et al. (2018) describe as policy experimentation through digital innovation. Tools such as SICAP/LCO enable transparency and accountability in public management, promoting concrete results, such as the review of Multi-Year Plans (PPAs) and the inclusion of specific actions for early childhood in municipal budgets.

### **Social Innovation: Focus on Community and Sustainability**

The Tocantins Commitment for Early Childhood also shows a consistent application of the principles of social innovation. As Purtik and Arenas (2017) argue, social innovation emerges from collaborative interactions between multiple actors, and is essential to address complex social problems. The training carried out by the TCE/TO, such as those aimed at guardianship counselors and municipal managers, illustrates the commitment to building local capacities. This process is aligned with the concept of distributed agency, pointed out by Shu-wang et al. (2022), which highlights the role of social capital as a facilitator of innovation.

In addition, initiatives such as the Mãos à Obra project demonstrate the use of collaborative strategies to overcome structural challenges, such as the resumption of paralyzed works in daycare centers and schools. This practice reflects the approach advocated by Zapata-Aguilar (2024), which emphasizes the integration of economic sustainability, social cohesion, and environmental stewardship in promoting lasting social innovations. The project also reinforces Oliveira's (2024) argument about the importance of meeting local needs and involving the community in the development of solutions.

### **Alignment with Public Policies and Learnings**

The TCE/TO initiatives are in line with the principles defended by Polman (2019) and Jacobi et al. (2019) on the need for public policies adapted to regional specificities. The articulation between the TCE/TO and the 139 municipalities of Tocantins to adjust the Multi-Year Plans (PPAs), Budget Guidelines Laws (LDOs) and Annual Budget Laws (LOAs) shows a deep understanding of local particularities. This alignment allows actions to be more effective and targeted, as pointed out by Sabourin et al. (2021) in the context of local dynamics of family farming.

In addition, the experience of Tocantins reinforces the role of strategic partnerships, such as those established with UNICEF and the National Fund for the Development of

Education (FNDE), in expanding the impact of the initiatives. This practice is in line with the idea of Ronconi et al. (2021), who highlight the relevance of collaboration networks between different actors for the promotion of social innovations in challenging contexts.

### **Challenges and Sustainability of the Initiatives**

Despite significant advances, TCE/OT actions face challenges similar to those described by Saragih (2024) and Liarte et al. (2024), including financial limitations and institutional resistance. Overcoming these barriers requires long-term strategies that combine organizational innovation, such as structural reforms, and open innovation practices, as argued by Khanal (2022). The Early Childhood Budget Shift is an example of how the TCE/TO seeks to circumvent these limitations, offering technical support to municipal managers for the efficient allocation of resources.

In addition, the sustainability of initiatives depends on their ability to scale and replicate results in other contexts, as highlighted by Bissel and Becker (2024). In the case of the TCE/TO, the actions have already generated tangible impacts, such as the increase in the supply of daycare centers and preschools and the resumption of paralyzed works. However, the continuity of these results requires the institutionalization of innovative practices and the maintenance of strategic partnerships.

### **A REPLICABLE MODEL - CHALLENGES FACED AND THE LESSONS LEARNED THAT CAN BE APPLIED TO OTHER INITIATIVES**

An analysis of the Tocantins Commitment for Early Childhood confirms its potential as a replicable model that public and social innovation there. The TCE/TO's experience offers valuable lessons on how cooperation between levels of government, international organizations, and civil society can lead to social impacts, promoting sustainable development and children's well-being. As Martins and Martins (2018) argue, the combination of innovative strategies with an integrated and collaborative approach is key to addressing global and regional challenges, transforming innovation into a powerful tool for social change.

However, although it was successful, several challenges were presented, which can be learned for future public policies:

One of the most present are the challenges of financial sustainability. The restriction of the budget of the municipalities of Tocantins highlights the importance of creative

strategies for the acquisition of resources. Possible lessons also include the need to combine long-term financial allocation with specific public policies, such as the Fund for Childhood and Adolescence (FIA).

In addition, institutional barriers and resistance to change may arise. Too many standards can be an additional challenge, but the TCE/OT's approach through the capacity building of managers and regional workshops has shown that the technical and policy approach can be effective.

The difference between the technical and infrastructural capacities of the municipalities demanded personalized actions, such as the Mãos à Obra project, which helped in the resumption of paralyzed works.

The ECA's experience has shown that for initiatives like this to be replicated in other regions, decentralized and customized solutions must exist to meet the needs of heterogeneous areas.

The TCE/TO was an articulator, but the solid partnerships with the different actors involved made the initiative possible and successful. The analysis of the challenges faced and the lessons learned in Tocantins reveals the need for a balance between innovation, governance and adaptation to local realities, strengthening the potential for replicability.

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

These considerations begin by returning to the general objective of this article, which was to analyze how the "Tocantins Commitment for Early Childhood" is configured as a public innovation, promoting social impacts in the municipalities of Tocantins and generating examples of social innovation for other regions. It is considered that the objective set was fully met. The Tocantins Commitment for Early Childhood, under the leadership of the Court of Auditors of the State of Tocantins (TCE/TO), illustrates an effective connection between the concepts of public innovation and social innovation. Ultimately, this initiative not only addresses diverse local demands, but also strengthens the way social and institutional capacities are used to promote early childhood. The TCE/TO was able to mobilize several actors involved, including society, who worked collaboratively around a set of strategic ideas on health, education and continuous well-being for children in Tocantins, through activities such as "D-Day for Early Childhood", "Budget Duty for Early Childhood" and the "Mãos à Obra" project. The analysis presented in this article confirms the relevance of public innovation as a key aspect to deal with the

structural and contextual challenges that the public sector faces. The results of approaches based on monitoring technologies, training of municipal managers and intersectoral arrangements provide advantages in the provision of services and results beyond short-range policies.

During the implementation of the Tocantins Commitment for Early Childhood initiative, numerous challenges were also reported, which similarly appear in the literature, such as financial constraints, institutional resistance and the need for scalability. Overcoming these barriers requires continuous efforts to institutionalize innovative practices, strengthen strategic partnerships, and foster an organizational culture that is open to experimentation and continuous improvement.

Seeking the replicability of the Tocantins model in other regions is an aspect that is discussed throughout the article. The reported aspects showed, in the case of the TCE/TO, the junction between public and social innovation, which can be adapted to different contexts, as long as local specificities are respected and a collaborative approach is promoted among the various actors involved. Thus, the "Tocantins Commitment for Early Childhood" not only meets the demands of Tocantins, but also offers an important reference for future initiatives aimed at sustainable development and social equity.

Finally, this study emphasizes the importance of progress in the investigation and implementation of public and social innovations, developing a deeper understanding of the factors that favor their success and the obstacles that can restrict their impact. The experience of the TCE/TO illustrates that, by synchronizing innovative strategies with the needs of society, it is feasible to promote relevant structural and social changes, expanding the possibilities for future generations. Thus, the commitment to early childhood should be a priority not only for Tocantins, but also for all contexts that seek human development and social inclusion.

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