

# SOCIAL INNOVATION ECOSYSTEMS AND CITIES: CO-CONSTRUCTION OF A COLLABORATIVE PLATFORM

This article summarizes the analytical and methodological approach used in the co-construction of a digital and collaborative platform named Social Innovation Observatory of Florianópolis in South of Brazil, to understand the emergence and configuration of the Social Innovation Ecosystem (SIE) and its impact on the public arenas of the city.

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## INTRODUCTION

This research is based on the assumption that Social Innovation Ecosystems (SIEs) are hubs of collective intelligence and creativity, contributing to solving urban problems, creating new paths of development and reinforcing democracy in cities [1, 2].

In this sense, it is important to understand the dynamics that favor or inhibit mobilization, knowledge co-construction and collective actions around the city's public problems. In order to observe and analyze the practices of the actors that configure the SIEs (as support agents or promoters of social innovation) and their relationships, the Social Innovation Observatory of Florianópolis (OBISF) ([www.observafloripa.com.br](http://www.observafloripa.com.br)) was co-constructed. This article presents the analytical and methodological framework adopted to map and analyze the SIE of the city and to develop the OBISF, based on a pragmatic perspective of social innovation [3].

## METHODOLOGY AND MOMENTS OF ITS APPLICATION IN THE CO-CONSTRUCTION OF A DIGITAL AND COLLABORATIVE PLATFORM

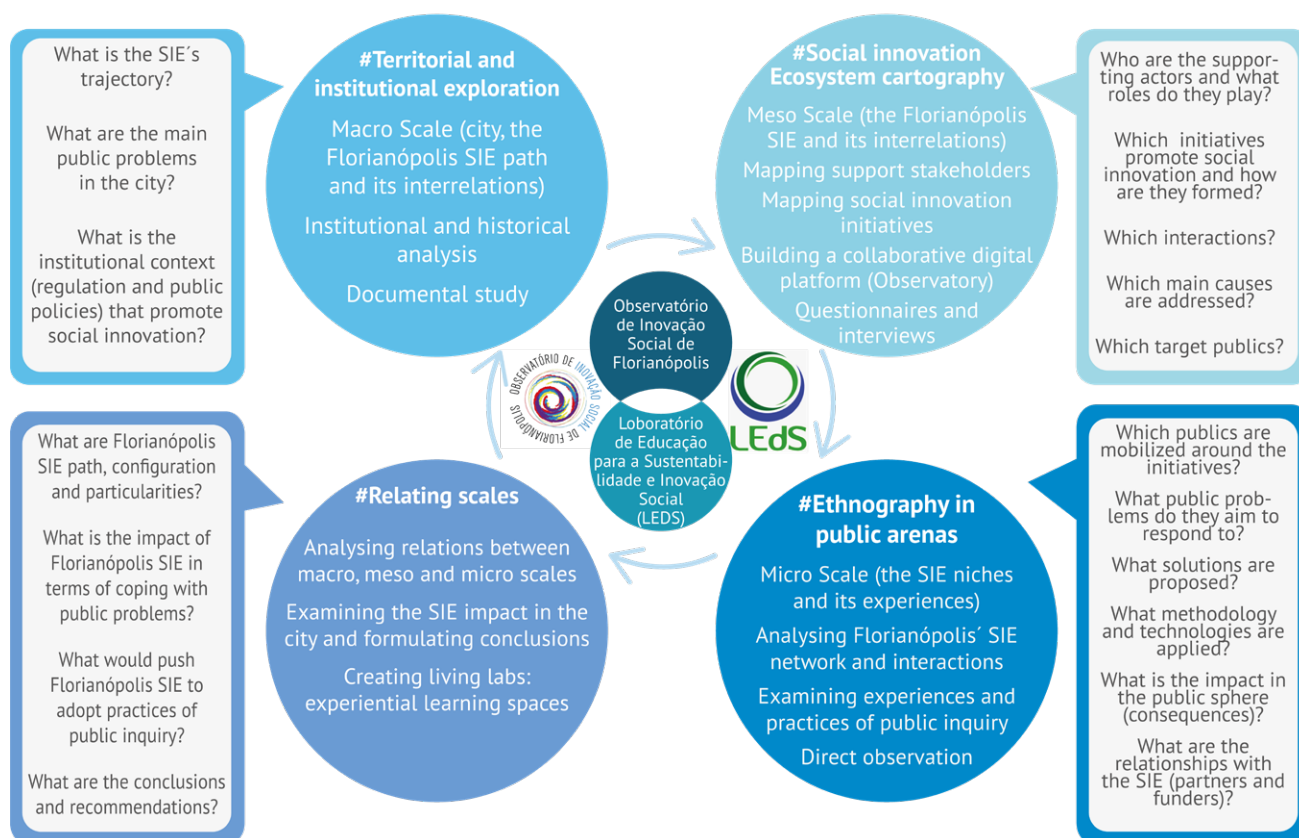
The OBISF was co-constructed from a research project, linked to teaching and transfer, whose objective was to implement a free access digital platform that allowed to gather information, monitor, and analyze the SIE of the city of Florianópolis.

The premises supporting the construction of the framework were:

1. A multiscale and multidisciplinary perspective understanding the SIE as a network involving multiple sectors (government, business, academia and civil society), different levels of practice (macro, meso and micro) embedded in public arenas [4].
2. A longitudinal and socio-spatial analysis through the georeferencing and long-term monitoring of different initiatives in the city of Florianópolis; a city recognized nationally and internationally as a source of social innovation.
3. A collaborative and experiential learning approach creating spaces in each of the four main moments so that the actors themselves explain their practices against the background of social innovation and construct their own theories about them, stimulating processes of 'public inquiry'.

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The research project is structured by four main moments: (1) *Territorial and institutional exploration*, (2) *Social Innovation Ecosystem cartography*, (3) *Ethnography in public arenas* and (4) *Relating macro, meso and micro scales*. The four moments are not developed linearly.



Analytical and methodological framework of the Social Innovation Observatory of Florianópolis

### 1. Territorial and institutional exploration

This first analysis started with a document and content analysis examining the institutional context (laws, regulations, policies and public programs) that supports social innovation in the city. In addition to legal provisions, we looked at the territorial dimension and history of the SIE, including the emergence and development of the SIE, as well as its territorial dynamics, with an emphasis on identifying the main public problems of the city. In order to comply with this step, we interviewed the main actors involved in the city's SIE and analyzed the main reports that deal with the current challenges in Florianópolis. With the preliminary information of the institutional context and the understanding of the formation and development of the SIE, we provide a panorama of what we call a macro scale considered for analysis along with the meso and micro scales.

### 2. Social Innovation Ecosystem cartography

This stage began with interviewing the main actors supporting social innovation in the city. Following the snowball technique, we expanded the sample of support actors in Florianópolis who we asked to complete a questionnaire to collect information about them and the social innovation initiatives they reinforced. With this first information, the conception and implementation of the platform started. The OBISF team collected free access information about the social innovation initiatives, (from government, business, civil society and universities) and

support actors, including legal format, causes they work with, key audiences and contact information for georeferencing. Afterwards, the social innovation initiatives mapped were observed (by on-site visits) to understand their mobilization around the public problems, the solutions they propose, how they measure their results, who is engaged with the actions, which methodologies and technologies they use, if they influence the public sphere and who their partners, supporters and funders are.

In this process, by the network analysis, more than 10 'network actors' were identified as articulators in the fields of social entrepreneurship, government, academia (Universities) and civil society. These actors were invited to become partners of the OBISF and helped to identify new social innovation initiatives supported by them in the ecosystem, increasing the sample of mapping initiatives. The involvement of the main actors of the ecosystem as partner of OBISF was important to validate the data, legitimate the project and co-create the platform. From then on, the network grew and, with the launch of the OBISF in September of 2017, the questionnaires could be completed online. In this way, a georeferenced map of the support actors and the interrelationships between them and social innovation initiatives was built. All this information about social innovation initiatives and support actors became part of the map, as well as its interrelations. It shapes a mesoscale of analysis that composes the online platform of the Observatory.

Currently (July 2019), the platform has 228 support actors and 306 social innovation initiatives registered, resulting in 534 agents that compose Florianópolis' SIE. Of the 306 social innovation initiatives registered, 201 were mapped and 105 were observed.

The number of initiatives observed could be expanded thanks to the involvement of undergraduate students that carry out on-site visits and follow-up the initiatives mapped. This has made it possible to broaden the involvement of the academic community within research and also with the city's EIS.

### 3. Ethnography in public arenas

In order to follow the 'fields of experience' of Florianópolis' social innovation initiatives, we are undertaking fieldwork with an ethnographic approach to study some specific public arenas. These public arenas are chosen because of the importance of their dynamics in the ecosystem either by the number of social innovation initiatives or by their strategic significance in terms of dynamics reinforcing democracy and sustainability. From the previous cartography and based on the observation of the social innovation initiatives some relevant 'democratic experiments' [5] in the public arenas have been identified. These experiences are followed by systematic observation conducted by postgraduation students in some public arenas: (1) the network that acts in the guarantee of children and adolescents rights; (2) the urban solid waste treatment network; (3) the municipal public policy forum; and (4) the articulation around urban agriculture.

From the monitoring of the initiatives and their practices, as well as the participation of researchers in public meetings and discussions, it becomes possible to better understand the advances, challenges and consequences of the action of these network actors involved with the public problems in the city. This also allows us to understand the controversies, the different interests and the conflicts around the subject. In this way, we could observe the 'fields of experience' of the public arenas analysed and not just isolated initiatives. So, along with the platform, a kind of 'living lab' was co-constructed to follow and facilitate public inquiry processes in the public arenas studied. The Laboratory for Education in Sustainability and Social Innovation (LEDS) aims to be a collaborative space for the co-construction of knowledge,

promoting the interaction between the knowledge produced in the University and in the communities of practices.

### 4. Relating macro, meso and micro scales

The purpose of the research project is to promote a multi-scale and longitudinal reading of the SIE of Florianópolis, relating its historical, territorial and institutional dimensions (macro scale), with an analysis of its network, forms of cooperation and interaction (mesoscale), as well as the actors' practices (microscale) and its consequences in the public sphere. The research allows to observe in loco how SIE is formed in the interface between the already established institutions and the creative potential of the different actors. In this sense, the goal is to promote collaborative learning through experience in public arenas. This means to reinforce spaces and opportunities to problematization, publicization, exploration and collective experimentation in coping with public problems.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article summarized the analytical and methodological framework that is guiding the implementation of a digital and collaborative platform that maps the SIE of Florianópolis city, in Brazil. As preliminary results from this research, it was possible to give more visibility for actors and initiatives of social innovation, to promote their interaction and stimulate the co-construction of learning about the SIE and its public arenas. It also promotes spaces for collective reflection about the features of the SIE and its impact in response to the city public problems. This research, with a pragmatist inspiration, does not start from a predetermined notion or concept of social innovation, since we aim to understand the practices enabling a process of theorization. Thus, the platform is available to any initiative promoting responses to public problems in the city. In this sense, our objective is to analyze and provide light to these initiatives, understanding how they emerge, relate to each other and produce consequences in public arenas, (potentially) changing the realities where they are inserted. More than a structural analysis of the SIE, we look forward to strengthen and disseminate the public inquiry practices in the city, contributing to reinforce dynamics of experimentation of democracy and promotion of change towards more sustainable styles of development.

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