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The role of graduate programs in public policy located in the Northeast Region in reversing social inequalities through social technologies

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Abstract: It seems established in the Brazilian scientific scenario that society has historically demanded State intervention in order to meet the most basic needs, especially those that are essential for people in social vulnerability. In these terms, this study aims to analyze some of the actions that have been coordinated by researchers and scholars from Federal Higher Education Institutions (IFES) in the last 05 (five) years (2020 to 2024), through Stricto Sensu Graduate Programs in Public Policies in the Northeast Region, involving two themes that overlap and have a direct connection with the mitigation of social asymmetries: the Social Issue and Social Technologies. The identification of social problems and the use of Social Technologies to address these issues are fundamental to reducing social inequalities and, from this perspective, academia, within the scope of the Stricto Sensu, has contributed to promoting, suggesting and forwarding public policy(ies) for inclusion, intervention and solutions to these issues. In conclusion, and based on the centrality of Social Technologies, it was possible to identify that IFES have contributed little to reversing unfavorable scenarios, when the object of intervention is fragile communities, whose inequity is exacerbated by the State's inaction regarding actions of a socioeconomic nature.

Keywords: social issue; social inequalities; universities; social technologies.

1 Introduction

The function that approaches this study is interconnected to a critical analysis oriented by the concept of social inequalities present in contemporary Brazil not only brand a historicity that evidences the fragilities of an insufficient democracy, because present to the “condition inequality”, words from Tocqueville (2019, p. 538), but also under the perspective of the Greek *polis*, in whose space, naturally oriented for debates, dissents and consensuses, democracy assumed a collective practice of equality as a way to mark political territory, to the extent that equality converged towards freedom, another point strongly defended by the Greeks (Singer; Araujo; Belinelli, 2021).

In a historical perspective, according to Guarinello (2021), in his analysis, the rescue of founding elements of Greek-Roman democracy – using aspects such as belonging, participation, individual freedom, citizenship, and rights – has diverse



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connotations of the ones understood and promoted in the contemporary Global South, fact that imposes an additional conceptual, sociological, and theoretical effort in order to understand the dynamics of the current Brazil, even considering the social demands of the time – 4th and 2nd centuries B.C – that had already expressed an inflection point and acceleration of conflicts (Guarinello, 2021).

This way, the imbrication between scenario of social asymmetries, in the Brazilian reality, and the context of democracy in its more subtle concept imposes a reflexive and critical analysis aiming at sewing the connections that structure the role of graduate programs in public policy located in the Northeast Region and its mission in knowing, revealing, understanding, and accessing reversing mechanisms to a social problem. There is a conviction that the permanent implementation of public policy (ies) – conducted by the Executive Branch or emanating from the Judicial Branch – clearly characterize and express a social gap that needs to be surpassed, constituting, since then, an efficient way to solve, to some extent, the social problems the country daily exposes. In these terms, the study underlies in Social Technologies as an efficient instrument to foster feasible approaches and objectives aiming at addressing social inflection points, whose goal is in reversing unfavorable scenarios.

The purpose of this study, based on field research conducted in graduate programs in public policy, is to analyze the interconnections between the need to implement Social Technologies to solve national problems and the proven immaturity and inconclusiveness of the Brazilian democracy. This further complicates the formation of a political structure capable of implementing measures to mitigate or reduce social inequalities in Brazil, especially when ordinary people are given the suggestive designation of politically and culturally apathetic (Chauí, 2007), a result of the distance between representatives and society (the represented) and even the lack of hope in the effectiveness of Public Policies designed to overcome existing social fissures.

In this context, recognizing that a public policy – hereinafter referred to as Public Policies – through programs, projects, subsidies, tax incentives, etc., proves itself effective in mitigating existing social inequalities, it is argued that academia, through *Stricto Sensu* Graduate Programs in Public Policies, has played a relevant role in the development of studies, research, and knowledge that have resulted in pragmatic application to vulnerable groups. Indeed, this study aims to analyze the

actions coordinated by researchers and scholars from Federal Institutions of Higher Education (IFES) over the last 5 (five) years, through *Stricto Sensu* Graduate Programs in Public Policies located in the Northeast Region of Brazil. The choice of the Northeast Region is justified by the fact that this study involves a Research Project supported by CNPq¹ (National Council for Scientific and Technological Development).

The question that permeates and objectively advances the orientation of this study is: What role have the *Stricto Sensu* Graduate Programs in Public Policies at Federal Public Universities in the Northeast of Brazil played in relation to the use of Social Technologies to propose solutions to regional social problems?

One of the main indicators that democracy is under threat is the observation of the erosion of social ties (Sandel, 2023) between groups that are articulated and organized, on the one hand, and those that are not properly articulated, the latter because of the dispersion of individual interests, many of which are based on the condition of impoverishment and disillusionment, whose first proof is the permanent struggle for survival, that is, a frenetic search for the conquest of the basics, in the present day. In the realm of Public Policies, it must be understood that these are promoted not only from an intentional agenda of the Executive Branch, but, above all, from the needs coming from social collectives, which demand favorable conditions for the fulfillment of their demands. Carlos, Dowbor, and Albuquerque (2021) strongly defend the importance of social movements in political dialogue, aiming at establishing a positive agenda, towards the constitution of effective and assertive Public Policies. However, as the authors point out, not only "social movements" are necessary to develop strategies and leadership in conducting actions with public management, but, beyond the simple definition of strategies, what must be considered is the organization that such social movements establish on their backs, in order to ensure that interventions with the Public Authorities activate the awareness and political perception that the acceptance of such demands can provide in the future.

Indeed, regarding social rights and the promotion of the Welfare State, in light of what Sirén (2021) found in his studies, which confirmed that social spending in

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democratic nations governed by left-wing parties has evolved (time frame from 1995 to 2015), it is pertinent to recall a timely idea put forth by Ernest Forsthoff (1968), brought up by Habermas (2014), whose thought is developed in the two dimensions of State: the pure liberal-capitalist State and the welfare state. Forsthoff's position is as follows:

Freedom ensured through demarcation refers to a State that sets limits for itself, leaving the social situation, as it is, to the individual [...]. Participation, as a right and a claim, refers to a productive State that allocates, distributes, and shares, which does not leave its social situation to the individual, but comes to its aid with concessions. This is the welfare state. (Forsthoff, 1968 *apud* Habermas, 2014, p. 470).

The fact is that, following the same line of reflection conceived by Forsthoff (1968), Atkinson (2015) highlights that inequality of opportunity implies inequality of outcomes; that is, if at the starting point there is no linearity of conditions among subjects, the teleological aspect is the prevalence and diffusion of inequality throughout the present and future cycle, considering here the generations resulting from lost competition. This scenario reinforces the gap between rich and poor and, on the same page, social exclusion emerges, which is supposedly mitigated by the intervention of the State.

At this stage of the discussion on the role of the State – including the delegation granted to Federal Institutions of Higher Education – it seems pertinent to revisit Mondaini's (2021) idea regarding the three types of State, taking as a beacon the aspects that involve the rights of social subjects: i) **Liberal State**: civil liberty and passive citizenship, without interference in the private lives of individuals; ii) **Democratic State**: political equality, active citizenship, participation of all in the political process; and iii) **Welfare State**: promoter of social equality among individuals, their right to citizenship, and balance in the distribution of national wealth. Indeed, according to Iamamoto (2010, p. 275), the State needs to intervene in order to allow "Universality in access to social programs and projects – which means they are open to all citizens [...]", in order to cover the "[...] progressive commodification of the fulfillment of social needs [...]". This interventionist function can be fulfilled by Federal Institutions of Higher Education (IFES) aiming at promoting, developing, and disseminating knowledge in order to reduce existing social disparities.

Modern, contemporary society, termed by Beck (2011) as the "risk society," incorporates and disseminates sociological compounds of discord and confrontation because of the historical need to demarcate territories of power and political assets shielded by a pragmatist and neoliberal vision that resorts to the unquestionable position of maintaining inequalities (Hayek, 2023) in order to reaffirm the *status quo* of Public Power. It becomes imperative, therefore, that institutions outside the living conditions that break the social barrier act with the purpose of mitigating the fissures that permeate inequalities in Brazil, and, certainly, the Federal Institutions of Higher Education (IFES) hold this prerogative and this social function.

Considering the necessary thought for the socioeconomic reflection that permeates this study, it is relevant to point out what Harvey (2014) stated in his work entitled "A brief History of Neoliberalism". For the author, in a context where capitalism advances in geographical spaces, exacerbating social inequalities, "[...] the neoliberal State is necessarily hostile to any form of social solidarity that imposes restrictions on the accumulation of capital" (Harvey, 2014, p. 85), thus dismantling the Welfare State and substantially reducing any possibility of social justice. From this outlook, individualization explodes in all its aspects, influenced by the need to seek the minimum for the survival of the social subject. Additionally, Harvey (2014) points out that:

It is precisely in this context of reduced personal resources stemming from the labor market that the neoliberal determination to return all responsibility for well-being to the individual has doubly detrimental effects. As it reduces resources dedicated to social welfare and diminishes its role in areas such as healthcare, public education, and social assistance, once so fundamental to embedded liberalism, the State leaves ever-growing segments of the population exposed to impoverishment. The social safety net is reduced to the bare minimum in favor of a system that emphasizes individual responsibility. Personal failures are generally attributed to individual failings, and the victim is very often blamed! (Harvey, 2014, p. 86).

Thus, concluding this introductory section, it is imperative to point out that there is, in fact, a disconnection between the possibilities engendered by the welfare state in order to solve the most pressing issues of a fragmented, socially dehydrated, and unequal society, and the very group of citizens and beneficiaries of public policies who tend to promote social cohesion and social justice. It is worth recalling the idea developed by Tonucci Filho (2020), who discusses the influence of neoliberal logic on the demarcation of public spaces. For the author:

It is neoliberal rationality that, by extending private appropriation and the logic of competition to all spheres of society, culture, and life, suppresses and makes invisible the common good: but it is also against this rationality that the common good emerges as a counter-rationality, conceived in the very struggles and movements fighting for a path beyond the State and the market. Addressing the recognition, strengthening, and constitution of the urban common good, there are two parallel lines of conflict involved: the urban (encounter, difference, fulfillment) versus the industrial (fragmentation, homogeneity, work, and productivism); and the common good (sharing, cooperation) versus the neoliberal (private appropriation, generalized competition) (Tonucci Filho, 2020, p. 394).

In this context, the concept of Tonucci Filho (2020), which discusses people's right to common space in cities, becomes appropriate for this conclusion, opening a new section that intertwines social inequalities and the Social Issue. Indeed, a reflection is proposed, from the next section onwards, on what are the implications between the recurrence of social inequalities in a historical context of social lags such as the Brazilian one, and the Social Issue.

This article is structured as follows, in addition to this introductory part: the second section provides the theoretical background related to social inequalities, the Social Issue, and Social Technologies; the methodological procedures in the third section; the fourth section indicates the data obtained in the research field and, based on them, the analysis and discussion of the survey are carried out; the fifth section presents the final considerations, concluding with the section dedicated to the references used in the study.

2 Conceptions of social inequalities, the social issue, and social technologies

This section aims at expanding upon analyses that focus on social inequalities, which are transformed into the Social Issue, a category encompassing diverse segments of society addressing the imbalances of power that constitute the relations between capital and labor, as well as between the poor and the rich; workers and the business elite; socialism and liberalism; State and society; pragmatism and subjectivism; State public policies and government public policies, among other forms of antagonism. In Brazil, one should not ignore the existence of a latent social delay, that is, a broad range of historical social regressions, many of which originate from the relations between capital and labor, the seed of the discussion, in essence, of the Social Issue.

Thus, it becomes relevant to assert that, under the Democratic Rule of Law, the concept of citizenship is a crucial element in the analysis and identification of social inequalities, in light of what Singer, Araujo, and Belinelli (2021) argue, for whom a negligent and absent State pledges equality and, as such, potentiates social asymmetries. In this context, social rights are suppressed or reduced. In the lucid position of Carvalho (2024, p. 18), “Social rights allow politically organized societies to reduce the excesses of inequality produced by capitalism and guarantee a minimum of well-being for all. The central idea on which they are grounded is that of social justice,” although, in the matter of social justice and social inequalities, Sowell (2024) takes an opposing position, as the following excerpt points out:

It is especially difficult to argue that one can automatically assume that the inequalities shown in the results were caused by discrimination by a dominant majority against a subordinate minority, when, in fact, many subordinate minorities have economically surpassed dominant majorities in various countries around the world and at various periods in history (Sowell, 2024, p. 3).

About this, understanding the obstacles that political decisions must overcome in order to promote actions aimed at addressing the problems faced by the most vulnerable social groups – such as food insecurity; lack of housing; absence of formal employment opportunities; restricted political culture; the natural limitations of school places, reinforcing educational asymmetries; hopelessness; famine; prejudice based on race, gender, and ethnicity; environmental abuses; the fragmentation and historical subjugation of indigenous peoples, etc. – contributes to the formation of a sociopolitical web capable of confusing and preventing numerous initiatives towards these solutions. Social justice, in the terms of Gamarnikov (2013, p. 190), from the perspective of John Rawls, represents the “[...] fair distribution of resources and opportunities,” and this scenario naturally tends to reduce social inequalities, reinforcing the civic character of those involved. Regarding the seminal idea of citizenship, Guarinello (2021) makes the following conceptual intervention:

The essence of citizenship, if we could define it, would reside precisely in this public, impersonal trait, in this neutral environment in which conflicting social situations, aspirations, desires, and interests confront each other within the limits of a community. Certainly, there have been communities without citizenship throughout history, but effective citizenship only exists within a concrete community, which can be defined in diverse ways, but which is always a privileged space for collective action and for building projects for the future (Guarinello, 2021, p. 46).

The Social Issue, therefore, proves to be relevant in the process of developing effective and assertive Public Policies, not constituting, indeed, an ephemeral process of responding to social demands, but a systematized articulation of actions that need to be permanent, considering the recurring needs that vulnerable social groups demand and which, under the sign of inconclusive and insufficient democracy, recognizes that social problems persist for decades without the necessary and incisive measure to end the problem. That is, the development of a country necessarily has a direct relationship with the reduction of social obstacles, and freedom, in the light of Amartya Sen's thought (2010), accurately translates this premise, under which Social Technologies can provide subsidies and approaches aimed at containing potential social inequalities. In the words of Arruda (2019, p. 38),

Today, we are witnessing a regression of achievements that seemed insurmountable. The social fracture caused by the most inequitable forms of inequality coexists with the strengthening of homogeneous social groups that hold privileges, undermining our energies and weakening our position on the international stage.

Given the preceding discussions and recognizing the need to understand the context² of the Social Issue in order to establish a solid interaction with Social Technologies, it is appropriate to list some concepts of the Social Issue for the purpose of understanding its scope and degree of semantic depth, having as a background the social fissures that permeate modern relations between society and the State. In the viewpoint of Lavalle (2016), who argues that citizens should be more active in seeking their rights,

[...] social groups with low participation, with no voice in the public sphere and underrepresented, simultaneously positioned at a disadvantage in various dimensions of social and economic status, tend to remain trapped in a vicious circle, while well-endowed and organized social groups receive the benefits of overrepresentation. Economic inequality causes political inequality, and the latter causes the regular functioning of representation to favor wealthy groups, perpetuating the former (Lavalle, 2016, p. 177).

² It is important to clarify that the analysis of the Social Issue, although not considered a concrete category, encompasses not only expressions related to the capitalist mode of production in its most critical dimension – structural unemployment, social inequalities, poor distribution of national wealth, labor market flexibility, low qualification of the working class – but, above all, a historical perspective whose foundation lies in racial asymmetries, the basis of Brazilian society. Gonçalves's (2018) analysis contributes to this understanding.

Considering this scenario of inequality and low social appeal, it is important to understand some concepts regarding the Social Issue, which appropriates and incorporates various conceptions, some of which are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 – Proposals to understand the Social Issue

Concept	Author
"[...]The aporia of modern societies highlights the ever-renewed disjunction between market logic and societal dynamics, between the ethical demands of rights and the imperatives of economic efficiency, between the legal order that promises equality and the reality of inequalities and exclusions woven into the dynamics of power and domination relations."	Telles, 1996, p. 85.
"The issue of exclusion then becomes the 'social issue' <i>par excellence</i> ".	Castel, 2000, p. 18.
"[...]Exclusion is neither arbitrary nor accidental. It stems from a set of proclaimed reasons. One might even dare to say that it is 'justified', if by that we understand it to rest on judgments and go through procedures whose legitimacy is attested and recognized."	Castel, 2000, p. 41.
"[...]The social issue means, first and foremost, knowing <i>who</i> establishes [social] cohesion and under <i>what conditions</i> it occurs in a given society."	Wanderley, 2000, p. 56.
"The social issue concerns the set of expressions of social inequalities engendered in mature capitalist society, unthinkable without the mediation of the State. It originates in the collective nature of production as opposed to the private appropriation of human activity itself – labor – of the conditions necessary for its realization, as well as of its fruits."	Paulo Netto, 2001, p. 16-17.
"The term 'social issue,' first coined around 1830, originated in Europe, stemming from the major social, political, and economic transformations brought about by the Industrial Revolution. It is fundamentally based on the recognition of a set of new problems linked to modern urban labor conditions."	Stein, 2009, p. 134.
"The contemporary 'social issue in capitalist societies maintain the characteristic of being a concrete expression of the contradictions and antagonisms present in the relations between classes, and between these and the State."	Pastorini, 2010, p. 22.
"By 'social issue', in the universal sense of the term, we mean the set of political, social, and economic problems that the emergence of the working class imposed in the course of the constitution of capitalist society. Thus, the 'social issue' is fundamentally linked to the conflict between capital and labor."	Cerqueira Filho (1982), <i>apud</i> Paulo Netto 2011, p. 17.
"[...]The immediate manifestations of the 'social issue' (strong inequality, unemployment, famine, disease, poverty, helplessness in the face of adverse economic circumstances, etc.) are seen as the unfolding, in modern (bourgeois) society, of ineliminable characteristics of any and all social order.[...]"	Paulo Netto, 2011, p. 155.
"[...]The term 'social issue' is not being used to designate inequality and poverty indiscriminately, but rather those issues whose existence is rooted in the capitalist mode of production."	Santos, 2012, p. 28.
"The deepening of social issues and the intense deterioration of living conditions are consequences of the current economic, political, and institutional climate, within a context of globalization, branded by the intensification of internal and external inequalities among nations."	Silveira, 2017, p. 490.
"[...]For social workers, who operate in the most varied expressions of the social issue, and who find in social public policies the necessary mediations for serving the population, social inequality, resulting from the concentration of income and property, presents itself as a structuring axis of the 'social issue,' especially when visualized in its concreteness, that is, in pauperism."	Meirelles, 2017, p. 110-111.
"It is necessary to assess that the contemporary scene is surrounded by problems of various kinds that shape the social issue. These expressions affect the population in every way, from difficulties in accessing social rights to their violation. The social issue appears to the individual in the form of poverty, social inequality, and social	Machado, 2019, p. 52.

exclusion, weakening their structures, breaking their family ties, and debilitating them in a way that leads them to social risk, whether through drug addiction, homelessness, or even involvement with crime.”.	
“The social issue has always been the target of a bourgeois offensive aimed at dissociating it from class struggles; from its structural origin – stemming from the functioning of bourgeois society –; from its recognition associated with the organizational and advocacy power of the working class; from the social debt of this society in addressing it; and from the State's responsibility in providing goods and services through public policies financed by the whole of society.”.	Cavalcante; Teixeira, 2022, p. 34.
“The social issue has already been an intrinsic element of capitalist society in Europe, evidenced by the social problems arising from the expropriation of the means of production and the final product from workers, and the confluence of social movements. In Brazil, slavery appropriated freedom, bodies, and products; social movements targeted freedom and an end to mistreatment. Indeed, in Europe, the social issue had reached its point of eruption, while in Brazil its structural and political elements had not even been conceived.”.	Araújo, 2022, p. 120.
“[...]Contemporary expressions of the social issue are shaped by the material and productive base of capitalist society, as well as its socio-political and cultural implications. Hegemonic neoliberal capitalist economic policies prioritize the market, privatization, deregulation of labor rights, and attack social rights, explicitly targeting public education and social security (health, pensions, and social assistance).”.	Faria, 2022, p. 27.
“The ‘social issue’ is perhaps the main pillar supporting Social Work. Its penetration into the vocabulary of this profession is forceful and historical. The role of the social worker, considering social inequality, allied with labor exploitation and the alienating conditions characteristic of capitalist society, is fundamental for glimpsing another possible future.”.	Brum, 2024, p. 52.
“[...] una expresión de las desigualdades sociales producidas y reproducidas en el capitalismo y que se manifiesta en las condiciones objetivas y subjetivas de vida de la población más pauperizada”.	Ghiraldelli, 2024, p. 81.

Source: Designed by the author, 2025.

Considering Table 1 as a conceptual reference for a mature understanding of the Social Issue, it is possible, at this stage, to arrive at a definition of what is considered, from the view point of the panorama of latent social inequalities: The Social Issue arises from the unfolding of social inequalities, potentiated by the historical trajectory that permeated racial inequalities, a reality whose core lies in the conformation of the capitalist model in the direct link between labor and capital, insofar as they demarcate a territory of deconstruction of social justice and regression of social rights, destructuring and weakening social, cultural, political, economic and environmental relations, whose scenario fosters social exclusion, compromises citizenship, and calls into question the democratic spectrum, given its disintegrating effectiveness and its indelible contradiction to social cohesion. The Social Issue, so to speak, reflects a scenario in which social injustice is evident, especially with regard to the most marginalized groups, such as Black people, Indigenous peoples, quilombola

communities, refugees and stateless persons, people experiencing homelessness, among others.

In Meirelles's (2015) viewpoint, the relativization of poverty is an obstacle to the intervention of the Welfare State, because, with partial access to consumer goods, people do not relinquish their social rights. It is as if a person's purchasing power were an impediment to the pursuit of the most legitimate social rights, exempting the State from meeting the needs of people who, in the end, seem to be able to assume responsibility for their own well-being, in a clear indication of an individual pursuit of success as social outcasts, who have no place, no identity, no guaranteed minimum rights, have limited political cognition, and are unaware of their ambitions. This is a neoliberal imperative in explicit antisocial cartography, shaping the intransigent character of the debate on the Social Issue. The capitalist liturgy is therefore decisive in ensuring that the Social Issue is discussed and better addressed from the perspective of the organizational and mobilizing power of the working class. The next section focuses on the discussion of the role of universities in shaping the scientific agenda and in forming paradigms that establish a new level focused on the deconstruction of the Social Issue.

Based on this reflection, it is imperative to affirm that universities are privileged spaces for the formation of contemporary paradigms and for the development of scientificism. In order to measure the investigative aspect in the academic environment, it is fundamental to evaluate, understand, and incorporate into the scientific *portfolio* the studies developed in order to solving regional problems through Social Technologies, which are conducted in Graduate Programs in Public Policies located in the Northeast Region, whose list is analytically presented in Table 2. Undoubtedly, it is recognized that academia has systematically contributed to the elaboration of strategies capable of conducting procedures and ideals with the purpose of proposing Public Policies favorable to the most vulnerable groups. Based on this analysis, Bourguignon, Marino, and Albach (2024, p. 6) assert that:

[...] The investigative and interventional dimensions are formative principles, and the practice of research is fundamental for the development of an investigative attitude and it can occur in different spaces within the university: in teaching; in university extension, at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Expanding the scope regarding the area of Graduate Programs, studies conducted within the scope of *Stricto Sensu* Programs in Social Work, for example, whose relationship with Public Policy Programs is closely related due to the interconnections between the areas of teaching and research (CAPES, 2024), have improved and advanced research and university extension, seeking indicators that point to alternatives for addressing the Social Issue. In the reading of Pinheiro, Senna and Lara (2024, pp. 22-23), for example:

The *stricto sensu* graduate program in Social Work has followed a trajectory of quantitative and qualitative advancements, contributing to the qualified training of teachers, researchers, and professionals, and to the production of knowledge on themes related to the social issue in its multiple expressions and determinations, to the Brazilian reality, to social policies, and to professional work, in addition to the development of university extension activities and technical-scientific cooperation alongside social movements, civil society organizations, and governmental institutions and national and international research.

In the context of the national academic system, conducted by Federal Institutions of Higher Education (IFES), the application of public resources becomes essential for the promotion of knowledge, the dissemination and expansion of research, as well as for the deepening of studies aimed at solving the Social Issue, taking Brazil as an example of nation that still presents serious social shortcomings, especially in the most vulnerable strata. Denying the role of science in the construction of a new society – contemporary, connected to the directions of a new socioeconomic landscape and a global and inclusive science – is to disregard the basic principles of its existence and its essence, as an instrument capable of reversing unfavorable scenarios. As Duarte and César (2020, p. 9) attest while discussing the denial of the relevance of science:

Denialism is a social phenomenon not only because it involves the mass production and dissemination of controversial theses in relation to validated scientific consensus, but also because denialist theses have a direct impact on the behavior of millions of people. Simultaneously, denialism is a political phenomenon because, more often than not, it is associated with the extraction of advantages by economic groups interested in denying or questioning scientific theses and knowledge. This occurs, above all, when such knowledge inspires public policies aimed at transforming collective behaviors and lifestyles, which affect powerful economic interests.

Discussing the importance of Social Technologies as a legitimate instrument for achieving local development, Bava (2004) makes the following conceptual analysis of what he considers Social Technologies:

More than just the ability to implement solutions to specific problems, these can be seen as methods and techniques that allow for the empowerment of collective citizen representations, enabling them to contest, in public spaces, development alternatives that originate from innovative experiences and are guided by the defense of the interests of the majority and the distribution of income (Bava, 2004, p. 116).

Almeida *et al.* (2011) point out the important role of academia in the pursuit of innovations for the Northern Region of Brazil. According to the authors, regional development – through the intensification of innovation – is largely due to research conducted in the academic environment, which is the reason why they report that the relationships between academia and companies are of considerable value in modifying unfavorable scenarios. Despite the idea of regional development is connected to the neoliberal perspective, Almeida *et al.* (2011) argue that solving social problems, especially in the Northern Region of Brazil, involves the intervention of academia in the production of knowledge capable of reversing unfavorable scenarios, especially for the poorest and most underserved population by State actions. For Casaril (2019, p. 287), when studying the dynamization of the local and regional economy emerging through the intervention of IES – Higher Education Institutions, “[...] IESs play an important role in regional development, contributing to mitigating economic and social disparities”.

Research conducted by Reis and Vêras (2024), both professors at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo, exposed the fragilities of spatial mobility in the city of São Paulo, producing even more social fractures for groups with less organizational power. According to the authors,

The analysis of these inequalities by class, gender, and race made this need clear, since the vulnerable population is the most affected by the difficulties of public transportation, such as access to systems and opportunities, safety in the surrounding area, protection from harassment, longer intervals, and other factors (Reis; Vêras, 2024, p. 553).

The studies that served as examples in this section represent only a small sample of the actions and research produced and conceived in the academic environment, whose focus is on solving local and regional issues. Indeed, universities

have adopted a leading role when the topic is solving the most urgent issues of a society still surrounded by detrimental conditions.

At this stage, there comes a contextualization that involves Social Technologies intervening in disadvantaged territories, such as *quilombola* communities, indigenous peoples, black populations, etc. Thus, this part of the research promotes a synthesis of some studies that have been undertaken by Federal Institutions of Higher Education (IFES) and points out some that, although not necessarily involving Social Technologies, still reinforce the role of public universities as a breeding ground for the production, deepening, and dissemination of knowledge. For example, the analysis contained in the study of Pinheiro, Senna, and Lara (2024, p. 23) establishes clear connections with the formulation of Public Policies. For the authors, "The academic-scientific maturity achieved by the area [Graduate Programs in Social Work] can be, in one hand, credited to the capacity to induce public policies for scientific and technological development in the country."

This finding reinforces the role of specialists and scholars in the field in engaging in research aimed at mitigating the most pressing issues faced by disadvantaged groups. The same authors further emphasize the role of the Social Work field in promoting guidance, studies, and research directed towards effective solutions in this area. In this respect, they state that:

In Social Work, the interventionist and investigative dimensions coexist in a reciprocal relationship, fact that places research as a permanent activity for intervention and vice versa. This way, graduate studies, as a space of excellence for research and knowledge production, gain relevance as a privileged *locus* for the improvement and qualification of Social Work professionals and related areas (Pinheiro; Senna; Lara, 2024, p. 25).

A study published by Moraes, Guimarães, and Lopes (2023, p. 86) developed "[...] a scientometric analysis of the scientific production of the period (2011 to 2021), related to Public Policies with the dissemination of technologies for living in the semi-arid region (of Brazil) aimed at family farming." According to the researchers, the study was able to explore research that used Social Technologies as an instrument to reverse unfavorable scenarios in the Brazilian Semi-arid region, notably with suggestions for technologies such as: Slab Cistern, Subterranean Dam; Trench Barrier; Paved Cistern; Runoff Cistern; Small Dam; Stone Tank, Popular Pump, among other alternatives to combat drought in the region. In the viewpoint of the same authors, "Among the main

characteristics of a social technology are simplicity, low cost, easy applicability, and the generation of social impact. In addition, they must be replicable in other contexts” (Morais; Guimarães; Lopes, 2023, p. 93). This statement is fundamental to the dissemination of Social Technologies.

One more analysis, this time by Bava (2004), focuses the discussion on viable and easily replicable solutions in contexts of social inequalities. The author mentions the microcredit, for example, as a social alternative, in order to allow low-income people to embrace the entrepreneurial spirit, developing pragmatic mechanisms for income generation and opportunities. For Bava (2004), the focus of Social Technologies should be local development as an element of socioeconomic strengthening of a given region. Additionally, Bava (2004) states that:

There are also initiatives that reinforce public policies and give them greater scope and quality. This is the case with the creation of the figure of community health agents and family health programs, with excellent results. It is not the family that goes to the public health agencies, but the municipal health teams that go to the families' homes. These social technologies make the whole difference (Bava, 2004, p. 113).

Empirical research conducted by Queiroz *et al.* (2025), involving the economic viability of Amazonian communities, defines that:

The concept of Social Technology is used to describe innovative solutions collaboratively created with the aim of solving social problems in a sustainable, inclusive and personalized way, according to the needs of local communities. These solutions are characterized by different components, such as community participation, social inclusion, sustainability, local integration, empowerment, among others (Queiroz *et al.*, 2025, p. 101).

Concluding this section, it is appropriate to recall the study by Seixas *et al.* (2015, p. 10), whose objective was to discuss “[...] the importance of Social Technologies for social development, as through them it is also possible to progress in the area of social inclusion”. For the authors, Social Technologies (ST) constitute a valuable instrument in the socioeconomic transformation of regions, especially those with low social density.

3 Methodological Procedures

In methodological terms, the study is descriptive-exploratory in nature, with a qualitative approach, and uses bibliometric techniques to conduct the survey. The

database used was the CAPES Theses and Dissertations Database³, taken between 2020 and 2024 (5 years). The keyword for the survey was "Social Technologies," and the filter considered Graduate Programs in Public Policy. The research on the aforementioned platform was carried out in April and May 2025. As Aronson (2023, p. 16) states, "[...] the experimental method is the best way to understand a complex phenomenon. A truism of science says that the only way to truly know the world is to reconstruct it."

Table 2 lists the Federal Institutions of Higher Education (IFES) located in the Northeast Region that have Graduate Programs in Public Policy. These IFES are therefore the focus of this study, taking as a time frame the period from 2020 to 2024 (5 years).

Table 2 – Federal Institutions of Higher Education (IFES) that have Graduate Programs in Public Policy

FU	IFES	CAPES Level and Score ⁴	
		Mestrado	Doutorado
BA	Federal University of the South of Bahia – UFSB	YES (4)	YES (4)
	Federal University of Bahian Reconcave– UFRB (*)	YES (4)	NO
CE	Federal University of Ceará – UFC (**)	YES (3)	NO
	Federal University of Ceará – UFC (***)	YES (3)	NO
	Federal University of Ceará – UFC (****)	YES (3)	NO
MA	Federal University of Maranhão	YES (6)	YES (6)
PB	Federal University of Paraíba – UFPB (*****)	YES (4)	NO
PE	Federal University of Pernambuco – UFPE (*)	YES (4)	NO
PI	Federal University of Piauí – UFPI	YES (5)	YES (5)
TOTAL		09	03

Source: Research Data, 2025.

(*) Professional Master's Degree (PM)

(**) Evaluation in Public Policies – Professional Master's Degree (PM)

(***) Evaluation in Public Policies – Academic Master's Degree (MA)

(****) Public Policies and Higher Education Management – Professional Master's Degree (PM)

(*****) Human Rights, Citizenship, and Public Policies.

As shown in Table 2, UFMA and UFPI stand out for having the best CAPES scores in the Northeast Region, with 6 (six) and 5 (five) respectively, considering the

³ Access Link: <https://catalogodeteses.capes.gov.br/catalogo-teses/#!/>

⁴ Score assigned to Graduate Programs (PPGs) 2017-2020 by the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES). In 2025, the PPGs will be evaluated again by CAPES, this time taking into account the 2021-2024 quadrennium, with the score assigned to each PPG being based on the CAPES data collected in March 2025.

2017-2020 four-year period, both with Master's and Doctoral programs. This suggests that both programs are at a consolidated level in terms of research, implying the potential of this dimension in terms of developing solutions not only through the identification of bottlenecks, insufficiencies, and gaps that persist within the core of the least favored groups. This analysis also involves the use of Social Technologies as a legitimate instrument for reversing deleterious scenarios, especially in the Northeast Region, where there is a history of negligence and delayed actions regarding effective and lasting public policies.

4 Analyses and Data Discussion

Based on research conducted in the CAPES Theses and Dissertations Database (from 2020 to 2024), a survey carried out in June 2025 found that there are no published theses and dissertations involving Social Technologies in Graduate Programs in Public Policies in the Northeast Region, thus theoretically implying the operational infeasibility of the research. In other words: adopting the descriptor "Social Technologies" as selection criteria, opting for Applied Social Sciences as the Broad Area of Knowledge, and considering, as an additional filter, the 51 (fifty-one) Programs named with the preceding term "Public Policies" (Table 3), the research showed no results, with no published dissertations or theses involving these filters in the Northeastern geographic area.

In any case, in order to measure the scope of research involving Social Technologies, we sought to gather information on studies deposited on the CAPES Platform during the years covered by this research, focusing on Graduate Programs in Public Policy as the center of knowledge production, regardless of the region where the graduate program is located.

Table 3 – Graduate Programs in Public Policies (Brazil)

Program's Title and Quantity
Public Policies (17)
Public Policies and Human Education (9)
Public Policies, Strategies, and Development (6)
Public Policies and Educational Management (4)
Public Policies in Health (3)
Public Policies and Local Development (2)

Public Policies and Development (2)
Public Policies and Higher Educational Management (2)
Public Policies, Higher Educational Management and Evaluation (2)
Public Policies and Human Rights (2)
Public Policies and Government (1)
Public Policies, Knowledge Management and Regional Development (1)

Source: Elaborated by the author (2025) based on CAPES Theses and Dissertations Database.

Regarding Master's Theses, in 2021, 03 (three) studies were retrieved, two of which were from the Higher School of Sciences of the Santa Casa de Misericórdia from Vitória (ES) and one master's thesis from the Federal University of Latin American Integration (PR); in 2022, 03 (three) researches were obtained, produced by the Federal University of Latin American Integration (PR), the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, and the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul; in 2023, 02 (two) researches were detected, both from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro; in the years 2020 and 2024, no academic works were supported on the CAPES Platform, considering the aforementioned filters.

Regarding Doctoral Dissertations, in 2021 there is one study conducted at the Federal University of Paraná; in 2022, there have been identified 8 (eight) studies, 4 (four) from the State University of Ceará; 2 (two) from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, and 2 (two) from the State University of Rio de Janeiro; in 2020, 2023 and 2024, the research was inert using the considered filters.

It is worth mentioning, however, that as an alternative research approach, it was possible, through the descriptor Social Technologies and within the scope of Applied Social Sciences – whose purpose here was extending the base of studies involving the keyword – to identify, at the Master's level, studies conducted in other areas of knowledge (Management, Law, Information Science, Economics, Accounting Sciences, Communication, Environment, Architecture and Urbanism, Dynamics of Inhabited Space, etc.) and from numerous higher education institutions (private and public) in regions other than the Northeast Region. That is, the idea was to broaden the research base without limiting it to Graduation Programs in Public Policies and the various scientific contexts (Table 3).

After this new procedure was implemented – expanding the database – it was possible to reveal that in 2020, 43 Master's theses were obtained; in 2021, 275 academic works were published; in 2022, 276 studies were analyzed; in 2023, there were 263 Master's theses, and in 2024, no studies were published on the CAPES platform. Regarding the Doctoral Dissertations modality, using the same criteria as the Master's Theses modality, the following data was obtained: In 2020, 20 works were cataloged, none from the Brazilian Northeast Region; in 2021, there were 124 Doctoral Dissertations, with 12 (twelve) studies from the Northeast Region, distributed as follows by IES: 03 (UFPB, UFPE, each), 02 (UFRN), and 01 Doctoral Dissertations (UFC, UECE, UFAL, Catholic University of Salvador); For the year 2022, 138 studies were obtained, of which 24 (twenty-four) were produced in the Northeast Region: 10 (UFPE), 3 (UFAL, UFPB, UFBA, UFRN, each) and the Catholic University of Salvador, with 2 Doctoral Dissertations; in 2023, there are 150 (one hundred and fifty) theses at the national level, of which seven (7) studies were obtained in the Northeast Region: 2 (UFPE, UFPB, UFRN, each) and 1 from UFC; finally, in 2024, no researches were published.

On the other hand, considering Dias and Matos' (2019) conception of Public Policies⁵, and taking the term "Social Technologies" as a descriptor, it was possible to retrieve some studies that, although not necessarily being part of a Public Policies Program, as reported before, involve the issues debated in the university environment related to the theme, which is why it was decided to present them in Table 4, as a new inclusion criterion for this research.

Table 4 – Studies which used Social Technologies

IFES	PROGRAM	RESEARCH TITTLE AND LEVEL	DATE	AUTHOR	OBJECTIVE
UFS	Management (27001016038P3)	Methodology for the implementation and management of applicable projects to social technologies: a proposal based on PMD PRO.	2020	Grayceane Bomfim Santos de Jesus	To analyze the implementation and management of Social Technology Projects in Public Universities. Specifically, it involves identifying whether the projects developed in Public Universities contain the characteristics associated with a

⁵ According to Dias and Matos (2019, p. 11), "The expression 'public policy' encompasses various branches of human thought, interdisciplinarily, since its description and definition cover diverse areas of knowledge, such as Applied Social Sciences, Political Science, Economics, and Public Management Science, aiming at the study of the central problem, that is, the governmental decision-making process."

		(Master's Degree)			Social Technology and to verify which actions and tools were used in their implementation, enabling the structuring of a methodology that assists the implementation of Social Technology Projects.
UFPB	Management (24001015017 P8)	Social technologies and their contributions to the sustainability of family-based agroecosystems and the generation of regional development. ⁶ (Master's Degree)	2 0 2 1	Amanda de Albuquerque Queiroga Freire	The objective is to analyze the forms of contribution arising from the adoption of social technologies in the activities of small family-run agricultural enterprises, aimed at sustainability and regional development.
UFS	Management (27001016038 P3)	Public Policies' Innovation: A Study in Underdeveloped Localities (Master's Degree)	2 0 2 2	Irrilas Evelline de Carvalho Santos	The objective of this Master's Thesis is to analyze the suitability of public innovation policies for the context of underdeveloped localities in the state of Sergipe. The state of Sergipe was chosen because it is the smallest federative unit in the country and it presents low and sometimes fluctuating development indices. For that to happen, an analysis of public policies was revisited, and the understanding through the analysis of these policies was developed.
UFS	Management (27001016038 P3)	Public policies based on social technologies and the Brazilian Semi-Arid region: a study on the cistern program. (Master's Degree)	2 0 2 1	José Ednilson Matos Júnior	Some initiatives in Social Technology (ST) have resulted in social public policies, and are examples of experiences that started without the aid of public authorities, but whose practices were enhanced and disseminated when incorporated as policies, such as the Cisterns Program, which introduced STs originating from the active participation of the community, so that the inhabitants of the semi-arid regions of Brazil (preferably) could have increasingly better living conditions. From the context given, the objective of this study is to analyze the impacts generated by the Cisterns Program in the Brazilian semi-arid region.

⁶ This study has not been authorized for publication, as indicated in the CAPES Repository.

UFBA	Management (28001010020 P3)	Social innovation and social technology: differences and complementarities ⁷ (Master's Degree)	2 0 2 1	Larissa Mello do Nascimento	This study addresses the difference between Social Innovation (SI) and Social Technology (ST). From this perspective, the aim was to discuss the relationships between the concepts of SI and ST, situating them in space and time, from Classical Ancient Age to the contemporary debate on each approach, reinforcing the singularities of each theme, strengthening them as fields of research, and pointing out their differences and complementarities.
UFPB	Public Management (24001015079 P3)	Public policy formulation and its operational limitations: building the smart cities agenda for Natal, Rio Grande do Norte. (Master's Degree)	2 0 2 3	Sérgio Alexandre de Moraes Braga Júnior	This research aims to analyze the construction of public policies based on the premise of smart cities, focusing on urban planning and environmental issues, in formulating an agenda in the city of Natal, identifying its operational limitations, using science, technology and innovation to study its evolutionary process at the local level.

Source: Data from the field research, 2025.

Of the six (6) researches listed in Table 4, the studies by Amanda de Albuquerque Queiroga Freire (UFPB) and Larissa Mello do Nascimento (UFBA) do not have authorization for publication, which is the reason why it was not possible to provide a more detailed analysis of the context of both Master's Theses. Regarding the other four (4) studies, it can be assured that the study by Grayceane Bomfim Santos de Jesus aimed to analyze the implementation and management of Social Technology Projects in Public Universities, seeking to reveal the tools used in such projects.

Irrilas Evelline de Carvalho Santos's Master's Thesis analyzed the suitability of Innovation Public Policies for the context of underdeveloped localities in the state of Sergipe. José Ednilson Matos Júnior, in his turn, developed research that, through Social Technologies, presented initiatives that resulted in social Public Policies, and are examples of experiences that originated without the aid of public authorities. In this case, he cites the Cistern Program.

⁷ This study has not been authorized for publication, as indicated in the CAPES Repository.

Finally, Sérgio Alexandre de Moraes Braga Júnior's Master's Thesis, although not necessarily focused on the descriptor Social Technologies, developed an analysis to allow the construction of public policies based on the assumption of smart cities, focusing on the urban and environmental field.

It is observed that there is centralism in discussions involving Social Technologies within Graduate Programs in Management, which is not surprising given the amplitude the area allows in terms of teaching, research, and university extension. It is pertinent to mention, however, that the use of Social Technologies as a means of identifying solutions to local/regional/national problems is not limited to Graduate Programs in Management, but it applies to all areas of scientific knowledge, considering that it is a methodology capable of adjusting the Social Issue and the application of simple, replicable, and easy handling solutions by the protagonists of the developed solution, that is, the target audience involved with a given collective social problem.

5 Final Remarks

The purpose of this research was to analyze some of the actions coordinated by researchers and scholars from Federal Institutions of Higher Education (IFES) in the last 5 (five) years (2020 to 2024), through *Stricto Sensu* Graduate Programs in Public Policies in the Brazilian Northeast Region. To this end, the study relied on the descriptor Social Technologies in order to advance the field approach, using the CAPES Catalog of Theses and Dissertations.

The seminal idea was to examine Masters' theses and Doctoral dissertations that involved Social Technologies as an instrument of agreement between academia and society, permeating the adoption of Public Policies by the Public Authorities (local, regional, national) aimed at reducing or mitigating social inequalities. Certainly, the imbrication between Social Technologies and Public Policies has a strong connection, considering the conceptions presented in this research regarding the scope and purpose of Social Technologies in the formation of a positive agenda aimed at solving social problems. Therefore, the proposal was based on the expectation that Social Technologies are, in their genesis, conceived in spaces that aspire to Public Policies.

On the other hand, it was observed that the Masters' theses presented in Table 4, all of which used Social Technologies as a theoretical and empirical support, were

developed within Graduate programs in Public Administration and Management. All of them clearly demonstrated the relationship between the Social Technologies and the adoption of Public Policies aimed at solving the problems discussed in each research.

It is understood, therefore, that although this study did not establish Graduate Programs in Public Policy as a natural source of Social Technologies within the defined time period, it allows us to affirm that Social Technologies are present in discussions involving the Social Issue, social inequalities, and the necessary intensification of assertive Public Policies, even in fields different from those originally intended. The fact is that Social Technologies can naturally be developed in the most diverse environments of scientific knowledge; however, it is expected that even in academic Programs, such as those in Public Policy – whose social function is based on solving issues that are clearly unfavorable to social groups – approaches to producing solutions that mitigate, attenuate, and eliminate certain social problems can be shaped.

As limitations, and already prompting an agenda for future research, it is recognized that the present study could be expanded in terms of concentration field and broad knowledge field, including other Graduate programs, not restricting it to Applied Social Sciences, as well as adopting a broader temporal scope, seeking to encompass and unveil other potential studies involving Social Technologies, always in the systematic pursuit of solving Brazilian social problems. Alternatively, as a scientific possibility, a temporal and comparative analysis could be carried out between Professional Graduate Programs, which regularly face the need to form a group of Masters and Doctors who produce a PTT – Technical Technological Product, which is a method, product, technique, process or design developed with the potential to generate social impact, supported by innovative basis, aiming at solving practical and specific problems identified in certain social arrangements.

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