



RELISE

*ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEMS AND PUBLIC POLICIES IN REDUCING  
REGIONAL, RACIAL AND GENDER INEQUITIES IN BRAZIL<sup>1</sup>*

**ECOSSISTEMAS EMPREENDEDORES E POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS NA  
REDUÇÃO DAS INIQUIDADES REGIONAIS, RACIAIS E DE GÊNERO NO  
BRASIL**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Historical inequities in Brazil take on multiple dimensions that intertwine and reinforce one another. Regional inequalities are expressed in the concentration of infrastructure, income, and opportunities in certain territories, while other areas remain on the margins of development. At the same time, structural racism and gender inequality deepen social exclusion, restricting women's and Black populations' access to resources, credit, and labor markets<sup>5</sup>. This scenario highlights a country marked by disparities that go beyond the economic sphere, extending into social, cultural, and political issues (ALMEIDA, 2019).

In this context, the concept of entrepreneurial ecosystems (EEs) emerges as both an analytical and practical tool. Defined as sets of interdependent factors

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<sup>5</sup> As reported by G1 Empreendedorismo, in a report published on June 28, 2022, it was highlighted that Black entrepreneurs face greater difficulties in obtaining credit and recovering revenue, as indicated by a study by Sebrae. Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/empreendedorismo/noticia/2022/06/28/empreendedoras-negros-tem-mais-dificuldade-para-obter-credito-e-recuperar-faturamento-aponta-sebrae.ghtml>.



RELISE

2

- human capital, public policies, financing, infrastructure, innovation, and social networks - ecosystems create conditions for the flourishing of new businesses and for boosting the economies of historically marginalized territories.

However, their consolidation does not occur spontaneously; it requires coordination, institutional support, and appropriate public policies. Here we emphasize the importance of the State in formulating public policies capable of fostering EEs and thus reducing structural barriers. More than encouraging isolated ventures, the aim is to create favorable collective environments that bring together innovation, social justice, and territorial development.

In this editorial, an intersectional perspective is adopted as the key analytical approach, as proposed by Crenshaw (1989), by highlighting that inequalities cannot be understood in isolation but rather through their overlap and articulation. This means recognizing that inequalities in Brazil are not homogeneous: they vary according to the position individuals occupy at the intersection of territory, race, and gender. Understanding these intersections is crucial for designing policies that address the diverse realities that make up the country.

This study takes an essayistic approach, grounded in a bibliographic review. To this end, it mobilizes classical works in the political economy of development, recent studies on EEs, and institutional reports (IBGE, SEBRAE, Instituto Ethos/BID), as well as contributions from feminist and anti-racist critical thought. This combination makes it possible to articulate theoretical frameworks and empirical data in order to examine how public policies and solidarity economy practices can tackle regional, racial, and gender inequalities in Brazil.

Accordingly, the aim of this editorial is to present key concepts and possible governmental actions in the development of EEs that contribute to addressing regional, racial, and gender inequalities in Brazil.



RELISE

3

## **REGIONAL, RACIAL AND GENDER INEQUALITIES IN BRAZIL**

Brazilian inequality is not merely a socioeconomic phenomenon but a spatially structured reality, deeply tied to historical processes of settlement, colonization, and concentrated economic development. As noted by Furtado (2007) and Cano (2007), the political and economic choices that shaped the country favored certain spaces - especially the South and Southeast regions - as poles of modernization, industrialization, and infrastructure, while relegating other regions to a peripheral condition marked by low density of public and private investment.

This regional asymmetry goes beyond statistical dimensions, producing qualitatively distinct entrepreneurial ecosystems (EEs), each with specific logics, potentials, and obstacles. The so-called “Center,” represented by the South and Southeast regions, is characterized not only by a greater concentration of capital but also by a structural arrangement that reduces risks, expands access to opportunities, and accelerates innovation processes. Studies on regional development confirm that the presence of logistical infrastructure, diversified consumer markets, and a more sophisticated financial system creates environments more favorable to innovation and growth (CANO, 2007; SEBRAE, 2022).

By contrast, the periphery - comprising the North, Northeast, and inland areas - faces persistent structural constraints. In these localities, deficits in infrastructure, precarious logistics, low digital connectivity, scarcity of quality public services, and lower consumer market density limit not only the growth of existing businesses but also the very conception of entrepreneurship as a viable alternative for social mobility. Furthermore, access to credit and investment networks is reduced, both due to the absence of large financial institutions and due to prejudice and the perception of greater risk attributed to entrepreneurs from these territories (SEBRAE, 2022).



RELISE

Thus, this scenario generates a cumulative effect: more developed territories consolidate self-sustaining EEs, capable of attracting investment and talent, while peripheral regions remain trapped in a cycle of economic marginalization. The absence of capital, infrastructure, and support networks limits innovation capacity and reduces the attractiveness of these spaces for new initiatives, thereby reinforcing the historical pattern of wealth and opportunity concentration (FURTADO, 2007).

In this sense, more than a matter of location, inequality operates as a structural mechanism that organizes the economic space and determines in advance who will have the conditions to compete in a market increasingly driven by innovation, scale, and global integration. Ignoring the territorial matrix of inequality, therefore, means adopting an incomplete and ultimately ineffective perspective for formulating public policies aimed at democratizing access to opportunities to undertake and prosper in Brazil (INSTITUTO ETHOS; BID, 2022).

Nevertheless, if territorial inequality defines the material starting point, the racial filter operates as an additional, persistent, and often invisible mechanism that hierarchizes access to resources, networks, and social recognition within the EE. Brazil built its economic base on more than three centuries of slavery and never implemented robust policies of reparation or racial inclusion after abolition. As highlighted by Carneiro (2011) and Gonzalez (2020), racial inequalities are structural, reproducing themselves systemically across multiple fields of social life, including the business sphere.

From this perspective, recent research reveals the depth of these disparities: the average income of self-employed white workers remains about 70% higher than that of Black and Brown workers (IBGE, 2023). Regarding startup capital, while white entrepreneurs have greater access to formal credit lines, investors, and acceleration programs, Black entrepreneurs depend



RELISE

5

primarily on their own or family resources (INSTITUTO ETHOS; BID, 2022). These differences do not stem from individual choices but from a financial and investment system permeated by historical prejudices and evaluation criteria that covertly penalize Blackness (CARNEIRO, 2011).

Institutional racism is also manifested in access to credit and support networks. Black entrepreneurs, even with solid business plans, face greater resistance in obtaining financing, higher rejection rates, elevated interest rates, and unattainable collateral requirements. Moreover, access to informal spaces where opportunities circulate - such as mentorship, partnerships, and capital - is restricted by exclusionary dynamics (INSTITUTO ETHOS; BID, 2022). The Brazilian ecosystem of startups, accelerators, and investment funds, composed predominantly of middle- and upper-class white men, tends to reproduce patterns of homophily, meaning an inclination to invest in and trust profiles similar to those of the investors themselves (GONZALEZ, 2020). This structural blockage affects the ability of Black-led businesses to formalize and expand. With lower initial capital and restricted access to credit, their capacity to hire workers, acquire technology, and enter more competitive markets is limited, perpetuating a cycle of economic vulnerability: smaller businesses, more exposed to instability, with reduced reinvestment margins and low potential for wealth accumulation (SEBRAE, 2022).

Therefore, a racial analysis demonstrates that entrepreneurship is far from being a neutral field. It is a space shaped by power relations that defines who has legitimacy to take risks, access capital, build strategic networks, and achieve sustainable economic returns. Race, thus, is not merely a social marker but a structuring element of opportunities and constraints - a permanent filter operating at institutional, symbolic, and economic levels (CARNEIRO, 2011; GONZALEZ, 2020).



RELISE

6

## **ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEMS AND PUBLIC POLICIES**

We will now present some concepts related to entrepreneurial ecosystems (EEs) and the possibilities for governmental action in this context. Public policies that promote entrepreneurship are viewed as mechanisms to stimulate economic development, as they create the conditions for the emergence and strengthening of new businesses, fostering innovation, competitiveness, and income generation. Such policies also have an indirect effect on the population's quality of life: by expanding employment opportunities and increasing average income. Entrepreneurship and quality of life are not isolated dimensions but complementary ones. Public policies that foster EEs can serve as facilitators of both human development and regional economic growth (FERREIRA et al., 2023).

EEs are places or regional territories where the necessary conditions exist for entrepreneurship to emerge and develop, based on structural conditions, local entrepreneurial culture, and geographic environments (GIMENEZ; STEFENON; INÁCIO JÚNIOR, 2022). As proposed by Isenberg (2010), they consist of a set of interdependent elements which, in interaction, create favorable conditions for the emergence and consolidation of new businesses. This ecosystem is not limited to individual encouragement of entrepreneurship but encompasses a broader institutional and social environment capable of sustaining collective processes of innovation and value creation.

Among the key components of an EE are education, which develops qualified human capital; access to credit and financing, essential for enabling initiatives; technological innovation, which enhances competitiveness; physical and digital infrastructure, which connects markets and territories; and support networks, which bring together entrepreneurs, universities, companies, and governments. The combination of these factors is decisive for entrepreneurial activities to flourish sustainably (ISENBERG, 2010).



RELISE

7

Complementing this perspective, Stam (2015) developed a model of EEs with greater causal depth, structured into four ontological layers: framework conditions, systemic conditions, outputs, and outcomes. In this model, systemic conditions include elements such as entrepreneurial networks, leadership, access to financing, talent availability, knowledge production, and support services. Framework conditions, in turn, refer to broader dimensions, such as the presence of formal institutions, the consolidation of an entrepreneurial culture, the availability of physical infrastructure, and the existence of market demand.

Although Spigel and Harrison (2018) emphasize that EEs prioritize understanding the entrepreneurial process with less focus on the role of the State, they recognize that the proper functioning of an EE depends on entrepreneurs' ability to access resources, which may include support from the public sector. However, many existing policies for the creation and development of EEs have been formulated with little theoretical or empirical grounding. This poses a risk of low effectiveness or flawed outcomes (CANDEIAS; SARKAR, 2022). It is crucial that initiatives emerge from recognition of and articulation within the local context of each territory (ISENBERG, 2010) and that mimicking already established EEs be avoided (LÁSZLÓ ET AL., 2013).

Despite the appeal of the concept, several conceptual, theoretical, and empirical issues remain unresolved, since the notion was employed before being extensively studied. Among the critical points is the scarcity of evidence to support public policy formulation, due to the absence of a clear cause-and-effect relationship, as well as uncertainty about the appropriate level of analysis, which can range from cities and countries to more restricted contexts, such as specific sectors or organizations (STAM, 2015).

In this process, the State plays a central role as a driver of regional ecosystems. Through public policies, it can offer tax incentives, expand credit in vulnerable regions, invest in infrastructure, and promote innovation and business



RELISE

8

incubation programs. Government action thus constitutes a strategic element to balance historical disparities, especially in contexts where the market alone does not ensure minimum conditions for productive inclusion. However, an important criticism is directed at uniform public policies applied homogeneously throughout the national territory. By disregarding the specificities of each region, such policies end up reproducing inequalities, as territories with less infrastructure or accumulated human capital cannot compete on equal terms. Therefore, thinking about EEs in Brazil requires adopting a territorialized approach, capable of recognizing and valuing regional particularities.

In light of this diagnosis, some possibilities of governmental actions and public policies aimed at fostering entrepreneurship within the scope of EEs are presented, accompanied by concrete examples. Particularly noteworthy in this context are initiatives with greater potential to reduce social, labor, and income inequalities, as well as those oriented toward strengthening enterprises anchored in the social and solidarity economy. The latter should not be understood merely as a complementary alternative to the dominant model but as a genuine counterpoint, capable of reorganizing productive relations and challenging historical structures of exclusion, while offering fairer and more sustainable forms of economic and social inclusion.

## **GOVERNAMENTAL ACTION AND PUBLIC POLICIES**

The success of entrepreneurial ecosystems (EEs) can be identified both by the existence of profitable and enduring businesses and by the creation of an environment that fosters productive entrepreneurship - understood as that which generates value not only for entrepreneurs themselves but also for the surrounding community (ISENBERG, 2010; STAM, 2015). In this sense, state action to promote local development reinforces the need for public policies and support for entrepreneurship, since the government plays a strategic role in





RELISE

creating favorable conditions for the development of EEs, whether through the design of incentive policies or by reducing bureaucratic and tax barriers that hinder the establishment and sustainability of new businesses (MORAIS; BACIC, 2019). From this perspective, we will highlight some public policies aimed at promoting and supporting entrepreneurship within the context of EEs, underlining not only their function in stimulating the creation of new businesses but also their potential to reduce historically entrenched social and regional inequalities.

In Brazil, several public institutions are engaged in promoting research and entrepreneurship. Moraes and Bacic (2019) cite examples such as the Financier of Studies and Projects (FINEP), the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP), and the National Bank for Economic and Social Development (BNDES). These agencies provide a range of instruments, from research grants and training programs to capital funding and incentives for venture capital. In addition, other federal and state-level initiatives aim to support the creation and expansion of technology parks, bringing universities, companies, and government together around the innovation process. Also noteworthy are legal frameworks that facilitate entrepreneurial activity, such as the General Law for Micro and Small Enterprises (2006), which promotes accounting simplification, expands access to credit, and encourages these businesses to participate in public procurement, and the Supersimples Law (2007), which unifies and reduces the tax burden through a more accessible regime for small entrepreneurs (MORAIS; BACIC, 2019).

As an international example, Kantis (2017) analyzes the trajectory of innovation EEs in the United States and Israel, highlighting the central role of the State in the emergence of these environments, particularly through the allocation of resources for early-stage research, technological development, and innovation, as well as investments in infrastructure that enhance territorial



RELISE

competitiveness. The author also highlights a successful governmental initiative in Israel known as “Incubator 2.0,” which combines public and private funds to select and support projects by local companies (KANTIS, 2017).

However, from the perspective of socioeconomically disadvantaged populations - the focus of this editorial - we emphasize, among the possible ways in which the State can articulate public policies that induce regional development through the strengthening of EEs, the initiatives of the social and solidarity economy (or simply Solidarity Economy), as conceived by Paul Singer (2008)<sup>6</sup>. This form of entrepreneurship stands out as a potential public policy for generating work, countering exploitative labor processes, and addressing food insecurity, poverty, and lack of income (DE SOUZA, 2011).

The Solidarity Economy proposes to organize forms of production that transcend the capitalist mode and reorganize labor processes in a collective manner, grounded in cooperative ties and the political awareness of the most vulnerable sectors of the working class (GADOTTI, 2009; MEDEIROS, 2023). More than a complementary alternative, the Solidarity Economy constitutes a strategy to confront structural inequalities by proposing productive relations based on self-management and a balance between economic and social objectives. Enterprises inspired by this logic can take on different formats, such as popular cooperatives, collective production, service or consumption groups, and exchange networks, all sustained by collective decision-making and inclusive practices. For such initiatives to be consolidated, government support through public calls, procurement programs, and incubation projects proves essential. Among practical examples are recyclable waste pickers’ cooperatives, which

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<sup>6</sup> In a 2007 interview with Professor Paulo de Salles Oliveira of the University of São Paulo, Paul Singer highlights some important points for understanding the Solidarity Economy. It reinforces collective ownership of the means of production, democratic self-management by workers themselves, equal rights, and participation and profit-sharing. According to Singer, the Solidarity Economy is characterized by a liberating experience with the potential for social inclusion and combating unemployment, while fostering the development of democratic values (SINGER, 2008).



RELISE

11

organize the work of vulnerable populations, generating income and strengthening environmental practices, as well as family farming ventures, which ensure food security and sustainability for participating families (MORAIS; BACIC, 2019).

In this context, it is important to emphasize that public policies tailored to the specific region in which the EE is established are crucial for its development. Nevertheless, as with other elements that compose EEs, there is no consensus in the literature regarding the most appropriate policy design, which highlights the need for further theoretical and empirical investigation (CORDEIRO; SPOLADORE, 2021).

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Throughout this editorial, it has been emphasized that Brazilian inequality cannot be understood merely as a socioeconomic problem, but rather as a phenomenon that is structurally territorialized and racialized and also shaped by gender markers. For this reason, peripheral regions remain trapped in cycles of exclusion and low economic attractiveness, while more developed centers concentrate infrastructure, credit, and support networks. This territorial pattern is directly linked to structural racism and sexism, which restrict the possibilities of Black and women entrepreneurs, perpetuating selectivity in access to capital, markets, and social recognition. Thus, entrepreneurship in Brazil proves to be deeply shaped by power dynamics, far from any notion of neutrality. The intersectional perspective discussed throughout the text shows that territory, race, and gender cannot be dissociated in the design of public policies to foster EEs. Recognizing these dimensions is an indispensable condition for democratizing opportunities for work and income, as well as for building more innovative and equitable environments.



RELISE

12

In this scenario, it is crucial to emphasize that territorialized and intersectional public policies play a strategic role. If, on the one hand, literature still does not offer consensus regarding the most appropriate policy design, on the other, the path analyzed demonstrates that state action is essential to balance historical disparities. By articulating credit, infrastructure, innovation, and the strengthening of the solidarity economy, the State can foster the creation and development of sustainable EEs, capable of reducing regional, racial, and gender inequalities, aligning economic development with the principles of social justice. For this reason, there remains a pressing need to deepen studies and reflections on the relationship between public policies and EEs from the perspective of Brazilian regional inequalities, as well as on the potential of entrepreneurship to confront social inequities through innovation, work, and income.



RELISE

13

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RELISE

14

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RELISE

15

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