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PUBLIC GOVERNANCE AND INNOVATION IN GERONTOLOGY: THE INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE GERONTEC INNOVATION CENTER IN THE BRAZILIAN AMAZON

Carlos Augusto Hossaine do Nascimento

UNINQ International University
Santa Catarina, Brazil

Luciano Rodrigues do Nascimento

UNINQ International University
Santa Catarina, Brazil



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ABSTRACT: Rapid population aging poses significant challenges for the formulation and implementation of public policies, especially in regions marked by socioeconomic inequalities and structural limitations, such as the Brazilian Amazon. This article analyzes the institutional development process of the Center for Innovation in Gerontology (Gerontec), affiliated with the Open University for the Elderly Foundation (FUNATI), from the perspective of public governance and innovation in active aging policies. From a methodological standpoint, the study adopts a qualitative approach, based on a systematic documentary analysis of institutional regulations, technical reports, action plans, administrative records, and official documents related to the creation and consolidation of Gerontec. The documentary material was analyzed using Bardin's (2016) content analysis, enabling the identification of analytical categories related to institutional stability, collaborative governance, and intersectoral coordination. The results indicate that collaborative governance, institutional continuity, and intersectoral arrangements were central factors in the consolidation of Gerontec, even in the face of administrative obstacles and limitations in specialized human resources. It is concluded that the model has potential for replication, provided it is adapted to regional specificities and local administrative capacities, contributing to the debate on public innovation in peripheral contexts.

KEYWORDS: Population aging. Public governance. Social innovation. Gerontology. Public policy.

Introduction

Population aging is recognized as one of the major demographic phenomena of the 21st century, with direct impacts on health care, social security, social assistance, and urban planning systems. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2015; 2020), the demographic transition requires integrated public policies that promote not only longevity but also quality of life throughout the life course, demanding intersectoral coordination and sustained institutional capacity.

In Brazil, this challenge takes on even more complex dimensions in peripheral regions, such as the Amazon, which are characterized by socioeconomic inequalities, territorial dispersion, and infrastructure limitations. In these contexts, the implementation of public policies focused on aging depends not only on national regulatory and policy guidelines, but also on local institutional capacity to mobilize scarce resources, coordinate multiple stakeholders, and sustain innovative processes over time.

Although public innovation in aging policies has been extensively studied in high-income countries, the international literature still contains significant gaps regarding how institutional stability and collaborative governance operate in peripheral and structurally constrained regions. Most dominant theoretical models are based on implicit assumptions of consolidated state capacity, stable administrative infrastructure, and relatively broad technological availability. Such assumptions do not always hold true in emerging contexts, where public innovation occurs under conditions of administrative instability, resource scarcity, and territorial fragmentation.

In this context, the Open University Foundation for the Elderly (FUnATI), affiliated with the Amazonas State Government, stands out as a significant institutional initiative in the field of public policies for older adults. The creation of the Center for Innovation in Gerontology (Gerontec) represents a milestone by integrating technological innovation, applied research, and public policy development in a region marked by significant structural challenges. More than just an empirical example, this case offers an analytical opportunity to examine how governance capacities are built and sustained in peripheral environments.

This study aims to address the gap identified by analyzing the institutional development of Gerontec in the Brazilian Amazon, contributing to theoretical debates on governance capacity, institutional resilience, and innovation in peripheral public systems. It is argued that, in contexts such as the Amazon, public innovation depends less on the availability of technological infrastructure and more on the interplay between administrative stability, collaborative governance, and organizational learning.

The purpose of this article is to analyze how institutional stability and collaborative governance arrangements enabled the implementation and consolidation of the Gerontec Innovation Center. In doing so, the study makes a theoretical contribution by demonstrating that, in peripheral contexts, innovative capacity is built through institutional mechanisms of continuity and intersectoral coordination, challenging innovation models formulated on the basis of more consolidated administrative realities.

In addition to this introduction, the article is divided into five sections. The following section presents the theoretical

framework underpinning the analysis. Next, the methodological procedures adopted are described. The fourth section presents and analyzes the results, emphasizing the process of institutionalization and governance of Gerontec. In the fifth section, the findings are discussed in light of the specialized literature. Finally, concluding remarks are presented.

Theoretical Framework

This section aims to provide a theoretical foundation for the analysis of the empirical case, drawing on three central conceptual themes: population aging and public health policies, public governance, and social innovation. It is based on the assumption that addressing the challenges posed by the demographic transition requires not only an expansion of services but also an institutional reconfiguration of government action.

From this perspective, the theoretical framework is organized around two main themes. The first examines population aging as a defining feature of contemporary public policy, highlighting its institutional and territorial implications. The second addresses the concepts of public governance and social innovation, emphasizing their interdependence in the development of sustainable government responses.

Thus, this chapter is not limited to a descriptive review of the literature, but seeks to establish an analytical foundation that enables an understanding of how state institutions can build public capacities focused on active aging. The interconnection between these themes provides the conceptual framework necessary for the empirical analysis developed in the subsequent chapters.

Population Aging and Public Policy

Population aging is a structural phenomenon associated with demographic and epidemiological transitions, characterized by declining fertility and mortality rates and a sustained increase in life expectancy. According to the United Nations (2020), this transformation profoundly alters the age composition of societies, necessitating changes to social protection systems and public policies.

In the Brazilian context, this process is occurring at an accelerated pace and with significant regional disparities. Camarano (2014) notes that the country is aging at a faster rate than has historically been observed in developed nations, yet without having fully consolidated its social welfare structures. Along the same lines, Veras and Oliveira (2018) argue that services for the elderly population still suffer from institutional fragmentation and low intersectoral integration. Thus, the combination of rapid aging and unequal institutional capacities intensifies the challenges of coordinating public policies.

Alongside demographic changes, there has been a shift in the conceptual framework of policies targeting older adults. The paradigm of active aging, formulated by the World Health Organization (2002), shifts the focus from a welfare-oriented model to an approach centered on autonomy, social participation, and community integration. However, the implementation of this paradigm requires institutional structures capable of coordinating actions in the areas of health, education, social assistance, and innovation, overcoming the sectoral fragmentation historically present in public administration.

In this context, the challenge is not limited to expanding the quantity of services, but also involves building institutional capacity for intersectoral coordination and ensuring the sustainability of policies. In peripheral regions, characterized by fiscal constraints, territorial dispersion, and structural inequalities, this need becomes even more evident.

Thus, the literature on population aging highlights the magnitude of the demographic problem and the normative shift in public policies; however, there remains insufficient exploration of how specific institutional arrangements are structured to address this challenge in peripheral contexts. It is precisely this gap that the present study addresses, by examining how governance and innovation capacities are mobilized in the Amazonian context.

Public Governance and Social Innovation

The concept of public governance has emerged in the context of state reform and the move away from the traditional bureaucratic model, shifting the focus from hierarchical authority to arrangements based on coordination, interdependence, and the participation of multiple actors. From this perspective, governance is not limited to the formal exercise of state power, but encompasses mechanisms for coordination among public institutions, civil society organizations, and other actors involved in the production of public policies. As systematized by Rhodes (1996), governance involves policy networks characterized by negotiation and the sharing of responsibilities. This approach is further developed by Kooiman (2003), who emphasizes that governing implies managing complex interactions in social contexts marked by a plurality of interests and growing institutional specialization.

In the field of social policy, these principles are put into practice through the collaborative governance model. Ansell and Gash (2008) argue that structured deliberative processes, based on shared responsibility and institutional trust, tend to enhance the effectiveness and legitimacy of public actions. Thus, collaborative governance represents not merely an alternative organizational arrangement, but a strategic prerequisite for addressing complex public problems, especially those requiring intersectoral integration, such as policies addressing population aging.

It is against this backdrop that the debate on social innovation takes place. Unlike market-driven technological innovation, social innovation refers to the creation or reconfiguration of practices, services, and institutional models aimed at addressing collective needs. Mulgan (2006) highlights that such innovations often emerge from institutional gaps and the need for adaptive responses to persistent social challenges. Murray, Caulier-Grice, and Mulgan (2010) complement this perspective by emphasizing that social innovation involves processes of experimentation and continuous institutional learning, requiring organizational environments capable of sustaining structural changes.

It is therefore evident that governance and innovation are interdependent dimensions. Governance establishes the coordination and legitimacy mechanisms necessary for the implementation of innovative initiatives; innovation, in turn, redefines institutional practices and feeds back into governance arrangements. In contexts of rapid population aging, this interaction becomes particularly relevant, since the demands of

the elderly population exceed the capacity of fragmented sectoral responses.

In the state of Amazonas, the process of institutionalizing the Open University for the Elderly Foundation (FUnATI) serves as an empirical example of this dynamic. The initiative originated from a proposal submitted by geriatrician Euler Esteves Ribeiro to the State University of Amazonas (UEA) and was formally adopted during the administration of Rector Marilene Corrêa. Approval by the University Council (CON-SUNI) granted the then Open University for the Elderly the status of a supplementary body, formally integrating it into the state university structure.

Later, in 2018, during the administration of Amazonino Mendes, the institution was restructured and elevated to the status of a public foundation, becoming part of the state's indirect administration as FUnATI. This institutional change expanded its administrative and financial autonomy, in addition to redefining its organizational structure with vice-dean's offices responsible for teaching, research, extension, administration, and health promotion. The presence of a specialized polyclinic reinforces the integration between academic training, healthcare, and public policy formulation, creating an arrangement that combines the typical functions of a university with those of an agency implementing social policies.

FUnATI's institutional trajectory demonstrates that its consolidation is not limited to an administrative process, but rather represents the development of public capacity focused on active aging and social inclusion in the Amazonian context. Its organizational structure and scope of operations point to a model that combines intersectoral governance and organizational

innovation, thereby putting into practice, at the state level, the theoretical principles discussed earlier.

Thus, this study adopts FUnATI as an analytical unit to examine how public governance arrangements can support social innovation processes in aging policies. It is based on the understanding that the institutional consolidation of the foundation reflects not only an administrative decision but also a strategic move to expand state capacity in a regional context marked by specific demographic and structural challenges.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative design of a descriptive-analytical nature, structured as an institutional case study. The empirical focus is on the Gerontec Innovation Center, affiliated with the Open University Foundation for the Elderly (FUnATI), located in the Brazilian Amazon region. The time frame covers the period from 2018 to 2025, corresponding to FUnATI's institutional transformation into a public foundation and the implementation phase of Gerontec.

Documentary corpus

The empirical corpus consists of 30 official institutional documents, obtained through direct consultation of FUnATI's administrative archives and the Amazonas State's public regulatory databases. The document set is distributed as follows: **5 state regulatory instruments** (laws and decrees) regarding the creation of the public foundation and the regulation of its organizational structure, published in the Official Gazette of the State of Amazonas; **04 internal regulations and administrative resolutions**, including the foundation's general regulations

and specific regulations of Gerontec; **06 annual management reports** (2018–2023); **5 institutional plans and strategic planning documents**, including the institutional Multi-Year Plan and sectoral action plans; **5 agreements and terms of technical cooperation**, signed with universities, public agencies, and institutional partners; **5 technical reports and operational documents** related to the implementation and consolidation of the Gerontec Innovation Center.

All documents analyzed are archived at the Administrative Directorate of FUnATI or available in the state's public regulatory database. The selection was based on two objective criteria: (i) direct relevance to the dimensions of governance, institutional structure, and organizational innovation; and (ii) formal validation by competent administrative bodies, ensuring document authenticity and traceability.

Analysis Procedures

The analytical strategy adopted was a deductive thematic analysis, guided by categories previously defined based on the theoretical framework: (a) collaborative governance; (b) institutional stability; and (c) capacity for innovation in gerontology.

The analysis of the empirical data was based on the principles of content analysis, following the methodology proposed by Laurence Bardin (2016), and included the following steps: **I-Pre-analysis:** Organization of the corpus, skimming, and definition of units of analysis; **II- Exploration of the material:** Manual coding of relevant excerpts according to analytical categories; **III- Processing and interpretation:** Cross-sectional comparison between documents,

identification of recurring patterns, and verification of temporal consistency between institutional regulations and practices.

The coding was performed manually, with systematic recording of units of meaning in a structured analytical matrix, allowing for traceability of inferences. Triangulation was achieved by comparing different types of documents (regulatory, strategic, and operational), thereby reducing the risk of interpretive biases arising from isolated sources.

Reliability and limitations

To strengthen analytical reliability, the findings were validated through documentary triangulation and temporal consistency checks. Despite these procedures, the study has limitations inherent to single-case designs, particularly with regard to the generalizability of the results. Nevertheless, the case's analytical depth and “ ” offer relevant theoretical contributions to understanding the dynamics of governance and innovation in peripheral public contexts.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis procedures, guided by analytical categories previously defined based on the specialized literature, namely: collaborative governance, institutional stability, and innovation in gerontology. The processing of the empirical data was based on the assumptions of content analysis, following the systematization proposed by Bardin (2016), encompassing the stages of pre-analysis, exploration of the material, and interpretation of the results.

It is acknowledged, however, that the single-case design imposes limitations on the statistical generalizability of the results. Nevertheless, the choice of this case is justi-

fied by its strategic nature and its empirical relevance in the Amazonian context. Thus, the study's contribution lies in the analytical and theoretical realm, by offering evidence on how specific institutional arrangements can shape public capacities for innovation in peripheral contexts.

Results

The results show that the analysis of a corpus of 30 institutional documents revealed three key pillars in the consolidation of the Center for Innovation in Gerontology (Gerontec): (i) institutional stability, (ii) inter-institutional coordination, and (iii) organizational capacity for innovation.

Institutional stability

The first pillar concerns the institutional stability resulting from FUnATI's transformation into a public foundation. Administrative documents and management reports indicate that the expansion of administrative autonomy was linked to the continuity of strategic projects. An institutional report highlights that “the change in legal status allowed for greater budgetary predictability and medium-term planning capacity” (FUnATI, Management Report, 2019).

The 2019 Management Report notes that the new institutional structure “enabled greater capacity for multi-year planning and continuity of strategic actions.” This evidence is reiterated in the 2020 Management Report, which notes the formalization of Gerontec as a core program linked to the Office of the Vice-Rector for Research and Innovation.

Internal administrative records also indicate that “its status as a public foundation made it possible to establish Gerontec as a permanent structure, rather than a one-off project” (Administrative Record, 2021).

A longitudinal analysis of the documents indicates that, in the period prior to the institutional transformation, initiatives related to innovation in gerontology were sporadic in nature, being linked to specific projects. Starting in 2018, Gerontec was incorporated into formal planning instruments, such as the 2022–2025 Institutional Strategic Plan and the 2023 Annual Action Plan, suggesting its consolidation as a permanent organizational structure.

Inter-institutional Coordination

The second area concerns inter-institutional coordination. Five Technical Cooperation Agreements signed between 2019 and 2024 were examined, including agreements with state public universities, state health departments, and applied research institutions. According to an institutional record, “Gerontec stems from the understanding that innovation in gerontology requires constant dialogue with other institutions and with the local community” (Manager G2, institutional record).

The 2021 and 2022 Technical Cooperation Reports indicate that these partnerships enabled the development of projects in the areas of telehealth, continuing education in gerontology, and the development of integrated care protocols. The minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting (Minutes No. 03/2022) note that the cooperation strategy was conceived as a means of expanding technical capacity in light of the limited number of in-house specialized staff.

A comparative analysis of the 2019 and 2023 reports shows an increase in the number of inter-institutional projects and a diversification of the themes of the initiatives. There has also been an expansion of the

institutional cooperation network, with the participation of various actors from the public and academic sectors.

In addition, the documents indicate that the partnerships contributed to the exchange of technical and scientific knowledge and to the sharing of responsibilities among the institutions involved.

Organizational capacity for innovation

The third pillar refers to organizational capacity for innovation. An analysis of the 2022–2025 Institutional Strategic Plan, the Gerontec Technical Implementation Reports (2021 and 2023), and the Internal Regulations of the Office of the Dean of Research and Innovation indicates that innovation initiatives involved the reorganization of institutional workflows, the integration of teaching, research, and service, and the training of technical teams.

According to the strategic planning document, “innovation was understood as institutional change and not merely as technological acquisition” (Institutional Strategic Plan, 2022).

The documents analyzed highlight three main initiatives: (i) the creation of a specialized technical unit focused on innovation in gerontology; (ii) internal training for staff in digital technologies applied to healthcare; and (iii) the implementation of integrated protocols linking outpatient clinics, teaching, and research.

The 2023 and 2024 Technical Reports also document operational limitations, highlighting shortages of human resources with specific training in gerontology and health innovation, as well as procedural difficulties related to state administrative processes.

Taken together, the documentary records indicate that innovation initiatives were developed within the constraints of the existing institutional framework, with an emphasis on reorganizing internal practices and coordinating different organizational functions.

Analytical synthesis of the results

The integrated analysis of the three identified axes—institutional stability, inter-institutional coordination, and organizational capacity for innovation—highlights their coordinated occurrence in the process of consolidating the Center for Innovation in Gerontology (Gerontec).

The documents analyzed indicate that institutional stability was linked to the formalization of Gerontec in planning instruments and the continuity of strategic actions throughout the period analyzed. With regard to inter-institutional coordination, there was an expansion of partnerships and a diversification of actions carried out in cooperation with different institutions. Regarding organizational capacity for innovation, the records point to the implementation of initiatives aimed at reorganizing internal workflows, integrating teaching, research, and care, and providing technical training.

Taken together, these three dimensions allow us to describe the process of Gerontec's consolidation as the result of a combination of institutional conditions, cooperative practices, and organizational innovation initiatives, as evidenced in the analyzed document corpus.

Discussion

This section interprets the results in light of the theoretical framework employed, examining the extent to which the case of the Center for Innovation in Gerontology (Gerontec), affiliated with the Open University for the Elderly Foundation (FUNATI), confirms, expands, or challenges the literature on public governance, state capacity, and innovation in peripheral contexts.

The discussion is organized around three themes corresponding to the analytical categories adopted: institutional stability, collaborative governance under resource constraints, and innovation beyond technological adoption. Unlike the previous section, the focus here is on the theoretical implications of the empirical findings

Institutional stability in peripheral governance systems

The literature on public governance links administrative stability to decision-making predictability and policy continuity. From an institutionalist perspective, Peters (2010) argues that the consolidation of state capacities depends on durable organizational structures capable of sustaining intersectoral coordination over time. Within the framework of New Public Governance, Osborne (2010) maintains that co-production and innovation in public services require stable institutional environments in which actors can establish relationships of trust and medium-term commitments. Similarly, Ansell and Gash (2008) demonstrate that collaborative arrangements require clear rules, administrative predictability, and institutional continuity as minimum conditions for cooperation.

However, in peripheral contexts, institutional stability plays a qualitatively different role. Unlike in established administrative systems, where innovation can occur even in the face of political upheaval, in environments marked by administrative volatility, fiscal constraints, and territorial fragmentation, instability undermines the very development of basic organizational capacities.

In these contexts, stability acts not only as a facilitating factor but as a structural prerequisite for sustaining innovative processes. The case analyzed thus suggests a significant shift in analytical perspective: institutional stability should be understood as a mechanism constitutive of state capacity, and not merely as a contextual variable of governance.

Collaborative Governance under Resource Constraints

Collaborative governance, widely discussed in the international literature, takes on a distinct structural role in this case. More than a mechanism for improving the efficiency of public policies, collaboration functions as a substitute for limited state capacity. In contexts of scarcity of financial, technical, and human resources, inter-institutional coordination becomes an integral part of governance capacity itself.

The model proposed by Ansell and Gash (2008) conceives of collaboration as a strategy aimed at increasing legitimacy, efficiency, and the resolution of complex problems. In systems with high state capacity, such arrangements tend to play a complementary role to traditional hierarchical structures.

However, in contexts of limited state capacity, collaboration takes on a distinct role. Inter-institutional coordination ceases to be merely a tool for improvement and instead assumes a substitute role in the face of insufficient internal resources. Network governance thus emerges as a constitutive component of public action.

The case of Gerontec reinforces this interpretation by demonstrating that the implementation of projects and the very continuity of actions depended on the sharing of infrastructure, technical knowledge, and organizational capacities among partner institutions.

Innovation Beyond Technological Adoption

A significant portion of the literature on innovation in public policy emphasizes technological adoption as the primary driver of change. Greenhalgh et al. (2004) acknowledge the influence of organizational factors but maintain that technology is the central element of the process. Hartley (2005) broadens this perspective by distinguishing between product, process, and paradigm innovation, incorporating organizational dimensions. Pollitt (2011) argues that the sustainability of reforms depends on the institutional framework that underpins the changes.

In the case studied, innovation did not primarily focus on the adoption of advanced digital technologies. The findings indicate that innovation occurred mainly through the reorganization of institutional workflows, the integration of teaching, research, and patient care, and the training of staff.

This evidence allows us to question technology-centric approaches, especially when applied to peripheral contexts. In

such environments, innovation tends to depend more on institutional coordination capacity, organizational learning, and incremental adaptation than on technological sophistication.

Thus, public innovation can be understood as a socio-technical and institutional phenomenon, in which organizational changes condition—and often precede—technological adoption.

Summary of the Discussion

Together, institutional stability, collaborative governance, and organizational innovation constitute interdependent mechanisms for building state capacity in peripheral contexts. In dialogue with Peters (2010), Ansell and Gash (2008), Hartley (2005), and Pollitt (2011), the case analyzed not only confirms the relevance of these categories but reinterprets them in light of specific structural constraints.

The study thus contributes to the international debate by indicating that, in structurally constrained public systems, stability, collaboration, and organizational innovation are constitutive elements of state action, rather than merely complementary ones.

Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the literature on public governance and innovation by demonstrating that, in peripheral contexts such as the Amazon region—characterized by territorial dispersion, structural inequalities, infrastructure limitations, and fiscal constraints—the capacity for innovation depends fundamentally on institutional mechanisms for stability and intersectoral

coordination, rather than on the availability of advanced technological infrastructure.

The findings indicate that the consolidation of the Center for Innovation in Gerontology (Gerontec) was not primarily the result of the incorporation of digital technologies, but rather of the gradual building of institutional capacity. Empirical evidence shows that budget predictability, the formalization of cooperation instruments, and the institutionalization of administrative routines were associated with the sustainability of innovative initiatives. In this sense, the observed innovation was preceded by organizational stability and inter-institutional coordination, and not the other way around.

The institutional documents analyzed—including management reports, strategic plans, and administrative records—demonstrate a temporal link between the change in FUnATT's legal status, the expansion of formal partnerships, and the consolidation of Gerontec as a permanent structure. These elements support the argument that, in contexts of fiscal constraints and limited state capacity, public innovation is contingent upon the prior establishment of minimal institutional foundations and the existence of stable mechanisms for collaborative governance.

The study's main theoretical contribution lies in challenging models of public innovation formulated within contexts of high state capacity. While part of the international literature emphasizes technological adoption as a central driver of transformation, the results presented here indicate that, in structurally constrained contexts, innovation emerges from processes of institutional coordination, administrative continuity, and incremental organizational adaptation.

We thus propose a situated interpretation of public innovation: in peripheral systems, the capacity for innovation must be understood as the result of the interaction between institutional stability, network governance, and adaptive organizational capacity. In these contexts, these elements do not play a complementary role, but rather constitute the very essence of state action.

Concluding Remarks

The analysis conducted leads to the conclusion that the consolidation of the Center for Innovation in Gerontology (Gerontec) was associated with the articulation of three institutional mechanisms: legal-administrative stability, the formalization of inter-institutional arrangements, and the internal reorganization of work processes.

The documentary evidence indicates that the transformation of FUnATI into a public foundation has increased administrative and budgetary predictability, creating conditions for the continuity of strategic projects. In addition, formal cooperation mechanisms have helped to expand the institution's operational capacity in a context of limited resources.

The results also indicate that the innovation observed at Gerontec was predominantly organizational in nature. Rather than relying on the incorporation of highly complex technologies, the innovative process manifested itself through the institutionalization of routines, the definition of internal workflows, and inter-institutional coordination. This evidence reinforces the interpretation that, in peripheral contexts, innovation depends on the prior consolidation of institutional mechanisms of stability and collaborative governance.

As for the potential for replicability, this does not involve a direct transposition of the model analyzed, but rather the possibility of replicating its underlying mechanisms. Experience suggests that, in regional contexts with similar constraints, the combination of institutional stability, the formalization of strategic partnerships, and organizational coordination capacity can promote the sustainability of innovative initiatives. Replicability therefore depends on three minimum conditions: a stable regulatory framework, formal instruments of cooperation, and administrative capacity for network coordination.

By empirically examining a case study set in the Amazonian context, this study contributes to the debate on public innovation by shifting the analytical focus from technological centrality to the institutional mechanisms that underpin government action. It is concluded that, in structurally challenging regions, the capacity for innovation is less associated with technological availability and more with the incremental building of administrative stability and intersectoral coordination.

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