

# INSTITUTIONAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE CERTIFICATION PROCESS OF BOA ESPERANÇA AS A FAIR-TRADE TOWN

## El Emprendimiento Institucional en el Proceso de Certificación de Boa Esperança (MG) Como Ciudad de Comercio Justo

### ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze institutional entrepreneurship as a driving force for the consolidation of an emergent field. Therefore, it analyzes the role of institutional entrepreneurs for the certification of the city of Boa Esperança, Brazil, as a Fair-Trade Town, based upon the proposition that the creation and transformation of institutions are partly explained by the activities of actors whose resources and positions allow them to articulate and reinforce innovations. The study was done under a qualitative approach, following an exploratory-descriptive case study design. Therefore, the agencies of eight actors that performed key roles in the certification process were studied, along with documental analysis and in locus observations. Results revealed that these actors were invested with legitimacy among stakeholders, were able to articulate their support and shared locally legitimated values. Nevertheless, because there was no need for further negotiation, such theoretical proposition could not be analyzed. Because the case is recent, it was also impossible to assess whether the field's complete stabilization was achieved or not. However, it can be inferred that they had not only a technical role in the certification process, but they were crucial in the building of a symbolic universe that will allow the institutionalization of such structure and its transmission for future generations. This paper contributes by examining theoretical propositions by means of a thorough analysis of facts. It also indicates trends for public, social and private organizations, which must be aware of the behaviors and actions of key actors, in order to legitimate and institutionalize politics and programs.

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### RESUMEN

El propósito de este artículo es estudiar el emprendimiento institucional como motor de consolidación de un campo organizacional emergente. Para ello, se analizó el rol de los emprendedores institucionales en la certificación de Buena Esperanza como Ciudad de Comercio Justo, a partir de la propuesta de que la creación y transformación de instituciones se explica en parte por las actividades de actores con recursos y posiciones que les permitan articular y reforzar innovaciones. Se utilizó el enfoque cualitativo, siguiendo el diseño de un estudio de caso exploratorio-descriptivo. Para ello, se investigaron las agencias de ocho actores con mayor participación en el proceso, además de examinar documentos y observación directa sobre el terreno. Los resultados revelaron que estos actores tenían legitimidad con relación a los stakeholders, pudieron articular su apoyo y compartieron los valores legitimados localmente. Sin embargo, como no había necesidad de mayores negociaciones, esta propuesta teórica no pudo analizarse. Como el caso es reciente, tampoco fue posible verificar si lograron la estabilización completa del campo, que es otra proposición teórica sobre el tema. Como el caso es reciente, tampoco fue posible verificar si lograron la estabilización completa del campo, que es otra proposición teórica sobre el tema. Este trabajo contribuye examinando proposiciones teóricas en un contexto empírico, a través de un análisis exhaustivo de los hechos. También indica lineamientos para la actuación de las organizaciones públicas, sociales y privadas, que deben prestar atención a los comportamientos y acciones de los actores clave para legitimar e institucionalizar políticas o programas.

**Keywords:** Institutionalization; legitimation; organizational field.

**Palabras-clave:** Institucionalización; legitimación; campo organizacional.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Institutions are the product of a historical process that, according to Berger and Luckmann (2004), occurs when patterns defined over time guide the actions of individuals in a particular direction, among so many

possible ones, being subjected to social scrutiny. Once institutionalized, these patterns are presented as a “given” structure, no longer as products of rational actions practiced by the human community. Even in some phases of this process, generally in the initial or changing periods, it is possible to identify the evident action of individual actors

or specific groups that objectively contributed to the institutionalization of these structures. The institutional theory postulates that the creation and transformation of institutions is explained, in part, by the entrepreneurial activities of actors with resources and positions that allow them to articulate and reinforce innovations, as well as to resist the prevailing social structures (DIMAGGIO, 1988).

This article focuses on the study of the phenomenon of institutional entrepreneurship as a relevant force in the consolidation of an emerging organizational field. To this end, the field of relations between small farmers/family farmers and industry/distribution channels and consumption systems for these products was chosen.

One of the practices that have been institutionalized in this organizational field is fair trade, whose central axis is the relationship between producers in the southern hemisphere and importers and marketing platforms in the northern hemisphere, who distribute these products in their own stores or retail through certification seals. The logic, although much discussed, is to reduce the number of intermediaries between producers and consumers, avoiding the concentration of income and power in the production and marketing chain (DRAGUSANU; GIOVANNUCCI; NUNN, 2014).

Freitas *et al.* (2016) point out that, in unfavorable scenarios, rural producers seek market and organizational innovations based on strategic relations of cooperation with social development, in order to access markets and overcome difficulties. According to the authors, fair trade is an example of these competitive arrangements, by “creating different market spaces for producers who are disadvantaged by market dynamics and, at the same time, stimulating solidarity among members through the practice of self-management” (FREITAS *et al.*, 2016, p.40).

Derived from fair trade, the Fair Trade City movement has already certified more than 2,000 cities in 33 countries (FAIR TRADE TOWNS, 2020), with the goal of getting more and more workers involved in fairer trade practices (PEATTIE; SAMUEL, 2018). In Brazil, there are three cities with the certification: Poços de Caldas (MG), Rio de Janeiro (RJ) and Boa Esperança (MG).

To be certified as a Fair Trade City, it is necessary to meet with some requirements and to have the participation of several local actors, articulated in a cohesive and active network of entrepreneurship and mobilization of stakeholders (FRYE, 2015). Such activities give these actors the characteristics of institutional entrepreneurship proposed by the theory (ARPIN *et al.*, 2016). Given the above, the general objective of this article is to analyze

the role of institutional entrepreneurs in the process of certifying Boa Esperança as a Fair Trade City. To make this general objective operational, the following specific objectives are outlined: 1) to identify the actors and communities that acted as institutional entrepreneurs in the process of certifying the municipality as a Fair Trade City; 2) to analyze why the city invested in fair trade; 3) to describe the process of certifying Boa Esperança as a fair trade city; and 4) to understand the contribution of the agency of institutional entrepreneurs to the certification of the municipality.

Tracing this process of transformation or institutional construction through the entrepreneurial agency of certain actors, according to Maguire, Hardy and Lawrence (2004), is an important contribution, because it shows how actors take actions that can result in significant changes in an organizational field. This paper presents a study that combines institutional entrepreneurship and the fair trade movement -- which is still in the initial phase of institutionalization -- in a comprehensive analysis of the facts. This is intended as a contribution to the academic community.

In a practical way, the study of the actions and behaviors of institutional entrepreneurs, although focused on a case study, can indicate certain guidelines for possible future actions by public, social, and private organizations.

## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The institutionalization of a structure depends on a process of objectification, through which routine standards become accessible not only to those who practice them, but also to other groups and individuals who share a system of common meanings (BERGER; LUCKMANN, 2004). This structure, as solid as it may seem, is a social construction. The accumulation of these objectifications occurs when the person performs various typified and socially validated actions: roles, which reinforce the controlling character of the institutions (BERGER; LUCKMANN, 2004). Therefore, the performance of the role represents itself, as well as the institution itself. Nonetheless, according to Berger and Luckmann (2004, p. 106), some roles are strategic for a society, since they represent not only a particular institution, but also “the integration of all institutions into a meaningful world. Ipso facto, these roles naturally help to maintain this integration in the consciousness and behavior of the members of society.”

Tolbert and Zucker (1999) describe the variability of the levels of institutionalization, ranging from the initial stage, when new structural arrangements are implemented in response to specific problems and begin to be adopted by other organizations, to sedimentation, when these structures spread and perpetuate over time. However, this level of total institutionalization is not permanent, and its stability depends on the level of resistance of the detrimental groups, the support of the defending groups and a positive correlation with the desired results. An important concept in institutional analysis is the field of strategic action (FLIGSTEIN; MCADAM, 2011), which is a “space” in which interactions develop between individuals, socio-cultural conditions and other forces leading to institutionalization. It is also recognized as a place of conflict, as relations can be structured through agreement and disagreement. Bourdieu (1989, p. 89) refers to the field as “[...] structured spaces of positions (or posts) whose properties depend on the positions in those spaces [...]” where relationships and disputes occur.

Interest is a condition for the field to function, and it is what stimulates people, generates competition and makes them compete and fight. For Bourdieu (2004) the organizational field is located in its broadest social space -- networks of organizations interact in a symbolic way and the field is treated in an abstract way. This implies dispute, in which dominant agents need to believe in what they are fighting for and defend their interests.

According to Baratter, Ferreira and Costa (2010), patterns of imitation are not identified in emerging fields, as norms and values are in development and not yet shared, as well as power. In mature fields, however, the delimitation of actors and institutional logic is well defined and legitimized. Finally, in fields in crisis, there are contradictions and tensions. It is important to emphasize, according to the authors, that emerging and crisis fields are ideal environments for institutional entrepreneurship.

## 2.1 Legitimacy

Suchman (1995, p. 574) conceptualizes legitimacy as “the widespread perception or assumption that an entity’s actions are desirable, appropriate, or adequate for some socially constructed systems of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions.” For Berger and Luckmann (2004), legitimacy is a “second-order” objectification, in other words, it integrates the meanings of disparate processes already institutionalized, making first-order objectifications objectively accessible and subjectively plausible. Legitimacy arises from the need to transmit an

institutional order to new generations. By losing direct contact with the events that gave rise to the institution, they demand explanations and justifications as to why that institution is desirable for social order. It is a process that involves values (what is right and what is wrong), but it must also be preceded by knowledge of other rules (BERGER; LUCKMANN, 2004).

However, the degree of institutionalization in a society varies, depending on the relationships of the various institutions with each other, on levels of performance and importance (BERGER; LUCKMANN, 2004). This is because segmentation of society creates socially separate sub-universes of meaning, which can cause conflicts of function and meaning between structures. In order not to compete with each other, a universe of meaning is created that gives objective meaning and legitimizes the activities of different institutionalized structures. In the same direction, Suchman (1995) states that organizations must adhere to a collective evaluation and may even deviate from individual values and remain legitimate in the eyes of the general public. Behavior must be legitimate in the eyes of a group of observers (stakeholders), as a whole, to achieve the highest level of legitimacy. In general, it is this audience that perceives the organization as more valuable and more trustworthy.

For Hughes (2007), legitimacy is a collective process of cognitive negotiation between the organization and three main audiences: communities of practice, critics and gatekeepers. When the values, beliefs, and norms underlying the organization’s practice are congruent with what is socially acceptable or desirable, legitimacy is said to be unproblematic. Otherwise, legitimacy is problematic. In this case, the organization needs to “apply”, communicating with its stakeholders to be interpreted in the desirable way. Thus, it can be said that any social agent, from an individual, or a small group, to an organization or the State, is constantly struggling to convince its audiences of the correctness, desirability, and ownership of its actions. Otherwise, the justification for their own existence may be threatened.

Schleifer (2019) distinguishes the mechanisms that influence the search for legitimacy by decision makers in institutions at two levels: external and internal. At the external level, the organization responds to the pressures of stakeholders, which are isomorphic to the organizational field. The internal mechanisms refer to the preferences of institutional entrepreneurs and the negotiation processes between groups of stakeholders.

## 2.2 Institutional entrepreneurship

Institutional entrepreneurship is a theory that fits into the grand narrative of change and transformation in organizations and society. DiMaggio (1988) observed that institutions do not have given structures, nor do they arise only from external factors; on the contrary, they are the product of the agency of individual actors or groups that support or oppose prevailing practices. These actors, called institutional entrepreneurs, contribute to the creation or transformation of institutions. Battilana, Leca and Boxenbaum (2009), as well as Reynolds, Sheehan and Hilliard (2018) describe institutional entrepreneurs as individual or organizational agents who initiate and lead the implementation of changes in existing institutions, although the original intention is not to change the institutional environment and regardless of whether the changes were successfully implemented. The authors emphasize that these changes can be initiated within the boundaries of an organization or in a broader institutional context, of which the actor is part of.

According to Maguire, Hardy and Lawrence (2004), the term institutional entrepreneurship relates to the activities of actors who have an interest in certain arrangements and raise funds for the creation or modification of social structures. Social actors, previously seen as individuals and groups naturally inserted in their contexts, are in fact within an actor-environmental tension (MEYER, 2007). In this way, the social environment affects the behaviors and ideas of the actors. According to Qureshi, Kistruck and Bhatt (2016), institutional entrepreneurship sheds light on the agency of individuals, as before, institutional changes were assumed to be the result of external shocks and pressures and not the result of the rational action of actors intermingled in their structures.

Ko and Liu (2020) highlight the role of institutional entrepreneurship in organizational transformation, summarizing this relationship in three dimensions: the introduction of new practices to explore opportunities, the development of organizational structures and operating procedures (i.e., organizational forms) to respond to changes in the environment, and the establishment of legitimacy to resolve stakeholders' objections to institutional changes.

Hoogstraaten, Frenken and Boon (2020) emphasize that institutional entrepreneurship is no longer a term for the characteristics and practices of certain individuals and groups, but rather a complete theory, including strategic processes and hypotheses about the conditions under which this phenomenon tends to emerge. The theories on

institutional entrepreneurship, in their different emphases and approaches, are unanimous in contemplating three dimensions that underlie this phenomenon: 1) the social position of the actors, with its shades of legitimacy and power; 2) the structure of the field, in its different levels of stabilization, maturity and dispute; and 3) deliberate strategic action, which requires the articulation of resources to achieve objectives and interest in change.

It is important to emphasize that the "subject position" in a field is a socially constructed and legitimated identity, determined by the quantity and quality of the relationships established, and the central position can give access to the different resources available in the field and the legitimacy of its position allows the mobilization of allies (MAGUIRE; HARDY; LAWRENCE, 2004; BARATTER; FERREIRA; COSTA, 2010; KO; LIU, 2020). For this reason, they tend to occupy positions considered legitimate by stakeholders, facilitating social connections and fund raising. Institutional entrepreneurs move through different fields and this mobility allows them to transfer knowledge from one field to another, as well as a greater capacity to face objections and resistance (QURESHI; KISTRUCK; BHATT, 2016; HOOGSTRAATEN; FRENKEN; BOON, 2020; KO; LIU, 2020).

Heidanpää and Borgström (2014), when studying the motivations for biodiversity protection, concluded that institutional entrepreneurship promoted trust between stakeholders and beneficiaries and the consequent trust between agents caused actors to change their behavior. Three reasons were identified for this success: first, there was an active institutional entrepreneur who initiated the transformation scheme; second, this actor created social incentives for the creation of rules and principles by stakeholders, thus developing trust among the agents. Finally, changes in habits and actions made the schemes adapt to the practices and customs of the environment.

Persuasive argumentation and political negotiation are strategies to motivate new practices, since in this way it is possible to deal with different stakeholders.

Maguire, Hardy and Lawrence (2004) argue that, in addition to theorizing new practices to promote solutions for all, one must theorize about political chains capable of showing the consequences of supporting or not supporting the new practices, mobilizing stakeholders through negotiations, pacts, agreements and reciprocal concessions. The authors state that one of the roles of the entrepreneur is to be part of the collective construction of meanings, so that the new practice makes sense to the people and organizations with which it must be articulated.



According to Maguire, Hardy and Lawrence (2004), different forms of power influence institutional change, since even actors who do not occupy dominant positions can act as entrepreneurs, influence a field and reach it according to their interests. According to Baratter, Ferreira and Costa (2010) the most powerful actors are able to control enough resources to implement change, but when there is a certain degree of dependence on other actors, bargaining and negotiations are inevitable.

Major, Conceição and Clegg (2018) highlight this interconnection between power and institutionalization, since both the stability of an institution and its response to pressures are due to a circuit of social integration in which rules are both the source and the consequence of these power relations. Reynolds, Sheehan and Hilliard (2018) corroborate this by stating that in the process of creating institutions, the social skills of the actors are determined and this depends mainly on power and their positions in the field.

However, in mature or apparently stabilized fields, where power relations are more consolidated, individuals in privileged positions in this circuit of forces will tend to hinder change-oriented business actions, since they benefit from the status quo. Actors on the periphery of the fields will therefore be more inclined towards institutional entrepreneurship, as they are not favored by the current rules (HOOGSTRAATEN; FRENKEN; BOON, 2020)

According to Major, Conceição and Clegg (2018), no field is static, even when apparently sedimented. Disputes over charges and negotiations of interests occur constantly in any social space. However, emerging fields or fields in crisis are more prone to the emergence of institutional entrepreneurship (BATTILANA; LECA; BOXENBAUM, 2009; HOOGSTRAATEN; FRENKEN; BOON, 2020).

In an emerging field, the network of actors is heterogeneous in its perspectives and this diversity can make it difficult to achieve success, since there must be a solution capable of providing reasons that satisfy all the actors and guarantee support for the changes (MAGUIRE; HARDY; LAWRENCE, 2004). This is precisely why emerging fields favor the emergence of institutional entrepreneurship, since there are no standards to emulate and norms and values are still under development (BATTILANA; LECA; BOXENBAUM, 2009; BARATTER; FERREIRA; COSTA, 2010; HOOGSTRAATEN; FRENKEN; BOON, 2020). Onsongo (2019) highlights that institutional entrepreneurship emerges where there is an absence or weakness of formal market institutions, where there are gaps that occur in the

interface between formal and informal institutions and also where policies are lacking.

Maguire, Hardy and Lawrence (2004) observed that new practices are institutionalized in the emerging field, linking them to existing organizational routines. Thus, as new practices are combined with routines, some relationships are strengthened and others are not, in order to align the values of different stakeholders, allowing the creation of new standards in the field. According to the authors, since there are no consolidated standards in emerging fields, what is legitimate for one group may not be legitimate for another. In this way, new standards are created in the institutionalization phase, since the new practices are aligned with the interests of the different stakeholder groups.

Maguire, Hardy and Lawrence (2004) also argue that emerging fields have potential for work, but need to be structured to attract groups of actors. Therefore, in order to access stakeholders, it is necessary to differentiate arguments due to the existence of different types of stakeholders, the dynamics of problems and solutions being significantly more heterogeneous than in mature fields. Consequently, the diversity of views shows that, if institutional entrepreneurs were to focus on only one type of persuasion, they would be less likely to succeed. Baratter, Ferreira and Costa (2010) point out that mobilizing allies can be a challenge for actors, as there may be a limited vision of the possibilities for change and a restriction of vision beyond the borders of the field. In view of the above, it is necessary for actors to have legitimacy to gain the trust of stakeholders.

One way of articulating stakeholders' support is by demonstrating the benefits that the new structure can bring, thereby increasing the possibilities of its reproduction, through imitative practices (GASBARRO; RIZZI; FREY, 2018).

Woolthuis *et al.* (2013) show, based on three case studies, how institutional entrepreneurs play a relevant role in sustainable urban development. In this work, there are six tactics used by entrepreneurs to influence formal and informal institutions. The first tactic was called framing (reference framework), which consists of formatting ideas, putting in them positive emotions about sustainable development. The second tactic was theorizing, which was developed with moral and pragmatic arguments. The third tactic was collaboration, in which divergent interests were merged and new interests and practices were created. The fourth tactic was based on the importance of interaction with local authorities for sustainable development, a goal to be achieved in the process. Negotiation was the fifth

tactic, which played an important role in achieving the objective. Finally, the sixth tactic was standardization, realizing that organizations could develop competitive advantages by creating a standard or certification. It can be concluded, therefore, that the joint action succeeded in changing the institutional context of the projects, thus increasing their viability.

Strategic action is crucial in the process of institutional entrepreneurship. The success rate in institutional transformation is associated with the articulation between the conditions of the field and the characteristics of the actors, which implies a strategic vision, the articulation of stakeholders with a with a perspective of support and legitimization, and the formation of strategic alliances (GASBARRO; RIZZI; FREY, 2018; HOOGSTRAATEN; FRENKEN; BOON, 2020; TIBERIUS; RIETZ; BOUNCKEN, 2020).

Maguire, Hardy and Lawrence (2004) propose six conditions that synthesize the emergence of these institutional entrepreneurs in emerging fields: (1) they tend to be actors whose positions give them legitimacy in the eyes of diverse stakeholders; (2) they tend to be actors whose subject positions allow them to be a bridge between different stakeholders and access dispersed sets of resources; (3) they theorize new practices by bringing together a wide range of arguments that reflect the interests of different stakeholders; (4) they theorize on new practices through the development of stable coalitions of various stakeholders; through political tactics, such as negotiation, bargaining, and consensus; (5) they institutionalize new practices by linking them to existing routines and, in doing so, stabilizing field-level relationships; and (6) they institutionalize new practices by aligning them with the values of different stakeholders; and, in doing so, creating new field-level standards.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

The research was developed under the qualitative exploratory-descriptive approach (GIL, 2008). To this end, a case study was conducted in the municipality of Boa Esperança, Minas Gerais. According to Gil (2008, p. 57) “the case study is characterized by the deep and exhaustive study of one or a few objects, in order to allow their broad and detailed knowledge”. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that the validity of the results has an idiographic character, in order to understand a single event located in a time or place (OUTHWAITE; BOTTOMORE, 1996). In this way, the results of the work are limited to the

city of Boa Esperança and these cannot be generalized, although they serve as a parameter of comparison with similar studies.

#### 3.1 Data collection and analysis procedures

Two main data sources were used: primary data, through in-depth interviews, and secondary data, through documentary research.

The interviews were conducted in Boa Esperança, with actors directly or indirectly involved in the city's certification, designated by the Strengthening Manager of the Latin American and Caribbean Network of Fair Trade Small Producers and Workers (CLAC). Interviews were conducted with fair trade certified coffee producers and members of the Boa Esperança Specialty Coffee Producers' Cooperative; the President and Director of the cooperative; the municipal secretaries of Agriculture and Tourism; the Civil Society representative; and the local media representative. In addition to interviews with these actors, some citizens of the city - including hotel and supermarket employees - were asked questions about fair trade knowledge.

The interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees and were transcribed in full, so that spontaneity was captured. All statements were categorized and subsequently placed in correspondence with the relevant theoretical axis. This procedure was carried out through thematic analysis. This tool is used in qualitative research based on text (speeches, writings, images, or any other material that expresses meaning) to imprint rigor and reliability in the process. It basically consists of identifying patterns and themes in qualitative data that are relevant to the research (FEREDAY; MUIR-COCHRANE, 2006; MAGUIRE; DELAHUNT, 2017). This analysis is carried out in six steps: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, topic search, topic review, topic definition, and compilation (BRAUN; CLARKE, 2006). The six proposals of Maguire, Hardy and Lawrence (2004), regarding the emergence of institutional entrepreneurs in emerging fields, were taken as a reference, as shown in Table 1. Therefore, the topics sought in the interviews were based on these thematic axes. This thematic categorization was a necessary preliminary step to proceed with the content analysis, according to Bardin's method (2016, p. 48) which, in summary, consists of the “description of the content of the indicator messages (quantitative or not) that allow the inference of knowledge related to the production/reception conditions (inferred variables) of these messages.”

**TABLE 1** – Proposals from Maguire, Hardy and Lawrence (2004) and research categories

Proposals on the position of institutional entrepreneurs in emerging fields	Categories searched in interviews and documents
1. They are usually actors whose subject positions give them legitimacy in front of the different stakeholders.	Position of the actor in the field
2. They are usually actors whose subject positions allow them to be a bridge between different stakeholders and to access dispersed sets of resources.	Position of the actor able to access all stakeholders and gather resources
3. They will theorize new practices by bringing together a wide range of arguments that reflect the interests of different stakeholders.	Argument used
4. They will theorize new practices by developing stable coalitions of diverse stakeholders through political tactics such as bargaining, negotiation, and consensus.	Political negotiation carried out
5. Institutionalize new practices, linking them to existing routines and, in doing so, stabilize relationships at the field level.	New practices linked to routine to institutionalize and stabilize in the field
6. Institutionalize new practices by aligning them with the values of different stakeholders. and, in doing so, create new standards in the field.	Alignment with stakeholder values

Source: Elaborated by the authors

The interviews with the actors involved in the certification process were guided by a single script, composed of 27 open-ended questions, aligned with the 6 thematic axes proposed by Maguire, Hardy and Lawrence (2004): identify the actor's position in the field; identify if the actor's position was able to access stakeholder groups and pool resources; identify the (persuasive) argument used; identify if there was political negotiation and, if so, how it was conducted; identify if new practices were linked to routines to institutionalize and stabilize in the field; identify if practices have been aligned with stakeholder values. The same script was presented to all respondents, but with some flexibility, given the diversity of profiles and roles.

The information collected through interviews was complemented by documentary analysis, as official documents and reports were found. Most of the documents were news taken from the Internet, in sites such as the Municipality of Boa Esperança, CLAC, Brazilian Fair Trade Platform (BRFAIR), Dos Costas Cooperative, fair trade towns. In addition, the official declaration of Fair Trade City was used.

The documents were analyzed through thematic analysis, in relation to: technical position of the actor, validating the positions informed in the interviews; legitimacy of the actor, mainly in news stories; compilation of resources, looking for facts that can show some type of institutional association won by the entrepreneurs; and linking new practices to routines, looking for events and activities in which fair trade disclosure materials were inserted.

## 4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

First, a brief description is given of the arrival of the fair trade concept in Boa Esperança. Then, the research data (interviews and documents) are presented, structured according to the six propositions of Maguire, Hardy and Lawrence (2004), already mentioned in this article.

### 4.1 Fair trade and its arrival in Boa Esperança

Boa Esperança is a municipality located in the south of Minas Gerais with an estimated population of 40,219 people. It has a Municipal Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.704 and a per capita GDP of R\$ 20,451.28, ranking 2,336th among Brazilian cities and 234th in Minas Gerais (IBGE, 2020). According to Atlas Brasil (2019), 28.65% of the employed population over 18 years of age worked in the agricultural sector and 29.91% were in a situation of socioeconomic vulnerability.

Boa Esperança was initiated in the fair trade movement by the Dos Costas Cooperative, which originated in the association of 49 farmers affected by the rural exodus, due to the expansion of large coffee farms (CLAC, 2018). Some of these producers perceived, in fair trade, an opportunity to show the difference of their coffee in the market. Thus, after a series of efforts, the fair trade seal was achieved in 2008. In 2010, representing Brazil, the president of Dos Costas Cooperative, was elected by Fairtrade Labeling Organizations (FLO) - global certifier of fair trade products - as one of the members of the Advisory Council. After a few years,

in 2015, the process of trying to certify the city of Boa Esperança as a Fair Trade City began.

In October 2015, the then CLAC coordinator, Marco Consicione, visited Boa Esperança (BRFAIR's headquarters at that time). Since then, producers, local authorities and civil society have held meetings to plan and organize to meet the requirements, culminating in the signing of the declaration of support for the campaign. An agreement was signed between BRFAIR and Dos Costas Cooperative (representing small local producers), the mayor (representing the local government) and the Chamber of Commerce to develop activities with the theme "Fair Trade: a good hope for all."

On December 18, 2015, a declaration was signed in which local actors committed to meet the criteria for city certification. To this end, they carried out coffee promotion actions together with collaborating establishments, awareness-raising tastings on the consumption of local products, participation in events attended by the Dos Costas Cooperative and campaign promotion materials. With the success of the "Boa Esperança for Fair Trade" campaign initiated in 2015, the international recognition ceremony of "Boa Esperança as a Latin American City for Fair Trade" or "Fair Trade Town" was held in November 2017.

#### 4.2 The role of the actors in the certification of Boa Esperança

Interviewees mentioned that the main motivation for the city's certification was the attempt to raise awareness of the importance of strengthening the local economy, since most of the agricultural products consumed in the city come from other regions of the state and the country. The president of the cooperative argued that, if people from other countries consume Boa Esperança fair trade coffee, the local population could become aware and consume products from the city. Certification would be a way for the local population to become aware and understand the importance of local consumption. The interest was to strengthen the local economy as a

whole, not just coffee producers. Respondents were very confident in the quality of the city's products. Several of them demonstrated knowledge of the general concept of fair trade, but focused exclusively on family farming and not on the fair trade certification itself. The city was officially certified in 2017 with the work of actors who acted as institutional entrepreneurs in this still emerging field. Initial contacts indicated the critical involvement of eight actors, members of the certification committee (Table 2). After analyzing interviews and documents, the degree of involvement of the actors was identified through participation requirements that approached the six basic proposals in this research, as shown in Table 3.

It is possible to perceive that participation in the activities was heterogeneous, in spite of being all members of the certification committee. Actors A and B, the strengthening manager and the president of the cooperative, respectively, achieved the highest degree of participation. This is justified by the participation of these actors in direct contact with fair trade organizations, so they are or have been members of CLAC and have already had direct contact with BRFAIR (the fair trade representative in Brazil) or actively participated in its management. The two businessmen mentioned have worked with groups to raise resources, used persuasive arguments, and are considered legitimate. However, it is understood that all those involved were of particular importance for the certification to be carried out.

##### 4.2.1 Position of subject of institutional entrepreneurs

Maguire, Hardy and Lawrence (2004) showed that aspects such as legitimacy helped actors to achieve success, especially in emerging fields where there is no concrete definition of the rules. This is because legitimate institutional entrepreneurs tend to obtain more resources such as support, credibility and financial resources. Therefore, the categories sought in the interviews and documents refer to the actors' positions in the field and their ability to access actors and gather resources.

**TABLE 2** – Institutional Entrepreneurs (legend)

A - Strengthening Manager CLAC	E - Secretary of Tourism and businessman
B - President of the Cooperative and coffee producer	F - Local media representative
C - Director of the Cooperative and coffee producer	G - Civil society representative and businessman
D - Secretary of Agriculture of the Municipality and producer	H - Cooperative coffee producer

Source: Elaborated by the authors



**TABLE 3** – Actors participation by activity

Actors	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Part of the committee	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
It is considered legitimate	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	-
Allowed position to gather more resources	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-
Used arguments to convince	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-
Articulated with any group	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	-	-	-
Coordinated meetings	Yes	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Attended events	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Direct contact with BRFAIR	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	-	-	-	-
Direct contact with CLAC	Yes	Yes	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	9	8	6	6	6	5	4	2

Source: Elaborated by the authors

One of the factors that most influenced the legitimacy of the actors was the direct relationship with fair trade institutions. Being a small town, in Boa Esperança many people know each other personally, so they are called by the name of their parents or grandparents (“Mr. So-and-so”), as they are usually recognized by the family. One interviewee mentioned: “(...) I come from a very traditional family in Boa Esperança, so that gave me great support, right? (...)” Thus, it was pointed out that one of the aspects that gives legitimacy is the fact that it belongs to traditional families. Most of the interviewees belong to known families in the region and some are related to each other. This family relationship, in a city where people know each other more intimately, can be a great precursor of legitimacy. According to Fligstein and McAdam (2011) the amount of power of each actor can establish their position in the field, which legitimizes their ideas, values and behaviors.

Another source of legitimacy is work, which turned out to be more important to respondents than family ties. Interviewee C said that despite having family members in political circles and being known, his prestige comes from the cooperative. Interviewee D also attributes her legitimacy to the cooperative and for having a “righteous life.” Interviewee A emphasized that the work she has been doing has brought her recognition, since before she was called “So-and-so’s daughter” and today her father is called the father of interviewee A.

All actors are, in some way, recognized for some specific reason. Schleifer (2019) states that gaining legitimacy from institutional entrepreneurs can become difficult in the face of the heterogeneity of social groups. In

this case, although the group is heterogeneous in technical terms, that is, each plays a different role and carries out different activities, the idea spread easily, since the interviewees seemed to share the same symbolic systems and the same socio-cultural environment. Either they studied in the same school, or they are related, or they share the same religious faith and most are coffee producers or have been part of the environment at some point. Therefore, it can be considered that, despite occupying different positions and playing different technical roles, these actors share the same symbolic systems and the same socio-cultural environment, which may have facilitated the spread and acceptance of the idea of city certification.

Given the above, it can be interpreted that proposition 1 is reflected in the results of the research - *institutional entrepreneurs in emerging fields tend to be actors whose subject positions give them legitimacy vis-à-vis the various stakeholders*.

The interviews also examined the relationship structure that connected each of the institutional entrepreneurs with other positions, thus reflecting on the association of resources in the field.

One of the works carried out in Boa Esperança is precisely to make the population and producers aware that the product must be sold internally and that fair trade is the best thing for the city. As a result, in an opportunity to carry out the fair trade event, resistance was found to carry it out alongside marketers, since the proposal to have a fair trade stand distributing coffee and information brought fear to the approach and withdrawal of customers from the fair. After all, fair trade was still unknown to most of the city’s population. Due to the resistance encountered by the

marketers, the Municipal Secretary of Tourism, who comes from a family that has worked in food-free markets selling their own products, was a link to them. It was necessary to establish a relationship to explain and show that the city's certification work would be beneficial to everyone, especially small producers. It was therefore possible to use the suppliers' point of sale for some fair trade events.

An important work of influencing other stakeholders for the collection of resources translated into support and diffusion was done by the representative of the local media, who did an awareness work during his program in the radio station. Another important work is being done with the children, in schools, on fair trade. A teacher who teaches in public schools in the city became interested in fair trade in the middle of the diffusion that was carried out and decided to support the certification, being the bridge for students. The goal is to do a long-term work to raise awareness among children.

One of the committee members, a representative of the civil entity and a supporter of the project, owns a supermarket and, despite not having spoken directly with any interested party, displayed banners in his store and paid for advertising inserts in the city's newspaper, promoting fair trade and encouraging the consumption of the city's products. This interviewee was introduced to fair trade by the president of the cooperative, with whom he has been a friend for some years.

Both the president of the cooperative and CLAC's Strengthening Manager are important actors in the city's certification. In 2014, when the manager, a citizen of Boa Esperança, began to be part of CLAC, the "Latin American Cities and Towns for Fair Trade" campaign was also launched, whose focus is to involve producers as well as public authorities and society. At that time, the president of the coffee cooperative was one of the representatives of CLAC's coffee network, in addition to being the president of BRFAIR. This direct involvement with fair trade organizations in Latin America made it possible to collect resources more quickly and effectively.

With the intention of taking the campaign to Boa Esperança, the president of the cooperative and the coordinator managed to get the campaign coordinator to visit the city to start meetings with the Mayor and local establishments. After a series of meetings, the first formal step of the campaign was taken, which was the signing of the intention to be a fair trade city, in 2015. It is noted that relationships are important in raising resources. Hence, according to the data presented and discussed in this section, it can be inferred that proposition 2 can be

verified in the case analyzed - institutional entrepreneurs in emerging fields tend to be actors whose subject positions allow them to be a bridge between various stakeholders and to have access to dispersed groups of resources.

#### 4.2.2 Theorizing for the adoption of new practices

Baratter, Ferreira and Costa (2010) argue that one of the roles of the entrepreneur is to make the new practice meaningful to the people and organizations with which it must be linked, which is possible through persuasion, alignment and translation of interests. The transmission of ideas is related to the theorizing process, so in order to get supporters, it is necessary to generate arguments. In the process of theorization "it is not enough to transmit ideas, it is necessary to build arguments that make sense to the other actors" (BARATTER; FERREIRA; COSTA, 2010, p. 259).

One of the possible strategies to motivate the integration of new practices in a field is argumentation. In emerging fields, there is a great heterogeneity of stakeholders, so each one is interested in a part of the certification. In this way, it could be perceived that, with each part, an argument and a type of language was used. Interviewee E stated that he always seeks to develop a didactic approach promoting the concept of fair trade:

(...) If I am going to talk to a businessman who owns a supermarket chain, it is clear that the trend of conversation, despite the fact that the concept is the same, is different. (...) You cannot put everyone in a room and want a more humble person to understand what is more focused on a concept and that in some aspects is complex and difficult to understand. (Secretary of Tourism. Interview)

This opinion is corroborated by the interviewee D, who said that she used a language adapted to the simplest people and the most technical language for those who are technicians.

Since one of the requirements for certification was the promotion of fair trade and support for small producers, some of the arguments were related to the use and consumption of products produced and grown in the city. The Secretary of Agriculture had as its main argument with society the fact that knowledge is necessary, the search for the origin of the product, which is simplified when it is grown locally. The secretary mentioned that the municipality follows up with agricultural technicians and this makes it easier for buyers to understand what they are consuming. A similar argument was used by the local media representative, who emphasized the quality of the

products, as well as increased income for producers and a greater volume of tax collection for the municipality. This actor also mentioned that, after certification, small producers improved their quality of life. The houses are better structured and equipped. These arguments were used to demonstrate that fair trade was a positive thing.

CLAC's Strengthening Coordinator said that, with each interest group, an argument was made to persuade them:

Each had an approach. With the producers, it was really about income diversification and coffee promotion, valuing their work, right? With the public authorities it was the [economy] of Boa Esperança, the possibility of bringing tourists. With local entrepreneurs we tried to promote this establishment as a fair trade establishment, we are promoting it, by placing this establishment on a fair trade map of the city, to expand purchase, a fair trade company, these ideas focused more on marketing. (CLAC's Coordinator. Interview)

With the producers, it was about income diversification and promotion of coffee. With Public Administrations, making the city known and the possibility of attracting more tourists and, with the local traders, promoting the establishments as points of sale. When asked about the implementation of "win-win" arguments, it was found that most of the committee's actors affirmed that this type of argument exists. The actors, therefore, articulated according to their interest and knowledge of the field, valuing the benefits they believed the movement would bring to each stakeholder.

This argument focused on the benefits that fair trade could bring to the city echoes the proposals of Gasbarro, Rizzi and Frey (2018), in terms of seeking legitimacy through the demonstration of profits.

In addition, the profile of the institutional entrepreneurs in Boa Esperança places them as agents of the outskirts of the coffee field. Far from occupying a privileged place, the interest in fair trade is presented as an alternative to transform the coffee field, which has been stabilized and concentrated for a long time in the hands of the large exporting and multinational agro-industry, to establish their interests there. This condition is in line with the arguments of Hoogstraaten, Frenken and Boon (2020), who emphasize that actors from the periphery have a greater inclination towards institutional entrepreneurship.

In this way, it can be inferred that proposition 3 manifests itself in the context studied - institutional entrepreneurs in emerging fields will theorize new practices through the grouping of a wide range of arguments that translate the interests of the various stakeholders.

According to Maguire, Hardy and Lawrence (2004), another strategy of theorization involves political negotiation and haggling to ensure that all stakeholders accept the new practices or, at least, do not hinder their introduction. Therefore, it was necessary to identify in the data collected how to negotiate when there were disagreements and when the arguments were not sufficient for a consensus. It was noted that one of the disagreements was related to the difficulty of maintaining the initially proposed approach. Since only coffee was certified as fair trade, it was questioned how other products could be classified as fair trade. As such, the divergence was about expanding certification, creating seals for establishments and other products that could be certified, to increase the scope, without necessarily involving fair trade organizations. Other actors thought first about obtaining certification from the city and then about other approaches. It was noted that the most involved actors disagreed with some ideas that came out of the general line of Fair Trade City. However, disagreements over more out-of-focus ideas come from peripheral actors, who may, in some cases, be held responsible for introducing new practices, as they have less knowledge of the standards and this makes them more susceptible to ideas for innovation.

CLAC's Strengthening Coordinator maintained that fair trade is, in fact, a broad movement that encompasses the appreciation of local products, of family agriculture. But she said that these discussions were in fact more a matter of understanding the concept. Furthermore, the president of the cooperative, on this same topic, justified that there are these divergences from the main approach, "(...) because it is a very appealing topic, let's say the truth, it is a topic that encourages many ideas, so it becomes a factory of ideas and it is difficult to compress it into a single thing (...)"

In addition to the discussions on product and property certification, the debate on political participation in the process was highlighted. According to fair trade rules, local authorities must participate in fair trade initiatives to achieve city certification. However, while some actors considered it important to involve the political class in the certification process, another actor disagreed, believing that certification could not become a political issue. One of the actors even disagreed with the meetings held at city hall: "(...) there [in the mayor's office] it is not possible, because afterwards we will have to owe a favor". So, one of the alternatives to this was to leave municipal policy as a low priority criterion for the time being, since the issue was controversial and could not be

addressed at a time when the certification process was so new and still unstable.

Despite these arguments, in general, respondents did not feel that there were serious disagreements, only discussions about ideas that everyone brought to the meetings. When asked who calmed or measured the meetings, all cited CLAC's Strengthening Coordinator. Therefore, it was understood that there was no negotiation or bargaining per se, since everyone was interested in certification. The actors sought support for certification. The argument that everyone would win, made in the previous session, was everyone's thought. In this way, it was noted that the theorization went through the development of stable coalitions, but without bargaining, only by majority consensus. Thus, proposition 4 was only partially verified: institutional entrepreneurs in emerging fields will theorize new practices by developing stable coalitions of different stakeholders through political tactics, such as bargaining, negotiation, and consensus.

#### 4.2.3 Institutionalization of new practices

The last two proposals refer to the process in which institutional entrepreneurs bring new practices to institutionalization in the field. In emerging fields, there is no standard of sedimented rules to follow, in addition to greater distance and heterogeneity of stakeholders, which makes institutionalization more difficult and slower (MAGUIRE; HARDY; LAWRENCE, 2004). For the authors, in emerging fields, there are two ways of institutionalizing new practices: linking them to existing routines in the field and aligning them with pre-existing stakeholder values.

A certification process, despite having the same values, is unique in each place. Thus, there were no practices to undo or replace in the city with the objective of institutionalizing. The operationalization to achieve certification was carried out by incorporating into the city routines criteria that introduced the concept of fair trade in the city. In order to make its fair trade coffee also known in the national market, the cooperative began to hold tasting events for city residents and supermarkets, bakeries and fruit shops began to sell the product.

Events were held that showed what fair trade is and what city certification can bring to citizens. Little by little, people understood that fair trade was not just for coffee, but something bigger, to strengthen the local economy as a whole. It was noticed through interviews and documents that the events that existed in the city, in public spaces such as schools, squares, and the lake shore,

were complemented by the participation of the certification actors in the promotion. CLAC's Strengthening Manager mentioned the installation of stands at the events held by the municipality and stated that a very intense promotion work was carried out in 2015 and 2016.

A public-school teacher brought the fair trade city project into the school so that students would become aware and share the information with their parents. In addition, students are looking to learn about fair trade and are looking to the cooperative to learn about coffee.

Despite these facts, when asked about certification acceptance and its consequent institutionalization, the actors interviewed stated that this has not yet happened. Fair trade is still not well known in the city. One of the actors mentioned that even educated people still do not know what the movement is and what it can bring to the city. Based on the data and the discussion presented, the fifth proposition could only be partially observed: institutional entrepreneurs in emerging fields will institutionalize new practices, linking them to existing routines and, in doing so, stabilize relationships in the field level. The bias is due to the non-stabilization presented in the field studied. However, the attempt at institutionalization is being made by linking new practices to existing ones.

It is known that the values of the fair trade movement are linked to transparency, the creation of opportunities for the most disadvantaged, a commitment to gender equality and the economic empowerment of women, good working conditions and respect for the environment. When interviewed, many actors had difficulty understanding the question, so some findings had to be made through the information gathered during the stay of one of the researchers in Boa Esperança. As an example, next to the cooperative there is a cafeteria with a glass screen, which shows how the coffee is processed, showing transparency on the part of the administration towards the consumer. In addition, something that calls a lot of attention is the sale of cakes made by the wives of the producers, who made them and then sold them in the cafeteria. This was a way for the cooperative to actively participate in the empowerment of women. This is remarkable, but it was not said in the interviews.

It is necessary that the cooperative aligns itself with the values of the movement, since it is a certified fair trade cooperative, audited every year. There is an internal audit, in which people spend an average of three days auditing accounts and calculating the award. The Fair Trade award is an amount paid to producers in addition to the selling



price of the product. This award should be used to invest in the business, the community, or the social and economic development of the workers. Everything is decided democratically by the producers with an external audit.

The Secretary of Agriculture, who is also a producer, says that there is this alignment of values, because people have the same ideas and she advocated that, for the world to be improved, the environment in which people live must first be improved.

(...) People are being placed in time, at the right moment, who have more or less the same ideas. How can we improve the world if we do not improve our environment? I really like to play at the [Secretary's] meetings that we will first moralize the municipalities (...). We have a new mayor, an idealist, with a new goal, he joined, he loved the idea, so at the time he opened the doors of the city to us to do this work. (Secretary of Agriculture. Interview)

CLAC's Strengthening Coordinator also believes that there is an alignment of values in terms of sustainability, environment, valuation, and empowerment of small producers. According to her, when they started this venture, they were choosing people who shared the same thinking, who believed in the benefits of fair trade. She referred to this as a strategy: "Let's involve people, they believe, they work."

Therefore, this alignment of values existed in some actors and stakeholders. This allows us to infer that the sixth proposition occurred in the case studied: institutional entrepreneurs in emerging fields will institutionalize new practices by aligning them with the values of the different stakeholders and, in doing so, will create new norms in the field level.

## 5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This work was motivated by the combination of the emergence of the field of fair trade in Brazil, in particular the Fair Trade Cities and contributions to the study of institutional entrepreneurship. The context was analyzed so that the activities of the entrepreneurs would show their positions in the field, their strategies, and their challenges in a still emerging field. The discussions throughout the study aimed, therefore, to offer subsidies for the elaboration of a response to the objective of this research: what is the role of institutional entrepreneurs in the certification of Boa Esperança as a Fair Trade City?

The answer to this question required the identification of the actors (individual and collective)

that acted as institutional entrepreneurs, the analysis of the reason why the city of Boa Esperança invested in fair trade, the description of the certification process and, finally, the identification of how the agency of institutional entrepreneurs contributed to the certification of the municipality of Boa Esperança (MG) as a Fair Trade City. For the research question to be answered, it is necessary to take up again some considerations presented throughout the study. According to Maguire, Hardy and Lawrence (2004) the concept of institutional entrepreneurs arose from the need to understand how institutions arise and what the activities of these entrepreneurs are for this purpose.

Therefore, among the six proposals studied as research categories, four were found to be present in the case and two were partially verified. These results allowed us to answer the question initially posed in this research, allowing us to affirm that the institutional entrepreneurs played a strategic role in the process of certifying the city of Boa Esperança (MG) as a Fair Trade City, but they have also been playing a fundamental role in the construction of a symbolic universe that will allow the institutionalization of this structure and its transmission to future generations.

The elements obtained through the analysis of data in the interviews and the documentary research contributed to the investigation, mainly regarding the interviews, limitations that many times could not be avoided. The emotional manifestations, opinions, and difficulties in sticking to the questions of the interviewees are recognized as limitations of this study. Difficulties were often encountered due to the lack of in-depth knowledge of certification on the part of some actors, and sometimes confusion between the Fair Trade certification of coffee from Dos Costas Cooperative and the certification actually studied, from Fair Trade City. Additionally, it should be noted that the purpose of this research was not to generalize the role of the actors in certification, but only in the certification of the city of Boa Esperança. Consequently, further research on the subject may cover certification in general in Latin America and the Caribbean, places within the reach of CLAC, Latin American and Caribbean Network of Fair Trade Small Producers and Workers.

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