

# Co-production and Crisis Management: Overcoming COVID-19 and the Hunger Pandemics

## *Coproducción y gestión de crisis: superando el COVID-19 y las pandemias del hambre*

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**The COVID-19 pandemic spread a multidimensional crisis of never-before-experienced proportions. Because of it, the situation in Brazil, which already had a scenario of great vulnerabilities and social disparities prior to the pandemic, was aggravated. The crisis and the fragility of the State's responses to the emerging demands were evidenced by the effort of the organized civil society to meet such demands. This study analyses the crisis management and co-production process during the COVID-19 pandemic in the city of Santa Maria-RS, in 2020, via the Mesa Brasil food bank program. The chosen research strategy was the case study. Data collection was carried out through documentary research, interviews and surveys with managers of participating institutions in the Mesa Brasil program. For the results, a content analysis technique was undertaken. The study allowed to conclude that crisis management, through co-participation, allows the understanding of the use of innovative and collective strategies as a means to overcome the emerging difficulties arising from crises in which social vulnerability increases. The research also explains how, in the specific context of the pandemic crisis, co-production of public services stood out for the adhesion of organizations, sharing responsibility and power in the production and delivery of public services to maintain food security and reduce food waste.**

**Keywords: crisis management, co-production, food security, Mesa Brasil, COVID-19 pandemic**

La pandemia de COVID-19 propagó una crisis multidimensional de proporciones nunca antes experimentadas. Debido a ella la situación en Brasil, que ya contaba con un escenario de grandes vulnerabilidades y disparidades sociales, fue agravada. La crisis y la fragilidad de las respuestas del Estado a las demandas emergentes se evidenciaron en el esfuerzo de la sociedad civil organizada por atender dichas demandas. Este estudio analiza el proceso de gestión de crisis y coproducción durante la pandemia de la COVID-19 en la ciudad de Santa Maria-RS, en 2020, a través del programa de banco de alimentos Mesa Brasil. La estrategia de investigación elegida fue el estudio de caso. La recolección de datos se realizó a través de investigación documental, entrevistas y encuestas con gerentes de las instituciones participantes en el programa Mesa Brasil. Para los resultados se empleó una técnica de análisis de contenido. El estudio permitió concluir que la gestión de crisis, a través de la coparticipación, permite comprender el uso de estrategias innovadoras y colectivas como medio para superar las dificultades emergentes derivadas de crisis en las que aumenta la vulnerabilidad social. Y explica cómo, en el contexto específico de la crisis de la pandemia, la coproducción de servicios públicos se destacó por la adhesión de organizaciones, compartiendo responsabilidad y poder en la producción y prestación de servicios públicos para mantener la seguridad alimentaria y reducir el desperdicio de alimentos.

Palabras clave: gestión de crisis, coproducción, seguridad alimentaria, Mesa Brasil, pandemia de COVID-19

## 1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic spread a multidimensional crisis of never-before-experienced proportions. What would initially be a public health problem went on to affect several other aspects of society, such as the economic and social sectors (Savary *et al.*, 2020). The dramatic increase in contagion cases threatened human lives, disrupted livelihoods, and affected the global economy (Rasul *et al.*, 2021).

Facing cruel dilemmas, many developing countries were reluctant to establish strict quarantine criteria and isolation measures, even allowing premature relaxation (Osmani, 2021). In some cases, the disease was interpreted by vulnerable people as something imported by the elite and with equally elitist restriction measures, frustrating the poor and economically vulnerable, who found themselves unable to generate income (Omobowale, 2020). Therefore, it highlighted the need for governments and citizens to work together and fight the effects of the coronavirus, co-producing better results (Li, 2020).

Due to the lack of crisis management, several social and economic sectors were affected. The COVID-19 pandemic placed unprecedented tensions in food supply chains, resulting in significant demand shifts with measures aimed especially at containing the virus (OECD, 2020). The immediate effects of the pandemic impacted food systems, exposing their deficiencies and the poor state of food security (Ezirigwe, 2021) in addition to reinforcing existing inequalities (Rasul, 2021). The pandemic served as an example of a crisis that raised unprecedented challenges in the global food system and tested the commitment to the principles adopted by the Sustainable Development Goals (Fleetwood, 2020).

For many people in conditions of poverty and vulnerability, the “hunger virus” was perceived as deadly (Amadasun, 2020) or even deadlier than the coronavirus (Omobowale, 2020; Ingutia, 2021). Equally important was the possibility that transient food insecurity in vulnerable countries could persist for longer due to a combined effect of economic slowdown and increased poverty, limiting food supply (Udmale *et al.*, 2020). Such was the severity that the term “hunger pandemic” was coined (Savary *et al.*, 2020).

The situation in Brazil, which already had a scenario of great vulnerabilities and social disparities, was aggravated, acquiring dimensions of greater criticality in the face of practices and, mainly, omissions in public management. Still, at the beginning of the pandemic, the Federal Government decreed the expansion of services considered essential so that they remained open. However, this decision was superseding a series of restrictive measures for the movement of people during the pandemic recommended by the World Health Organization (Organización Panamericana de la Salud & Organización Mundial de la Salud, 2020). Such decisions made the Ministry of Health’s guidelines unfeasible in the name of measures that could produce popularity (Sodré, 2020). The crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic and the fragility of the State’s responses to the emerging demands was evidenced by the effort of the organised civil society, which acted in the co-production of public services to meet the existing demands.

The Mesa Brasil program food bank (henceforth referred to as the Mesa Brasil), which is the main food bank in Brazil, the biggest food bank network in Latin America

and an important example of civil society intervention (The Global Foodbanking Network, 2021), was among the distinguished efforts to fight hunger during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this study analyses the process of crisis management and co-production during the COVID-19 pandemic in the spatial limits of the territory of Santa Maria-RS during 2020, in the context of the Mesa Brasil. In this sense, it was relevant to address the question of how the Mesa Brasil contributed to the mitigation of the food insecurity generated by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Results explain how in the specific context of the coronavirus crisis, co-production became a fundamental strategy for meeting basic demands by mitigating the consequences of the pandemic, guaranteeing the basic right to quality food and food security for the benefitted public.

This paper is structured to present the elements of theoretical support, crisis management and the co-production of public services; the methodological procedures; the case study report of the Mesa Brasil; and final considerations, limitations, and suggestions for future studies.

## 2. Material and methods

The reality studied is the Mesa Brasil in the City of Santa Maria/RS in 2020 using the case study investigation strategy (Yin, 2018). To this end, a combination of qualitative techniques for data collection, analysis, and interpretation of results was used. This approach was selected to understand the meaning that institutions attribute to the Mesa Brasil. In other words, the aim was to understand the participation of institutions from their perspective, as well as their interaction in the co-production process during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data collection was carried out through documentary research, an interview with the member responsible of the coordination of the program at the SESC/RS, and the application of questionnaires to social assistance institutions that assist people in situations of social vulnerability and participated at the Mesa Brasil. In the documentary research, the focus was on the Mesa Brasil booklet, Brazilian legislation, and data and studies about the Mesa Brasil. Thus, the most relevant parts for the topic in question and its relationship with the theories of participation and co-production could be analyzed. The interviews and questionnaires complemented the data from the documentary research carried out, which involved the basic guidelines and the presentation of the program. Data collection was undergone during January 2021. The questionnaires were structured in Google Forms and sent electronically by mail to managers of the 45 institutions participating in the program in the city, of which 27 answered. For the analysis of the interviews and the forms, a qualitative approach was chosen (Triviños, 2007) based on the analytical, descriptive, and critical content analysis technique (Bardin, 2011). Both sets of data had, initially, their content analyzed and at a second stage a data triangulation was undertaken. Finally, the results were triangulated with theory and research objectives.

In the next section, the details of the case studied will be presented, followed by the visions regarding the program and the activities carried out in view of the crisis brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020.

### 3. Theoretical background

The public health crisis during a pandemic context can evolve rapidly and create problems in several other sectors. Crises are urgent and acute encounters between the practical protective needs of society and the theoretical challenges (Schmidt *et al.*, 2020). Planning and personifying actions during crises involves individuals and institutions, reveals difficulties and obstacles, socialises problems, and allows diversified contributions for plausible solutions, aiming to provide more resolute assistance to as many citizens as possible with better quality and safety (Silveira & Oliveira, 2020). The crisis management logic suggests that planning and preparing for a crisis should be a vital part of institutional and policy toolkits. In addition, institutional alignment is of paramount importance, seeking a fast response with which either a crisis can be avoided or its impacts minimised (McConnel & Drennan, 2006).

The success or failure of crisis management depends on how it is structured. Furthermore, the concept of crisis management includes interdependent phases or stages—initial conflict prevention, crisis management, and post-crisis management—and requires an increase in measures and instruments to implement the necessary policies (Saraiva, 2011). Thus, crisis managers face difficulties as pre-planning is an agenda of low interest in organisations since crises are not subject to predictability. However, there is no “optimal” coordination formula that can harmonise competing interests and overcome uncertainties.

Crisis management is permeated by interdependencies and diversity, exerting great pressure for coordination to be constituted in a multidimensional way (Christensen *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, good communication allows for the clarifying of roles and expectations, as well as promoting co-production activities through better intersectoral and interdepartmental coordination (Weng *et al.*, 2020). It is important to consider the space where society is organised and makes up for this lack of the State in the delivery of public services (Ramos, 1967). In this sense, the co-production of public services is understood as a solution to fill the gaps within crisis management.

Co-production is a mechanism for improving the quality of public service delivery with participatory citizen engagement (Brudney & England, 1983; Parks *et al.*, 1981). This concept takes place in conjunction with the evolution of public administration theory (Osborne, 2010) and the fragmentation of public service delivery (Haveri, 2006). Thus, the multiplicity of parties present in public governance is necessary for the achievement of social objectives and the effective provision of public services. The idea of interaction between multiple parties for the co-production of public goods and services has helped to shift from developing unique policy prescriptions based on free market principles to a position that recognises organisational and institutional diversity (Goodwin, 2019).

In contrast to the slow progress of top-down regulation, the bottom-up co-production approach can provide a synergistic solution of voluntary government and peer pressure effect (Lu & Sidortsov, 2019). Therefore, it can serve as an effective means to leverage new resources in providing public services and meeting complex social needs, in addition to being an instrument of social inclusion (Osborne, 2010). However, to adapt effectively to different government initiatives aimed at increasing citizen co-production, it

is important to understand the mechanisms by which the initiatives work (Andersen *et al.*, 2018).

In terms of public management, there are significantly different opportunities and restrictions that arise as a result of the relationships between organisations and the State (McMullin, 2021). Furthermore, certain preconditions, including policy consistency, the provision of resources, transitioning government roles to foster the voluntary spirit, and cultural acceptability to encourage public participation, must be in place for its success (Lu & Sidortsov, 2019). Thus, co-production challenges the traditional orthodoxy—in which citizens receive, consume and evaluate public services while public officials are responsible for projecting and delivering them (Pestoff, 2006)—in favour of a model in which the users of services may be subject to the process. This is seen as a normative, voluntary good which must add value to the public service production process, but which is not intrinsic to it (Osborne & Strokosch, 2013). The co-production effort comes together with concerns about social equity, where institutions support the government in the implementation of public services (Cheng, 2020).

Additionally, the co-production of public services is characterised by the adhesion of public and private organisations, non-governmental organisations, community groups, and citizens (Moretto Neto *et al.*, 2014; Salm, 2014). Furthermore, the ability to guide the collective-private production effort is fundamental, while human capital and attention to collective values are essential to ensure stability and preserve the robustness of each system (García-Mollá *et al.*, 2020). Organisations find themselves in a dilemma between State engagement and autonomy, and this tension generates struggle and political change (Goodwin, 2019).

While co-production has been flourishing during COVID-19 (Steen & Brandsen, 2020), in the specific context of a pandemic not only the health field is impacted. Thus, different solutions may be helpful to solve problems that are more complex. Disruptive situations require planning (Costa, 2020), and only multidisciplinary coordination enables an integrated civil protection system response for safeguarding citizens' lives (Lapão, 2020). However, the lack of coordination between entities can weaken management. In this sense, the synergy between intergovernmental efforts (Ribeiro, 2020) and the population becoming a partner becomes essential for crisis management (Lapão, 2020).

Trust in political institutions, as well as perceptions regarding the handling of the crisis, are also dimensions to be managed (Ribeiro, 2020). Thus, effective communication can improve trust, credibility, the motivation of citizens and, finally, results (Li, 2020). Additionally, the manipulation of data and the appropriation of the subject in favour of determined causes corroborates the severity of issues and impacts generated by the pandemic (Rodrigues, 2020). Therefore, a central aspect is the ability to learn from previous mistakes and utilise transparent means of communication and sharing of information, which should advocate a professional management for better response resilience (Lapão, 2020).

Faced with this reality, the most vulnerable are the most affected. For instance, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, an estimated 71 million people returned to extreme poverty in the first year, representing the first global increase in two decades (UN, 2020). Given the impact of the crisis on the international system, the trend of social inequalities (Aguirre, 2020; Rasul, 2021), political tensions, and the continuity of armed conflicts

(Aguirre, 2020) have risen. There was an unprecedented threat to the resilience of the State and society (Pirozzi, 2020) with the purpose of minimising the economic and social costs of the COVID-19 outbreak, which are likely to be significant and long-lasting (Rasul *et al.*, 2021). To deal with the problem, each country tends to mobilise its best resources (Lima *et al.*, 2020), and the need for citizens and governments to act in order to produce mechanisms to protect public health and expand the protection of public services is generated (Miao *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, the need to build trusting relationships between the public sector and community-based organisations in order to invest in their long-term organisational capacity is also relevant (Yu *et al.*, 2020).

Thus, in the challenge against hunger and food insecurity, food banks were an initiative that got even more relevance during the pandemic crisis. Food banks symbolise a changing landscape of social insecurity and welfare conditionality (Beck & Gwilym, 2020), and what lies in them is the development of a unified action to create a network to empower society to defeat hunger (The Global Foodbanking Network, 2021). This is accomplished by obtaining surplus food to be donated to the most disadvantaged through charitable associations (Tapia & López, 2020).

In Brazil, food is a right guaranteed in the Federal Constitution of 1988, which also covers the social rights to education, health, work, housing, leisure, security, social security, protection to maternity and childhood, and assistance to the destitute in its article 6 (Presidência da República, 1988). However, in the years preceding the pandemic crisis, there was a political weakening in relation to this right by the Federal Government due to the disarticulation of the National System of Food and Nutrition Security (SISAN), the absence of the National Conference on Food and Nutrition Security, and the weakening of the country's main income transfer program: the Bolsa Familia program (Amorim *et al.*, 2020; Ribeiro-Silva *et al.*, 2020). Because of this, the mobilisation of civil society to fight the COVID-19 pandemic took place from the beginning and it was very significant (Andion, 2020). This process involved segments of civil society, the private sector, social movements, collectives, civil organizations, and the community itself. This was a union in the search for the mitigation of vulnerabilities arising from or aggravated by the pandemic.

#### **4. Food security through co-production in the Mesa Brasil**

With the characteristics of co-production and in order to guarantee food security for an extremely vulnerable part of the population, one of the outstanding initiatives was the Mesa Brasil, an initiative of Social Service for Commerce (SESC). SESC was created by the National Confederation of Commerce in 1946 as a private entity, was maintained and administered by commerce entrepreneurs, and was financed with a compulsory contribution of companies linked to union entities that are part of the National Confederation of Commerce (Presidência da República, 1946). The social actions developed comprise several areas, such as health, education, culture, tourism, and social assistance. The food security activities developed by the Mesa Brasil are within the context of social assistance.

The Mesa Brasil is a national network of food banks that works against hunger and waste. The program emerged in 1994 as a result of the commitment of entrepreneurs to change the social scenario through actions that provide better living conditions for their employees and their families, as well as the development of the communities in which they live (SESC, 2016). The network is made up of more than 3,000 sponsor partners, among which are rural producers, wholesalers and retailers, distribution and supply centres, and food industries, in addition to companies from various fields of activity. Donations are production surpluses: food that is in a safe condition for sale, but does not meet the aesthetic standard. Donations of financial resources or logistics, in addition to volunteering, are also part of this solidarity program. Thus, the program preferably serves people in situations of social and nutritional vulnerability and users of registered social organizations, in addition to acting in emergencies, mobilising partners, and collecting and distributing donations to people affected by disasters across the country (SESC, 2016). In Brazil, the program has been working for over approximately three decades to fight hunger and food waste, with around 6,500 social assistance entities and more than 3,000 donors constituting the solidarity network (SESC, 2021).

In the state of Rio Grande do Sul, the Mesa Brasil program is carried out by the Fecomércio-RS System in the state capital and its metropolitan area, plus in other eight municipalities, always in partnership with city halls. It is a collaborative network based on the understanding of social reality and inequalities as hindering adequate health and living conditions (SESC, 2016). The institution convokes the public and private sectors to discuss and solve together these problems of a complex nature with interrelated factors. This practice underlies the collaborative model of the program's operational construction. In addition, the Mesa Brasil is a partner of the United Nations (UN) in the Food and Agriculture Program (FAO), which can infer the scope and magnitude of its activities. In addition to these parties is the monitoring of qualified professionals, with the allocation of social workers and nutritionists at all stages of the process.

In the City of Santa Maria and in the central region of the state, the Mesa Brasil has 103 registered institutions. Out of these 45 are from the City of Santa Maria and considered Systematic Social Institutions, while the others are located in 13 cities in the region and are Occasional Social Institutions.

The Mesa Brasil program is based on strategic alliances between the public and private sectors. In its structure, it combines organizational and political factors in a process of co-responsibility, providing an intersectoral intervention on problems that interfere in the population's life. The availability of food to vulnerable families is the main reference of the program; it therefore considers that food security strategies are not exclusively a direct action. To address nutritional and health problems, the social and community context—as well as the causal factors of the problems—must be considered. Thus, the program contemplates two different types of action. On one hand, the food bank, whose operating dynamics allow for greater flexibility in the process as it assumes an area and time for the sorting and separation of donated foodstuffs. On the other hand, a more complex management structure that collects food from the donors and then stores it and transfers it to institutions.



Urban collection, which is characterised by being agile and requiring less resources for implementation and maintenance as no food is stored, means the delivery of donations is made immediately based on predetermined routes for the collection and destination of the goods. This is done in a way that makes the daily relationship with the donor a component of the operating logistics. This bias of the program is directly related to its purpose of sensitising and mobilising donors, aiming at showing the inconsistency of the waste left behind in these sectors as compared to the number of people who are in a situation of food vulnerability. This fact supports the notion that collaborations by the network of partners can be carried out without additional costs, as they only provide surplus products that would otherwise be discarded (Mota, 2014).

Therefore, training is an important transversal axis of the program, with educational actions aimed at all agents in the process —professionals, volunteers, users of social entities, and donors— and it is a continuous process of empowerment, co-responsibility, and autonomy. In this process, SESC has an important mediating role, bringing together different parties in the formation of a solidarity network in favour of life, food and nutritional security. Donations are made to properly regulated Social Assistance Institutions; in order to be included in the program, social entities need to be regularly registered in the Social Assistance Councils of their cities (SESC, 2016). With this, it is necessary for the provision of meals to be completed exclusively on their premises in their supporting activities. Thus, the Mesa Brasil contributes to the improvement of its conditions to exercise its social roles, making its sustainability and autonomy effective. Also, in cases of disasters or public calamities, the program works together with the State power to address the vulnerabilities that emerge from said situations.

The process initially takes place by attracting potential donors, considering aspects such as motivation, the ability to donate, and the origin and characteristics of the products. Fundamentally, it seeks to form long-term alliances guided towards meeting common interests, empowering the network, and strengthening ties of trust and complicity. In this action, voluntary activity is a fundamental element that results in an act of solidarity, an important process for those seeking social justice. Voluntary activity assumes articulation between government and civil society, institutional and community resources, and technical skills and personal skills to deal with social problems. The program systematically monitors participating social entities through technical views in a permanent dynamic of communication with the teams, thus strengthening agreements and partnerships as well as enabling assessments and reformulations (SESC, 2016).

In the specific context of the pandemic, Mesa Brasil was particularly evident given the consequences of both the need for social distancing and the effects of the financial crisis across the country. In this sense, food insecurity became an expanded reality in which many families were affected both by unemployment and reduced income. Thus, food assistance was of great importance as many families had lost their most basic economic capacity, such as having the conditions to buy food items such as fruits, vegetables, or cereals.

In Brazil, SESC units also became donors to the program. Supplies from the institution's hotels and cafeterias were donated to registered entities and needy communities. At the national level, the work developed in Brazil in 2020 ended with

indicators of 2,384,074.04 kilograms of food distributed, 141,957 people benefited, 941 recipient institutions, 571 donors and partners, 135 educational actions carried out, and 5,190 people trained (SESC, 2020).

In the city of Santa Maria-RS, more than 11,000 people in a condition of social vulnerability in the city were assisted each month by receiving approximately 102 tonnes of food, hygiene, and cleaning products —equally necessary to reduce the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The managers of the participating institutions in Santa Maria perceived the Mesa Brasil as an important food security program that contributed to the maintenance of the activities of social organisations in the city. Furthermore, there was an awareness of co-producing two public services: food security and food guarantee. In addition, the relevance of the process of direct participation of society and institutions in the collection of food and the creation of a relationship of trust and partnership with SESC through participation in the Mesa Brasil were noted. Finally, it was observed that the food distributed in the institution by the Mesa Brasil altered the institutional capacity to maintain services with the vulnerable population, and there was no perception of the Government's contribution to the program.

Also, in the context of the pandemic, the donating institutions maintained food collection in the same way and levels as in the previous period. However, given the growing vulnerable population and food insecurity, the Mesa Brasil sought innovative ways to ensure participation and food donations during the pandemic.

Civil society collaborated by expanding food donations, and this generated the need to rethink the care provided to families, considering the potential impact on their daily lives and given the possible lack of food supply. With that, it was found that the vulnerability of the public served was increased due to the disruption of formal and informal jobs and mental health problems that were also impacted. Therefore, the collective action guideline was based on the notion that providing food would be an effort to meet the most basic of human needs.

To understand the meaning of the program for managers, aspects such as the provision of quality and diversified food for vulnerable people —such as children and the elderly— were highlighted. In this reality, the partnership met a demand for food and nutrition security, especially in the period in which shortages were increasing and, by participating in the program. On the other hand, there were difficulties in meeting the target population's food needs, even with the Mesa Brasil contributing as a facilitator of this process.

Also, the institutions valued the participation in the program, co-production in food assistance, and the reduction of vulnerabilities of the population living in poverty and extreme poverty. Besides, it was understood that these actions, along with similar ones, complement the efforts of public policies aimed at solving these problems and serving the target population. Finally, it should be noted that quality food, in addition to being a fundamental right, was understood as adding value to the final work of social organisations, i.e., to the good or service delivered to the user population.

Regarding the systematisation of tasks, some important processes and registers were evidenced, among which were the existence of norms that regulate the registers of donors, registers of social organisations, registration and control documents of the receipt and delivery of donations, and the national software monitoring program. There was also

the establishment of a hierarchy, but with autonomy for each state to develop actions according to the national guidelines of the Mesa Brasil. Thus, each local team, consisting of a social worker, a nutritionist, and a logistics team, had the autonomy to carry out activities inherent to the program in accordance with the local reality. In addition, the participation of social organisations in this process took place intensely, especially in the City of Santa Maria-RS. Since this city did not possess physical structures to store donations, these organisations were important to allow the swift execution of activities on a large scale with perishable food.

Once again, it is important to highlight that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mesa Brasil had its management affected, especially in terms of access to the resources necessary for the growing demand of people in vulnerable conditions. Thus, regarding the search for alternative means to guarantee participation and donations, the program was organised by carrying out actions on social networks —the so-called “lives”— with the participation of national and local artists to raise society’s awareness to the donation of food. Furthermore, a specific bank account which included the use of virtual mechanisms for cash donations was made available. With that, resources started to be reverted in the purchase of food provisions and directed to social organisations registered in the Mesa Brasil.

Regarding deliveries, partnerships were made with the public civil defence agencies of the cities for logistical purposes. Besides, the participation of civil society occurred fundamentally in a virtual mode and through the donation of resources due to the pandemic. And, regarding the importance of the direct participation of society and institutions in co-production with the Mesa Brasil, community recognition of the importance of the program was highlighted as a way to combat food waste, minimise the impacts of hunger, and provide opportunities for volunteer work in this field.

Considering the participation of the State, there was a partnership with the municipalities and the Mesa Brasil which was made through a term of cooperation and partnership, in which the municipal public administration was responsible for providing the physical structure for storing the donations. However, in this aspect there was a major deficiency of the program because there was no specific storage space in the city of Santa Maria, implying great difficulties in terms of logistics. This became evident with the pandemic crisis, limiting the more efficient and equitable storage and distribution of donations.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the development of the program, especially during the pandemic period, allowed it to become an organisational reference in the fight against hunger and food waste. With that, co-participation allowed collective action and the recognition and trust of society, permitting the maintenance of the dynamic nature of food donations. Involved in this process were a multiplicity of parties, as presented by Haveri (2006), thus generating the public value listed by Osborne and Strokosch (2013).

## 5. Conclusion

The crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic affected various sectors of society, creating crisis situations, expanding existing ones, and requiring organisations to arrange and manage to face said situations. With that, the fragility of the State and the need for

social organisation to make up for this lack in the delivery of more elementary public services became evident. In this context, the co-production of public services stood out for the adhesion of organisations, sharing responsibility and power in the production and delivery of public services. In this case, these were food security and food waste reduction. This reality corroborated the idea presented by Brudney and England (1983) and Parks *et al.* (1981), who previously emphasised the significant gains of public services with the participation of citizens.

Co-production led by the community and civil society organisations, studied in the case of the Mesa Brasil, was an alternative to mitigate the effects of the crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic and consequent food insecurity and food waste. Additionally, it was found that the potential co-production efforts by social organisations—trained, permanently mobilised, and automatically engaged— complemented the actions of public services in an independent and parallel way to the State. With such evidence, the co-production of the common good is verified not as a result of State efforts, but of the conduct of an independent program. Such facts reinforce the essence of Theory P (Ramos, 1967) as they emphasise the importance of the participation of society in the actions, resulting in collective responsibility and commitment.

Finally, crisis management through co-participation allows to understand that the use of innovative and collective strategies is a means to overcome the emerging difficulties arising from crises in which social vulnerability increases. By catalysing efforts to mitigate the risks and consequences of the food and health insecurity crisis, alternative means were found to meet the social demands of a growing vulnerable population, allowing social organisations to have sufficient support to fulfil said emerging demands.

The limitations of this study include the difficulty to obtain answers to the questionnaires from the managers who participated in the program. However, this fact did not compromise the sample. For further research, this paper suggests carrying out the study with all institutions covered by the Mesa Brasil program over the country. This is a rich source of diverse research possibilities and theoretical constructions.

In further research, it would be relevant to develop studies considering other contexts beside Brazil and similar organizations that attempt to help to overcome hunger crises and other future risks in the region. Also, there is space for research about the role of food banks in a broader co-production context. Finally, it is recommended that future studies consider a broader sample through both qualitative and quantitative methods.

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