

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PROINFANCIA FEDERAL PROGRAM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

A IMPLEMENTAÇÃO DO PROINFÂNCIA SOB A ÓTICA DAS RELAÇÕES INTERGOVERNAMENTAIS¹

LA IMPLEMENTACIÓN DE PROINFÂNCIA DESDE LA PERSPECTIVA DE LAS RELACIONES INTERGUBERNAMENTALES

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ABSTRACT: One of the aspects discussed by the public policy implementation literature refers to the tensions involving a centralized formulation of policies and the execution by subnational governments. Based on area studies, this article shows how Proinfancia – a federal program financing the expansion of kindergarten schools– was implemented and the perceptions municipal and federal agents have concerning the problems of implementation. An in-depth case study is carried out analyzing the city of Natal, in the State of Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil, using bibliographical revision, document and data analysis, and interviews with official agents. The mains findings suggest that extreme rigorous norms to adhere and to execute federal programs combined with the absence of formal channels of dialogue, participation and agreements with municipal governments produce no collective solutions for problems that should be expected in a federal state during implementation.

KEYWORDS: Education policy. Proinfancia Federal Program. Intergovernmental relations. Formulation of public policies. Implementation of policies.

RESUMO: *Um dos aspectos destacado pela literatura de implementação de políticas públicas refere-se às tensões que envolvem uma formulação centralizada na esfera federal e sua execução local. Com base em estudos da área, este artigo analisa como se deu a implementação do Proinfância – um programa federal de apoio à construção e reforma de escolas de Educação Infantil – e quais visões os gestores federais e municipais do programa têm sobre os problemas de implementação. Para isso, um estudo de caso em profundidade foi feito para o município de Natal/RN utilizando-se de revisão bibliográfica, análise documental, dados do*

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programa e entrevistas com gestores municipais e federais. Os principais achados mostram que a rigidez das normas de adesão e execução do programa combinada a não existência de espaços institucionais de diálogo, pactuações ou de participação dos governos municipais resultam em ausência de soluções coletivas de problemas típicos de implementação em um estado federativo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Políticas educacionais. Programa Proinfância. Relações intergovernamentais. Formulação de políticas públicas. Implementação de políticas.*

RESUMEN: *Uno de los aspectos que destaca la literatura sobre la implementación de políticas públicas se refiere a las tensiones que implican una formulación centralizada a nivel federal y su ejecución local. Con base en estudios en el área, este artículo analiza la implementación de Proinfância –un programa federal de apoyo a la construcción y renovación de escuelas de Educación Infantil– y qué visiones tienen los gestores federales y municipales del programa sobre los problemas de implementación. Para ello, se realizó un estudio de caso en profundidad para la ciudad de Natal/RN utilizando revisión de literatura, análisis de documentos, datos del programa y entrevistas con gestores municipales y federales. Los principales hallazgos muestran que la rigidez de las reglas de adhesión y ejecución del programa, sumado a la inexistencia de espacios institucionales de diálogo, concertación o participación de los gobiernos municipales, redundan en la ausencia de soluciones a problemas típicos de implementación en un estado federal.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Políticas educativas. Programa Proinfancia. Relaciones intergubernamentales. Formulação de políticas públicas. Implementación de políticas.*

Introduction

The literature on public policy implementation is permeated by different analytical lenses to explain the complex process in which policies take shape in practice. In the context of intergovernmental relations in Brazilian federalism, such complexity is high, as it typically involves institutional designs with formulation centralized in the federal sphere and local implementation by subnational governments, which, in turn, hold very diverse and unequal realities and capabilities (ARRETCHE, 2012; BICHIR, 2020; GOMES, 2009; OLIVEIRA; LOTTA, 2019).

For Oliveira and Lotta (2019), one of the problems related to the formulation of national policies lies in the adoption of single and rigid models by federal agencies that do not allow subnational governments to adapt planning and management instruments to their local particularities. The result would then be a decrease in the administrative autonomy or in the execution capacity of subnational entities, increasing the risks of not achieving the objectives of a public policy.

This article presents an illustrative case of this process described by Oliveira and Lotta (2019) by analyzing how the implementation process of a federal program at the municipal level took place. The findings show that the rigidity of the adherence and execution rules combined with the lack of institutional spaces for dialogue, pacts, or participation of municipal governments result in the absence of solutions to typical implementation problems. It can be observed that federal managers, on one hand, attribute to the lack of management capacity of municipalities the explanation for the implementation problems of federal programs and, on the other hand, municipal managers consider that the obstacles are generated by the inadequate rules of federal agencies.

To this end, the National Program for the Restructuring and Acquisition of Equipment for the Public School Network of Early Childhood Education (PROINFÂNCIA) is used as an empirical case study. Proinfância was instituted in 2007, as part of a series of other federal government actions designed to address inequalities of access in early childhood education (FNDE, n.d.).

The Program consists of a policy to support the expansion of access to this level of education, which is offered by the municipalities through projects for the construction and/or renovation of pre-school and nursery schools. The National Fund for Education Development (FNDE in the Portuguese acronym) is the federal agency responsible for both the approval of the projects submitted by the municipalities and for establishing the rules for their execution. Proinfância is a case of interest since, according to Oliveira and Lotta (2019), it is an example of a centralization that goes beyond the formulation process and extends to a centralization in its execution as well.

This top-down, federal induction-style model of execution is not unique to federal policies in education. Oliveira and Lotta (2019), as well as Pires and Gomide (2016), observed similar centralization movements in the *Minha Casa, Minha Vida* Program (PMCMV), in which the institutional design also reflects the decision to adopt single, national standards, very rigid and with low possibility of adaptation to local realities and contexts, both in formulation and implementation. One of the consequences of this low capacity to adapt projects to local realities is the infeasibility or delay in policy execution, or, to put it another way, in the efficacy and effectiveness of a public policy.

This article aims to analyze how the implementation of Proinfância occurred in practice and what views the federal and municipal managers of the program have about the problems of implementation. According to the nature of the study and in order to meet the proposed

objective, the case of the municipality of Natal/RN was chosen for an in-depth analysis. The following methodological procedures were adopted: bibliographic review of academic works on this theme; document analysis of the main legislations and institutional documents about the Proinfância Program; analysis of the data on the resources passed on to the municipalities of Rio Grande do Norte that joined the program and the types of works executed by these federated entities - data provided by the FNDE, in 2020, through the Access to Information Law; and structured interviews to capture the views of the implementing agents in comparison to those of the formulating agents, carried out in 2020. Interviewees provided informed consent for the interviews and their responses are anonymized.

In light of this context and the objectives outlined, the article, in addition to this introduction, has a section that recalls some of the central elements of the debate on intergovernmental relations in the implementation of federal programs; another section that presents the institutional design of Proinfância and the changes in the implementation rules; and an empirical section that presents the findings for the case of Natal, capital city of Rio Grande do Norte State. The final remarks recover the main aspects discussed in this paper and some of its implications, which may allow a reformulation in the mode of interaction between federal and subnational agencies.

Intergovernmental relations in the local implementation of federal programs

Studies on intergovernmental relations in Brazil have consolidated a relative consensus that the reforms adopted by different governments at the federal level, since the 1990s, aimed to produce national minimum standards in the provision of social policies under the responsibility of states and municipalities (ABRUCIO, 2005; ALMEIDA, 2005; ARRETICHE, 2002, 2012; BICHIR, 2011; BICHIR; SIMONI JUNIOR; PEREIRA, 2020; FRANZESE; ABRUCIO, 2013).

By adopting federal normatization strategies for these policies, the Brazilian federative model would have been characterized by formulation at the national level (policy decision-making) with subnational implementation (or execution) (policy-making), as proposed by Arretche (2012). The expansion in the provision of public services, as in health, education or social assistance, would be examples of instruments of national induction of public policies. However, there is a growing literature in Brazil that starts to address the process of public policy implementation that shows a diversity of situations in the modes and results of national policy

execution, affected by numerous factors (FARIA, 2012; LOTTA, 2019; MELO, 2020; PIRES, 2019).

Local contexts, with their own realities, impact the mode of implementation depending on the perception of the implementing bureaucracy about the values embedded in the public policy, the (diverse) understanding of how the policy should be operationalized, local difficulties not anticipated in the institutional design of the policy, among others pointed out by studies in the area. It is also highlighted, by a more recent literature, that the mode of implementation of policies can contribute both to the reduction of inequalities and, on the contrary, to their reproduction, that is, instead of fighting them, public policies can maintain or increase the exclusion of more vulnerable social groups to rights and public services that the policy originally sought to produce access to (PIRES, 2019).

This discussion is of special interest in this study, because the high centralization of decision-making and the rigidity of the instruments of implementation of Proinfância, defined by the FNDE, a central federal agency linked to the Ministry of Education (MEC), have negatively affected the capacity and agility of timely responses to the implementation bottlenecks of this national program.

In analogy to the two analytical cleavages that inaugurate the debate on implementation, Proinfância can be characterized as a top-down style policy, that is, the understanding that it is possible to "control" the agents responsible for its execution at the tip of the system by establishing specific and rigid norms for the fulfillment of implementation steps.

In other words, a top-down policy assumes that the bureaucrats responsible for formulating the policy at the central level are able to establish management instruments that control and induce managers at the municipalities and states to do exactly what is expected, without "deviating from course". In this case, the predominant view is that the central agencies should establish a series of norms and regulatory procedures for the implementing agents to strictly follow the pre-defined steps. In this perspective, implementation problems refer to "route deviations" by local managers, that is, they would have deviated from the planned (and expected) way of operationalizing the policy.

The limitation of this analytical and management perspective is that, in practice, there are several factors that affect local implementation but that could not be anticipated at the time of formulating a public policy. The reasons for this are the most diverse⁴, but a new view of the

⁴ For an overview of this debate, see Lotta (2019), Bichir (2020) and Gomes (2019).

problem is inaugurated by the analytical perspective known as bottom-up in implementation studies.

When questioning the (real) possibility of having almost total control over the behavior of implementers or, even, the form of local implementation through rigid or meticulous operationalization procedures of a policy, scholars of the bottom-up perspective invert the terms of the debate: “from the initial question why bureaucrats deviate from the objectives defined in the formulated policy to how bureaucrats implement this policy in practice” (GOMES, 2019, p. 45).

One of the learnings from the debate between a top-down implementation versus a bottom-up implementation is that it is not, in the end, a dilemma in which one should choose a single implementation model. In other words, monitoring how a given policy is being implemented in practice (or at the end of the system) is an important source of information to identify difficulties that arise and that could not be anticipated when drawing up the institutional design of the policy or the implementation instruments.

With this, an interaction – which also presupposes effective communication – between managers at the top of the system and bureaucrats from central bodies, who formulate the procedures for implementing policies, could produce learning that, in theory, would allow readjusting regulations and institutional designs to increase responsiveness and delivery of public goods and services.

The Brazilian literature has shown that programs with greater relational capacity between public agents, including those that incorporate the participation of social actors affected by policies, produce adjustments that improve the response or solution of problems or obstacles typical of implementation processes, producing what Pires and Gomide (2016) call it the ability to generate innovation in policy design.

In the next section, Proinfância is presented from the point of view of formulators at the federal level and how the norms for adherence by municipalities have become progressively stricter (OLIVEIRA; LOTTA, 2019), in a top-down style of implementation.

PROINFÂNCIA in terms of formulation by federal managers

The National Program for Restructuring and Acquisition of Equipment for the Public School Network of Early Childhood Education (PROINFÂNCIA) was created in 2007, through Resolution/CD/FNDE nº 6, of April 24, 2007 (FNDE, 2007a), in the by the x Minister of Education, Fernando Haddad, and the former President of the FNDE, Daniel Silva Balaban, as part of the Education Development Plan (PDE in the Portuguese acronym).

The main objective of the program was to expand the access of children from four months to six years of age to early childhood education by building daycare centers and preschools and, at the same time, renovating the physical infrastructure of those that already existed and equipping them (FNDE, 2007a). Proinfância, in this initial phase, had foundations that can be divided into two groups, in which the first was directly related to the problem that this public policy intended to tackle: the issue of difficulties in accessing and quality of early childhood education equipment, service public typically in charge of Brazilian municipalities; and the second aimed to correct inequalities in children's access to early childhood education, based on the expansion of the number of vacancies (FNDE, 2007a).

These fundamentals consider that Brazil, due to its institutional and historical legacy, its continental territorial dimensions and other factors, aggregates immense inequalities, among them, fiscal and administrative capacity, in addition to intra-municipal inequalities - especially relevant in municipalities with larger populations. and with intra-urban realities that are also unequal in terms of access, living conditions and opportunities for its population. All these elements are expressed in inequalities of access to public services, mainly by the segment of the population in a situation of greater social vulnerability. In this sense, Proinfância is part of a set of policies that seek to increase social inclusion, based on the correction of inequalities in access to the public service.

It should be noted that, in the 1990s, early childhood education was not a priority for the federal government, which centralized its efforts to the fundamental level, until then the only mandatory one and which had not yet achieved universal access at that time. There were few initiatives to support the expansion of day care centers and pre-schools, such as financial support for the acquisition of didactic material for pre-school students (4 to 6 years old), teacher training and support for the implementation of the National Curriculum Reference for Early Childhood Education in 1998 (BRASIL, 1998) or in municipalities included in the Comunidade Solidária Program (IPEA, 2003). Despite these few initiatives, the scenario was one of

allocation of few financial resources for early childhood education, particularly affected by the decrease in resources collected for the education salary in 1999 (IPEA, 2003).

Thus, Proinfância emerged in a context in which the expansion of fundamental education had already been consolidated and new levels and modalities of education started to become a priority in the agenda of discussions on educational policies. However, in order for this transfer of resources to take place, the municipalities and the Federal District, responsible for offering early childhood education, must comply with the guidelines of the National Fund for the Development of Education present in the Financial Assistance Manual (Resolution CD/FNDE No. 08 , April 24, 2007) (FNDE, 2007b), which guide the preparation of projects that must be sent by the federal entities to the FNDE and follow all its guidelines.

Resolution/CD/FNDE nº 6, of April 24, 2007 (FNDE, 2007a) also established prioritization criteria for subnational governments that wished to receive the transfer of resources in the initial phase of the Program. These criteria are set out in Annex I of the Resolution and cover three aspects: population, education and social vulnerability.

In the population dimension, those municipalities with the highest population growth and the highest population of children classified at kindergarten age and the highest concentration of population in urban areas are classified as priority. In the educational dimension, prioritization is established for municipalities with lower indicators of age-grade distortion in fundamental education and with greater numbers of teachers with higher education. In the dimension of social vulnerability, there is prioritization of municipalities with higher percentages of women as solely responsible for provision, a high rate of young people in socioeconomically vulnerable situations and a smaller budget for early childhood education (FNDE, 2007a).

It should be noted that Proinfância underwent institutional changes over the years, in which some criteria were modified, especially when the program was included in the scope of the Growth Acceleration Program (PAC in the Portuguese acronym), aiming to expand the number of municipalities served and provide more speed to the resource transfer process. Oliveira and Lotta (2019) demonstrate that the changes in the rules for joining Proinfância were FNDE responses to the difficulties that municipalities had to implement the policy. In the first period, from 2007 to 2011, the program had a low delivery capacity: of the 2,542 projects agreed with the municipalities, only 40% were effectively executed. For the authors, the instrument adopted for adherence – through agreements – was one of the reasons for the low delivery

capacity of the program, in view of several bureaucratic impediments that cities and towns faced.

It is also noted that, in the initial phase of the program, the priority criteria did not reflect a properly equitable principle of justice, since the population criteria and having better educational conditions end up generating the reproduction of existing educational inequalities and only the third, which lists social vulnerability has a corrective intention. More clearly, the population criterion defines as priority the municipalities with the largest population of early childhood education age, but also with a greater concentration of population in urban areas, and the educational criterion defines as priority the municipalities with lower age-grade distortion rates and higher number of professionals with higher education, while the criterion of social vulnerability prioritizes municipalities “with higher percentages of female heads of household, with higher percentages of young people in poverty and with lower availability of resources to finance early childhood education” (FNDE, 2007a). In this sense, the program had, in its original design, a conflicting intentionality by combining principles of justice that go in opposite directions⁵.

However, the criterion of social vulnerability, as the first criterion for assistance, highlights the prioritization of resource allocation to the most vulnerable municipalities, thus mobilizing an equitable criterion, as it aims to correct inequalities in access to early childhood education and meet the demand for vacancies for early childhood education from day care centers and, thus, guarantee equality in the offer of the service, promoting, in its, greater social inclusion.

Even if it is not enough, this criterion marks an important movement towards a fairer education, especially in this stage of education still marked by a wide inequality of access. This objective is more evident in the institutional design of the Brasil Carinhoso Program, which emerged, in 2012, as an action of the Brasil Sem Miséria Plan and, later, became an educational program carried out by the FNDE with a view to acting in a complementary way and, at the same time, parallel to Proinfância in expanding enrollments in early childhood education (CAMPELLO; FALCÃO; COSTA, 2014), but this time with clearer prioritization criteria for municipalities and families in situations of social vulnerability.

The institutional design of Proinfância, which establishes funding for projects aimed at building and/or renovating daycare centers financed by the FNDE to be executed strictly by subnational entities, composes what Oliveira and Lotta (2019, p. 456) call “ready-made models

⁵ We are grateful to the journal's anonymous reviewer for pointing out the need for clarification in the text.

of public policies, established by the federal government and over which municipal governments have little choice and/or adequacy to local specificities”. They result in numerous challenges and implementation bottlenecks generated by this high rigidity. According to Oliveira and Lotta (2019), this movement is part of a general process of recentralization of public policies by Dilma Rousseff’s government, especially in the first term (2011-2014), and which Proinfância illustrates well.

According to the authors mentioned above, from 2009 onwards, the MEC and the FNDE opted, due to the difficulties of the municipalities, to standardize the architectural projects of early childhood education schools that were previously structured according to the model proposed by these subnational entities and that ended up becoming one of the program implementation bottlenecks. These projects could be of “type A (non-standard project) or types B and C (standard architectural projects that correspond to 90% of the selected works)” (OLIVEIRA; LOTTA, 2019, p. 454).

In short, Proinfância aimed to correct inequalities in access to daycare and preschool by providing financial and technical support to Brazilian municipalities in the process of building and renovating teaching institutions dedicated to early childhood education. However, Proinfância, due to its strongly centralized institutional design, not only in terms of policy formulation but also with regard to the ways in which public policy is implemented, has become a clear case of the complexity involved in the production of a national standard. In this specific case, it is based only on the urban context, therefore not adapting to the specificities and diversity of situations throughout the Brazilian territory.

The implementation of PROINFÂNCIA in Natal

With regard to the implementation of Proinfância in Rio Grande do Norte, the analysis of the data provided by the FNDE, via the Law of Access to Information, made it possible to identify that, of the 167 municipalities in Rio Grande do Norte, 111 received resources from the federal government destined for the execution of Proinfância in the period from 2008 to 2019, that is, about 66% of the total number of municipalities in the State. Of these, the municipality of Natal received the largest amount of resources in absolute terms, largely because it is the largest administrative area in terms of population size in the state and with a larger target population.

In 2020, according to Melo (2020), the municipality of Natal had 74 Municipal Centers for Early Childhood Education (CMEIs) that offered early childhood education (day care and

preschool), 12 of which were built with Proinfância funds. Table 1 brings information on the distribution of CMEIs by neighborhoods in the city and information on the number of rooms available and students served in each CMEI.

Table 1 – Schools built with Proinfância resources by neighborhood and region, number of classrooms and students in Natal, 2020

CMEI's name	Neighborhood	Administrative Region	No. of rooms	Number of students
Antonio Gurgel De Melo	Potengi	North	10	406
Belchior Jorge de Sá	N. S. Apresentação	North	4	187
Mailde Ferreira Pinto	Potengi	North	8	360
Maria de Nazaré	Lagoa Azul	North	8	358
Professora Rosalba Dias de Barros	Potengi	North	8	342
Santa Cecília	Pajuçara	North	4	176
Telma Rejane Moura Freire	Lagoa Azul	North	8	345
Professora Terezinha de Jesus	Pajuçara	North	10	467
Clara Camarão	Planalto	West	5	217
Maria Luiza	Planalto/Guarapes	West	8	283
Professora Antônia Fernanda Jalles	Pitimbu	South	16	337
Maria dos Martírios Lisboa de Menezes	Pitimbu	South	4	153
Total			93	3.631

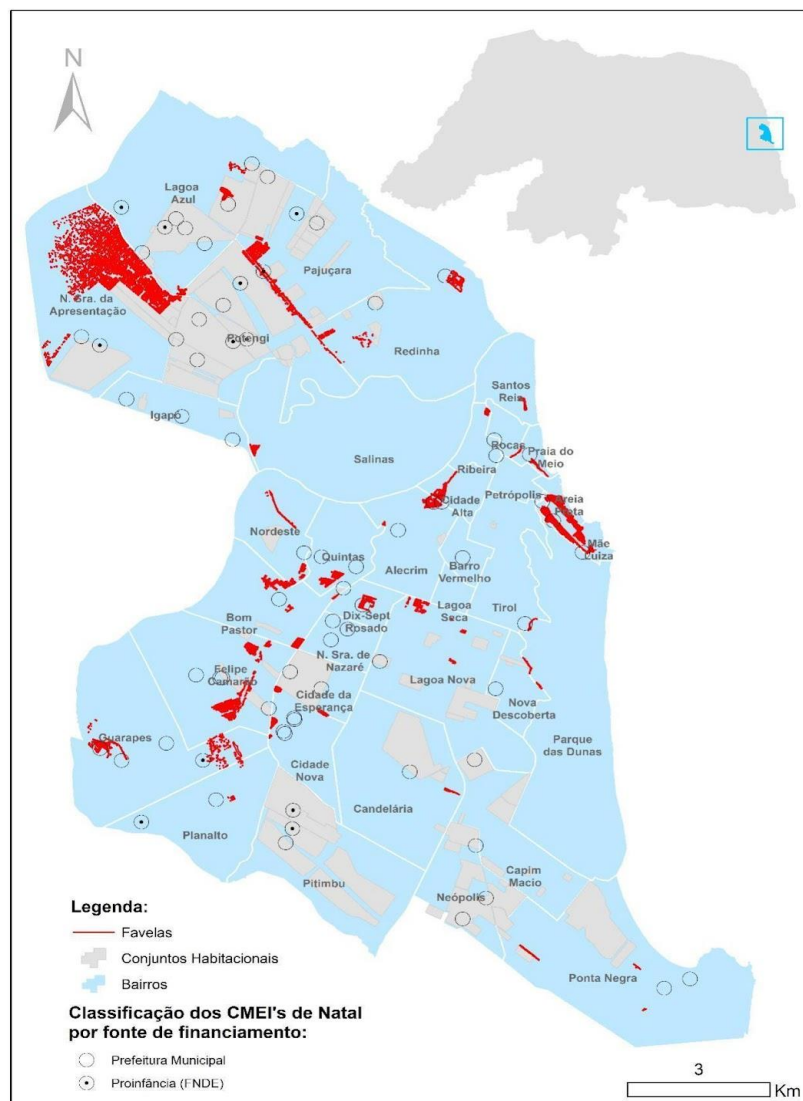
Source: Prepared by the authors based on Melo (2020)

From the data in Table 1, it can be seen that the CMEIs built using Proinfância resources are concentrated in the North (8), West (2) and South (2) zones of the city. When analyzing the regions and, specifically, the neighborhoods chosen by the Municipality of Natal for the construction of the Proinfância schools, it is noted the prioritization of neighborhoods with the highest concentration of population in a situation of social vulnerability: of the 12 CMEIs, eight (66, 6%) were built in the North Administrative Region, an area where the population with the lowest aggregate purchasing power resides and which has the highest indicators of social vulnerability in the City; two (16.6%) in the West Region, which is the second region with the highest concentration of low-income population in the city; and two (16.6%) in the South region, where the population of the city with the highest purchasing power resides, but with urban enclaves.

When we superimpose these data on the spatial location of favelas and housing complexes in the municipality of Natal (MEDEIROS, 2018), we identified that most CMEIs built with Proinfância resources (83%) were allocated close to these two types of urban agglomerations and the vast majority on the fringes or outskirts of the city. Even in the case of

the South region, CMEIs were built in the Pitimbu neighborhood, in a housing development area that concentrates a population in a situation of social vulnerability. The spatial distribution of CMEIs built with resources from Proinfância, in addition to other characteristics of urban spaces in Natal, can be seen on Map 1. It is verified, on the other hand, that there are neighborhoods characterized by a situation of high social and urban precariousness that were not contemplated, even though there was a high demand, as is the case of Igapó and Mãe Luíza.

Map 1 – Spatial distribution of kindergartens in the city of Natal/RN, Proinfância schools and location of slums and housing complexes



Source: Melo (2020)

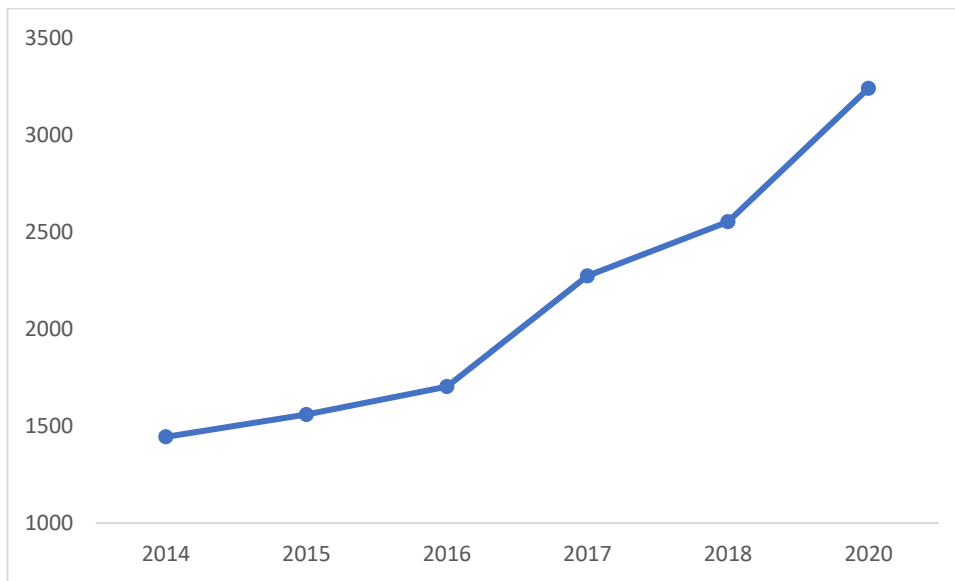
The reason why these neighborhoods, which meet Proinfância's priority criteria, do not have any kindergartens built is that the high informality and constructive density of this type of urban occupation - with the presence of slums and other precarious settlements - does not allow:

1) find land available for the construction of school facilities; and 2) when there are lands, there is no ownership, that is, there is no public and official registration of ownership in notaries, a result of the history of informal and irregular occupations in urban Brazil. As will be seen below, this problem was not addressed by the federal program, even though this is not a reality exclusive to Natal.

Thus, it can be seen, in general, that the CMEIs built with resources from Proinfância in Natal were allocated in areas of high social vulnerability, with emphasis on a significant number of schools built in housing complexes, spaces that have greater organization and planning. urban - in theory, places that have spaces to receive public equipment. However, schools built in peripheral neighborhoods or in urban enclaves and close to slums are also observed, in precarious settlements, often administratively irregular. In these cases, the problems of land with earthworks and ownership of public land are even greater and have become one of the problems for the execution of Proinfância in the case of the municipality of Natal.

Looking at the number of enrollments, based on the School Census data summarized by QEdu, it can be seen that there has been a significant increase in the expansion of vacancies for the early childhood education segment (daycare and preschool) in the CMEIs that received resources from the Pre-childhood in the period from 2014 to 2020. Graph 1 shows that the service capacity of the CMEIs financed by Proinfância grows over the years, as the equipment is built, delivered and goes into operation.

Graph 1 – Evolution of enrollments in schools built or renovated with Proinfância funds, Natal, 2014-2020



* There is no data for the CMEI Clara Camarão for the year 2015.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on information available on the QEdU Portal (2022)

The first disbursement of FNDE resources for Natal takes place in June 2010, but it is only in 2013 that 50% of the resources are paid. The total release for all projects takes place in October 2019, which is reflected in the service capacity of the equipment. The data in Graph 1 show a gradual increase in the number of enrollments of all Proinfância CMEIs in Natal since 2014. However, it is noted that it is only from 2017 onwards that there is a significant expansion in the service capacity of these school facilities.

Six interviews were also carried out with managers involved in Proinfância, seeking to better understand the information presented. Of these six interviews, one was exploratory and carried out with an employee of the National Union of Municipal Education Directors - UNDIME. Of the remaining five, three were carried out with managers and former managers of the National Education Development Fund (interviewees 1, 2 and 3) and two were carried out with managers of the Municipal Secretary of Education of Natal (interviewees 4 and 5). For this article, we chose to focus on the central question, that is, the public managers' view of the challenges and bottlenecks in the implementation of Proinfância.

According to the speeches of FNDE managers and former managers, the implementation challenges can be classified into two large groups. The first is related to the question of the motivation of contractors to carry out an architectural project, such as Proinfância, and having the technical capacity to execute the model proposed by the FNDE, as well as submitting to the payment receipt model that is marked by delays and interruptions. In

other words, managers point out that this contracting model makes it difficult to find companies capable or interested in building schools in view of the different and very diverse local realities.

In the second group, there are the technical, operational and fiscal difficulties of the municipalities that need to carry out the technical and bureaucratic procedures, according to the guidelines of the FNDE and the MEC. Among them, we highlight the realization of contracts, bids and availability of land according to specifications. The excerpts below, originally published in Melo (2020), illustrate the arguments:

[...] the main problem was the Brazilian ability to execute. Both public capacity and private capacity. We don't have, even though engineering is an old science and with standards and norms and ABNTs, you don't have this nationally, a capacity of all construction companies to do it quickly, economically, with a standard. And at the same time the city halls. The Proinfância was designed to be a linear construction, this was thought for the safety of children. You have several difficulties, and I would say a great executive difficulty for city halls, but I would not exempt the private sector, on the contrary, I think that it is co-responsible, it has not shown capacity. [...] **one of the design problems of Proinfância is that it was designed imagining minimum conditions that would be acceptable nationally** [...] a minimum standard that is far above many states and municipalities and then implementing it is a huge challenge (interviewee 1, federal manager, 2020, emphasis added).

In the municipalities, a lot of land problems, the lands were not viable, documentation problems to prove ownership of the land, a problem that I thought was basic, but, in the end, it was bigger than I imagined, it was the problem of earthworks, the municipalities were responsible for delivering the land with earthworks, and they couldn't. While they didn't deliver, they didn't give the first phase. **So this incapacity of municipal management is an absurd business in the country** (interviewee 2, federal manager, 2020, our emphasis).

There are 2 challenges: **attracting serious contractors that can support the disbursement time that we have today to pay for works in progress and the issue of implementing the policy. The challenge is for the municipality to be able to dissipate it**, because we give the standardized project, talk about the specifications of the land, but there is the number 1 difficulty that they do not have land, with the necessary adaptation to be able to build and not even the necessary dimensions, especially in large centers urban projects, 2nd the ability to bid for work due to the difficulty of the bidding process as a whole and the difficulty of having qualified engineers to bid for the work and 3rd, which is also very important, is the issue of lack of resources, the discontinuity of the program. We do not invest more in the program for new agreements, the main difficulties are the issue of execution, from the separation of the land to the hiring of the company, the inspection by the municipality, even the lack of funds to continue those that have, and mainly for new agreements. [...] I'm working on the service to city halls and you see how much they lack access to information. **If we don't have a good technical body to provide this support, sometimes the municipality is unable to carry out a project in life, which is precisely in the work of ProInfância that it cannot finish,**

because there is no engineer, there is no one who knows that can provide some kind of support in the municipality, both in terms of execution, bidding, work monitoring, work inspection [...] they often do not have the technical capacity to do this, so support from the FNDE is essential for the execution of various policies (interviewee 3, federal manager, 2020, emphasis added)).

In the view of municipal managers, the main challenges highlighted are finding suitable land for the construction of day care centers, both due to the need for ownership of the land and the availability of land in accordance with the specifications of the FNDE. In addition, there are still problems with the disbursement process of financial resources by the FNDE, which makes the pace of works slow and, in many cases, marked by temporary and/or permanent interruptions, as illustrated in the following excerpts:

The works are not paralyzed, they are being built. But it's always very slow. **So, there are many interruptions due to non-payment by the MEC.** The work is moving forward, moving forward. So much so that two works were practically supposed to be delivered in the middle of the year and they weren't. We are waiting for the completion of these works so that we can transfer the old spaces, which are rented houses, to this space. And we receive a lot of demand from both the directors and the target audience community. So what I see is the problem of interruption of payments to the engineering company. [...] It is not clear to me, but I see that it is a matter of priority: 'ah, this month the resource will go to Pernambuco and not to Rio Grande do Norte. **I see it as a matter of political choice. I find it very exhausting because the Secretariat has to go to Brasília, the Mayor has to go to Brasília.** Is it too exhausting because it's not a program? Either continue or extinguish. If there are no conditions, it will extinguish, but if it is active, it has to have the resources (interviewee 4, municipal manager, 2020, our emphasis).

The main challenges are earthly, it starts from there. But, for example, land is very difficult, because you have to have the right measurements, you have to have ownership, public documentation, and that's the terrible thing. For me, within our reality, from the little I follow, **this part of having ownership of the land is the biggest challenge for construction to begin** (interviewee 5, municipal manager, 2020, our emphasis).

It is noted that the implementation problems, in the view of the municipal managers, do not refer to the lack of management capacity, as they are factors external to the control of the municipal education departments. The issue of the lack of formal registration of ownership of land is even a national problem, not exclusive to the municipality of Natal, as a result of the historical irregular occupation in large urban centers, as is the case of Brazilian slums and many urban peripheries. The same can be observed in relation to the construction companies that win the bidding processes, are small and do not support the (long) time of disbursements foreseen by the FNDE, delaying the schedule and the delivery of the equipment.

The rigid norms for implementing the policy, as defined by the FNDE, although well-intentioned in trying to produce ready-made and finished inputs - especially relevant for municipalities with low state capacity - end up completely eliminating the ability to respond to typical implementation problems by city managers themselves. In view of the enormous regional diversity, in a country of continental dimensions, permeated by multiple inequalities, a single and national project without local adaptations will tend to reproduce delays and abandonment of public works that, in their original objective, sought to produce greater social inclusion.

Final remarks

This article sought to analyze how the implementation of Proinfância occurred in practice and what views federal and municipal managers of the program have about the problems of implementation. The program has had a partial effectiveness: on one hand, the school equipment is located in vulnerable and high vulnerability areas; and on the other hand, it has not been able to attend other priority areas as expected in the institutional design of the program. This is due to project implementation problems that are not contemplated in the federal regulations.

The main implementation bottlenecks pointed out by managers and former managers of the federal and local bureaucracy were: the difficulties in building the day-care centers due to the existence of few construction companies in a position to execute the project, the slow transfer of resources, the recurrent problem of the lack of public land suitable to the specificities of the project with proof of ownership, and the low technical and bureaucratic capacity of the municipalities. This last aspect, however, is one of the factors most cited by federal managers as a problem in the implementation of the policy, but it is not seen as the main problem in the view of the municipal managers themselves. It can be said that the establishment of national standardization is both a necessity and a problem.

The study carried out here illustrates the problems of a single institutional design for the whole country associated with problems of bureaucratic capacity and suggests that the program generates implementation problems that could be solved if there were instances of negotiation, agreement and dialogue in which local governments had a seat and participation. The FNDE's attempt to adopt a pattern of projects that would allow overcoming the known problems of unequal capacities among Brazilian municipalities generates an adverse effect: an excessively

rigid execution model that does not allow adaptations to local realities and contexts, resulting in delays and, in many cases, in abandonment and non-completion of works.

The central argument worked on in the article was that this excessive top-down bureaucratic inflexibility, characterized by the absence of dialogue, interaction or actualization channels between local managers and central agencies, prevents the identification of typical (and expected) problems at the moment of implementation of public policies. As a result, normative revisions and adjustments that would improve and speed up the delivery of services and public goods and the responses to implementation problems are not established. Without institutionalized spaces for dialogue and exchange, the system itself becomes dependent on case-by-case solutions and exposed to political influences and political clientelism.

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