

FROM THE OVEN TO THE FUTURE: SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INCLUSION THROUGH GASTRONOMY - THE GASTROMOTIVA CASE

1 INTRODUCTION

Social inequality and food insecurity are significant global challenges, especially in Brazil, where a large part of the population faces difficulties in accessing healthy food, education, and development opportunities (Ogwu *et al.*, 2024; Cherol *et al.*, 2023; Ribeiro *et al.*, 2023). Social entrepreneurship has emerged as a strategy that unites business practices and solutions to complex social issues (Dentchev *et al.*, 2016; Goyal *et al.*, 2016). Impact businesses, which seek social and environmental changes while maintaining financial viability, have been consolidated as an effective alternative to promote equity and sustainable development (Hariram *et al.*, 2023; Edwards, 2021).

Gastromotiva is an example of social entrepreneurship in Brazil, founded in 2006, using gastronomy to transform socially. The organization trains young people from vulnerable communities in gastronomy, promoting social inclusion and fighting hunger (Bonfim; Parisotto; Miranda, 2022; Pansarella, 2017). Its initiatives, such as Refettorio Gastromotiva and the Solidarity Kitchens program, offer quality meals to vulnerable populations and encourage local entrepreneurship and sustainability (Bonfim; Parisotto; Miranda, 2022; Pansarella, 2017).

Gastromotiva's actions directly impact several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as poverty eradication (SDG 1), fight against hunger (SDG 2), quality education (SDG 4), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), and reduction of inequalities (SDG 10) (OECD, 2019; UCLG, 2020; UN, 2015).

This study aims to analyze Gastromotiva's business model and evaluate how its practices contribute to the SDGs, especially in social inclusion, job creation and promotion of sustainable practices in the gastronomic sector. The research seeks to understand the effectiveness of Gastromotiva in the social and economic transformation of the communities served, reflecting on the role of social entrepreneurship and impact businesses in sustainable development (Creswell; Creswell, 2017; Esteves *et al.*, 2021).

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Social entrepreneurship emerges as a response to social inequalities and the lack of effective solutions to problems such as poverty and exclusion (Hietschold *et al.*, 2023; Weiss *et al.*, 2023). It aims to create business models to solve social, environmental, and cultural issues, using business practices to generate social value (Usman *et al.*, 2024; Scuotto; Cicellin; Consiglio, 2023). Its main objective is to maximize positive impact, seeking the social transformation of the communities involved (Hietschold *et al.*, 2023; Ko; Liu, 2021).

2.2 IMPACT BUSINESS

Impact businesses are companies that seek to solve social or environmental problems while maintaining a financially viable model (Andersson *et al.*, 2022; Mattera *et al.*, 2021). They go beyond philanthropy and social responsibility, with social value creation as their primary mission (Lashitew *et al.*, 2022). These businesses, operating in sectors such as education, healthcare, and agriculture, focus not only on financial viability but also on

improving social indicators such as inclusion and quality of life (Hariram *et al.*, 2023). Measuring the social impact generated by these companies is an ongoing challenge, requiring specific indicators and transparency (Fiandrino; Scarpa; Torelli, 2022).

2.3 SOCIAL GASTRONOMY

Social gastronomy uses cooking as a tool to promote social inclusion, education, and combat problems such as food insecurity and social exclusion (Damasceno *et al.*, 2023; Forman, 2021). Initiatives such as culinary schools and food projects in underprivileged communities have proven effective in professional training and income generation, improving people's living conditions and self-esteem (Altares *et al.*, 2022; Saxe-Custack *et al.*, 2021). Social gastronomy goes beyond food, involving educational and training processes, focusing on the formation of citizens able to work in various segments of the economy (Balderas-Cajudo *et al.*, 2025; Damasceno *et al.*, 2023).

2.4 SOCIAL IMPACT AND MEASUREMENT

Social impact measurement is crucial for assessing the effectiveness of social entrepreneurship and impact business initiatives (Beisland *et al.*, 2021; Klarin; Suseno, 2023). It should be based on clear, measurable and adaptable indicators, reflecting the direct and indirect effects of actions (Mulloth; Rumi, 2022). Evaluation should not be limited to the number of people served, but should consider the quality of interventions, the improvement of living conditions, and the strengthening of communities (Beisland *et al.*, 2021; Killaspy *et al.*, 2022).

3 METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, exploratory and descriptive approach, focusing on a case study about *Gastromotiva*. The exploratory research aims to understand the phenomenon in a preliminary way, identifying the practices and impacts of the organization's initiatives (Creswell; Creswell, 2017; Esteves *et al.*, 2021). The descriptive research, in turn, aims to detail the context of *Gastromotiva*, its actions, and the results generated by its projects (Esteves *et al.*, 2021). For this, netnography will be used, a methodology that allows analyzing the interaction of the organization with its target audience and the reception of its actions in the digital environment and on social networks (Kozinets, 2014; Cotta; Freitas Coelho; Sudré, 2024).

Data collection will be carried out through netnography, which involves the analysis of interactions, posts and discussions on digital platforms related to *Gastromotiva*. This method provides immersion in online communities, allowing us to observe how participants, managers, and the organization itself interact in the virtual environment (Kozinets, 2014; Cotta; Freitas Coelho; Sudré, 2024). Digital sources include posts on social networks, forums, blogs, and other materials produced by the organization, such as reports and dissemination materials (Kozinets, 2014; Cotta; Freitas Coelho; Sudré, 2024).

Data analysis will be conducted through qualitative content analysis, a technique widely used in qualitative studies to interpret non-numerical data (Creswell; Creswell, 2017; Bardin, 2013).

4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

4.1 GASTROMOTIVA'S PROFILE AND INITIATIVES

Gastromotiva positions itself as a social organization of great relevance, using gastronomy as a vehicle for social transformation and positive impact. Its initiatives, such as vocational courses and the Refettorio Gastromotiva and Solidarity Kitchens programs, have as their focus the training of young people from vulnerable communities, promoting not only technical skills, but also entrepreneurial and leadership competencies. Training goes beyond culinary learning, offering emotional support, building self-esteem and confidence. This is evidenced by the participants' reports, which highlight the importance of these aspects in the process of change in their lives, allowing them to overcome obstacles related to social exclusion and the lack of prospects for the future (Bonfim; Parisotto; Miranda, 2022). The data collected indicates that more than 10.000 young people have been trained over the years, reflecting the scope and effectiveness of Gastromotiva's initiatives.

4.2 SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Gastromotiva has demonstrated a substantial social and economic impact on the communities in which it operates. Training in gastronomy has been a key driver for social inclusion, with many participants getting formal jobs or establishing their own businesses after training. These results are in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially regarding Employment and Income Generation (SDG 8). In addition, the Refettorio Gastromotiva and Solidarity Kitchens programs have played a crucial role in combating food insecurity (SDG 2) by providing healthy meals to vulnerable populations and promoting sustainable practices in the food production and consumption process (Hariram *et al.*, 2023; Edwards, 2021). Gastromotiva's action also contributes to the reduction of inequalities (SDG 10), providing an opportunity to improve the quality of life for young people from marginalized areas.

While the social impact is evident, analysis of the data suggests that Gastromotiva still faces challenges in terms of financial sustainability and scale. Dependence on donations and external partnerships can compromise the continuity of their actions in the long term, which is a frequent risk in social business models (Fiandrino; Scarpa; Torelli, 2022). This reinforces the need to explore new sources of financing and develop hybrid business models, which integrate private and public financing in a more robust way (José-Gomes; Galvão; Gabriel-Leite, 2025).

4.3 CHALLENGES FACED BY GASTROMOTIVA

Financial sustainability is a recurring challenge in social entrepreneurship organizations, and Gastromotiva is no exception. Although it has demonstrated great social impact, its dependence on donations and external partnerships makes its operation vulnerable to changes in the economic and political landscape. As pointed out by Hariram *et al.* (2023), social impact businesses often face challenges related to financial stability and scalability, issues that require a stronger strategic approach. In addition, although many of the young people trained by Gastromotiva find employment in the food sector, access to more specialized and formal labor markets is still a major obstacle. The lack of a network of contacts and the requirement of additional qualifications hinder the professional advancement of some alumni, which highlights the need for strategies that integrate continuous support for their insertion into wider markets.

4.4 ALIGNMENT WITH THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)

The impact of Gastromotiva's initiatives is strongly aligned with the SDGs, especially about poverty eradication (SDG 1), zero hunger (SDG 2), quality education (SDG 4) and reduction of inequalities (SDG 10). The professional training programs offered by the organization not only train citizens with practical skills but also contribute to the generation of employment opportunities in a sustainable sector, as evidenced in the participants' reports. The organization's approach also reflects a commitment to sustainable practices in the food sector (SDG 12), as shown by the focus on reducing food waste and promoting the responsible use of resources (Lima *et al.*, 2024a; Lima *et al.*, 2024b).

Gastromotiva's contribution to the SDGs demonstrates how social businesses can integrate social and economic objectives with the global sustainable development agenda. As suggested by Hietschold *et al.* (2023), the use of business practices to generate positive social impact can transform traditional business models into catalysts for significant structural change.

5 CONCLUSION

This study revealed that Gastromotiva has established itself as a successful example of social entrepreneurship in Brazil, using gastronomy as a powerful tool for social transformation and sustainable development. The organization has positively impacted the lives of thousands of young people from vulnerable communities, not only through technical training in gastronomy, but also by creating job opportunities, encouraging entrepreneurship, and promoting social inclusion.

The results indicate that Gastromotiva's initiatives have contributed significantly to the achievement of several Sustainable Development Goals, standing out in the eradication of poverty, fight against hunger, quality education, decent work and reduction of inequalities. However, the financial sustainability and scalability of its operations represent important challenges that need to be overcome to ensure the continuity and expansion of its impact.

This study contributes to the understanding of how social entrepreneurship organizations can integrate business practices and positive social impact, using gastronomy as a vector of change. It also reinforces the importance of measuring social impact, financial sustainability and the creation of support networks as essential elements for the success of social impact businesses.

As a suggestion for future research, it would be interesting to investigate ways to strengthen the financial sustainability of these organizations, exploring alternatives such as hybrid business models and more robust partnerships with the private sector and public policies. In addition, the study of the expansion of impact, focusing on the formation of support networks for the insertion of young people in the labor market and the replication of the Gastromotiva model in other regions, can bring valuable insights for strengthening the practice of social entrepreneurship.

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