




## Social entrepreneurship: the role of a social organization in Minas Gerais for local development

*Empreendedorismo social: a atuação de uma organização social mineira para o desenvolvimento local*




*Emprendimiento social: el papel de una organización social en Minas Gerais para el desarrollo local*

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## ABSTRACT

**Goal:** This article aims to analyze how social entrepreneurship develops in a social impact organization in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, highlighting its main contributions to local development. **Methodology/approach:** A case study was carried out, through in-depth interviews with the entrepreneur and others involved in the business, an organization characterized as a social enterprise, located in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais. The study discussed the alliance of resources that would enable economic and health conditions through sustainable organic planting. **Originality/relevance:** It is relevant when delimiting a social business in Belo Horizonte/MG as a unit of analysis and is original because it has not been published in other scientific dissemination media. **Main findings:** There was a lack of social enterprises in the region and a lack of knowledge about the impacts that these companies can generate in communities, regardless of their economic level. It is also clear that social organizations have been giving positive responses to the communities in which they operate, but this work must be improved, so that more effective changes can generate better social and environmental impacts in cities. **Theoretical contributions:** The study highlights the functioning of a social enterprise and its consequences in the community, helping other companies and studies to provide themselves with data to build on the research findings developed here. **Management contributions:** It is expected to contribute to a greater spread of social entrepreneurship as a power of transformation and, mainly, an entrepreneurship model capable of generating profit, in addition to benefits for society.

**Keywords:** social entrepreneurship; social impact; local development.

## RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Este artigo tem como objetivo analisar como o empreendedorismo social se desenvolve em uma organização de impacto social de Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, destacando suas principais contribuições para o desenvolvimento local. **Metodologia/abordagem:** Foi realizado um estudo de caso, por meio de entrevistas em profundidade com o empreendedor e demais envolvidos no negócio, uma organização caracterizada como empresa social, localizada em Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais. O estudo discutiu a aliança de recursos que possibilitassem condições de economia e saúde mediante o plantio orgânico sustentável. **Originalidade/relevância:** É relevante ao delimitar um negócio social em Belo Horizonte/MG como unidade de análise e é original por não ter sido publicado em outros meios de divulgação científica. **Principais resultados:** Constatou-se a carência de empreendimentos sociais na região e o desconhecimento dos impactos que essas empresas podem gerar nas comunidades, independentemente de seu nível econômico. Tem-se ainda que as organizações sociais vêm dando respostas positivas às comunidades em que estão inseridas, mas esse trabalho deve ser aprimorado, para que modificações mais efetivas possam gerar melhores impactos sociais e ambientais nas cidades. **Contribuições teóricas:** O estudo aponta o funcionamento de uma empresa social e seus desdobramentos na comunidade, favorecendo para que outras empresas e estudos possam se munir de dados para partir dos achados de pesquisa aqui desenvolvidos. **Contribuições para a gestão:** Espera-se que contribua para uma maior propagação do empreendedorismo social como poder de transformação e, principalmente, modelo de empreendedorismo capaz de gerar lucro, além de benefícios para a sociedade.

**Palavras-chave:** empreendedorismo social; impacto social; desenvolvimento local.

## RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar cómo se desarrolla el emprendimiento social en una organización de impacto social en Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, destacando sus principales contribuciones al desarrollo local. **Metodología/enfoque:** Se realizó un estudio de caso, a través de entrevistas en profundidad con el empresario y otros involucrados en el negocio, una organización caracterizada como empresa social, ubicada en Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais. El estudio discutió la alianza de recursos que permitirían condiciones económicas y de salud a través de la siembra orgánica sustentable. **Originalidad/relevancia:** Es relevante al delimitar una empresa social en Belo Horizonte/MG como unidad de análisis y es original porque no ha sido publicada en otros medios de divulgación científica. **Principales resultados:** Hubo escasez de empresas sociales en la región y desconocimiento sobre los impactos que estas empresas pueden generar en las comunidades, independientemente de su nivel económico. También está claro que las organizaciones sociales han venido dando respuestas positivas a las comunidades en las que operan, pero este trabajo debe mejorarse, para que cambios más efectivos puedan generar mejores impactos sociales y ambientales en las ciudades. **Contribuciones teóricas:** El estudio destaca el funcionamiento de una empresa social y sus consecuencias en la comunidad, ayudando a otras empresas y estudios a proporcionarse datos para aprovechar los resultados de la investigación aquí desarrollados. **Contribuciones a la gestión:** Se espera contribuir a una mayor difusión del emprendimiento social como potencia de transformación y, principalmente, un modelo de emprendimiento capaz de generar rentabilidad, además de beneficios para la sociedad.

**Palabras clave:** emprendimiento social; impacto social; desarrollo local.

## ■ INTRODUCTION

Social entrepreneurship has emerged as a focal point for driving change and fostering innovation within private sector organizations and markets, as well as addressing local social and economic issues, thereby creating a conducive environment for social change (Swanson & Zhang, 2012; Oliveira & Godói-De-Sousa, 2015; Cruz Filho, 2018; Duarte, 2017; Mayas & Zabarh, 2019; Zhang et al., 2024). Currently, there is a growing interest in social entrepreneurship in empirical studies, across corporate, civil, and public sectors in both developing and developed countries, despite the limited number of studies in Brazil (Dacin et al., 2011; Silva et al., 2019; Tran, 2019; Barbalho & Uchoa, 2019; Oliveira et al., 2020; Campigotto-Sandri et al., 2020; D'amario & Comini, 2020).

This growing appeal seems particularly strong among a socially conscious group of individuals who have become skeptical about the capacity of governments and businesses to meaningfully address pressing social issues, such as poverty, social exclusion, and environmental concerns (Dacin et al., 2011; Ramirez et al., 2024). In this regard, social entrepreneurs strive to create social value as a primary organizational goal, utilizing business concepts to sustain their operations in pursuit of this purpose (Ilahi et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2024). Both national and international studies have examined the motivations behind an individual's decision to become a social entrepreneur (Oliveira & Cardoso, 2015; Estrin et al., 2016; Marins, 2018; Chaudry, 2023), what drives an individual to engage with the financial uncertainties of starting a business, when lower-risk employment options are readily available in the market.

In search of an explanation, several researchers (Lima et al., 2014; Polin & Golla, 2017; Nunes & Mello, 2018; Itelvino et al., 2018; Janssen, 2020; Hobus, 2021) have considered multiple variants and explanations for the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship. In this context, the application of business management concepts and practices to the social field arises, with inclusive business models and social entrepreneurship activities aiming at social objectives through business-oriented approaches (UNDP, 2015; Gaiotto, 2016; Duarte, 2017; Laurett et al., 2018; Oliveira et al., 2020; Ramos et al., 2023).

The benefits of such initiatives range from democratizing information and access to culture to reducing hunger and unemployment. Yunus (2008) believes that social enterprises could address some of the issues related to local economic inequality. Therefore, the concept of social entrepreneurship can be understood as a process that involves the innovative use and combination of resources to pursue opportunities that catalyze social change and/or meet the local needs of a specific region or community. From this perspective, it becomes evident that it is crucial to understand how social entrepreneurship can contribute to socio-environmental issues, sustainable development, and the creation of initiatives aimed at addressing the demands of civil society itself (Yunus et al., 2010; Comini, 2016; Silva et al., 2019; Campigotto-Sandri et al., 2020; Chaudry, 2023).

Given that this topic constitutes a growing field and that the literature remains underexplored due to the diverse perspectives it presents

(Lehmen et al., 2023), involving terms such as social, inclusive, socio-environmental, social impact, peripheral impact, and social enterprises (Barki et al., 2020), the present study seeks to explore the so-called “sector two and a half,” referring to social enterprises. This field holds significant potential in academic research and practical application, as it offers an alternative alignment between the third sector, which has a social purpose, and the second sector, which follows market logic, by reinterpreting businesses aimed at fostering a more just society (Barki et al., 2020; Lehmen et al., 2023). In addition to the challenge of hybridity in social enterprises, which entails balancing a dual mission focused on social purpose and financial sustainability, this study presents an opportunity for a deeper understanding of the field of social entrepreneurship, contributing to the development of purpose-driven businesses in alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Bittencourt, 2023; United Nations, 2024) for prosperity.

Thus, this investigation focuses on the discussion surrounding the following research question: How can social enterprises help solve social and economic problems and promote sustainable local development? To this end, it analyzed the social entrepreneurship of a social impact organization based in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, highlighting its main contributions to local development.

It is important to discuss social entrepreneurship within organizations in Brazil, as this action simultaneously involves social, ethical, legal, and business aspects. Furthermore, the social role of this action emphasizes the business excellence of valuing new types of social businesses as a phenomenon that contributes to societal improvement. Although this is a topic that presents substantial theoretical discussions, the proposed case study aims to address a theoretical and practical gap by examining a specific social enterprise in Belo Horizonte/MG. It is understood that efforts to define social entrepreneurship as a field of knowledge could create opportunities to resolve social dilemmas such as poverty, exclusion, and socio-economic sustainability, which, in the current context, have become increasingly urgent.

This study adopts a qualitative approach and utilizes the case study method to investigate the selected social impact organization, utilizing documentary data, a literature review, and semi-structured interviews. Some limitations in the research are highlighted, particularly concerning access to stakeholders involved with the social enterprise, especially clients, for conducting the semi-structured interviews. Nevertheless, it was possible to interview six (06) clients.

In addition to this introduction, the article is structured into the following sections: the first discusses social entrepreneurship and the possibilities of social enterprises; the next section problematizes the construct of local development and the sustainability of social enterprises. It then presents the methodological approach and data analysis. Finally, the contributions of the study are summarized, along with the challenges for future research.

## ■ THEORETICAL REFERENCE

### Social Entrepreneurship and Social Enterprises

The social environment is characterized by social customs, culture, values, and beliefs. Changes are not easily accepted within the socio-economic context of a country. Entrepreneurs discover new sources of materials, new markets, and new opportunities, establishing new and more profitable organizational forms. This is a reflection of their willpower, enthusiasm, and energy, which helps to overcome societal resistance to change. In its evolution, social entrepreneurship has forged a pact of social responsibility alongside profit generation, now regarded as a hybrid and innovative enterprise (Barbalho & Uchoa, 2019), facing the challenge of aligning two potentially opposing logics: a market logic that emphasizes financial performance and the efficient use of resources, and a social logic that prioritizes social value and addresses the needs of a socially disadvantaged audience (Simmons & Mason, 2024).

The economic, political, and environmental crisis has revisited a series of issues that need to be properly addressed. These trends have led to the emergence of new concepts, such as social economy and social entrepreneurship. Thus, the social economy is considered a “hybrid sector between the business (private) sector and the public sector, aimed at providing quality social services to disadvantaged communities and individuals” (Fundação Erasmus, 2020, p. 9). The social economy encompasses companies and organizations, particularly social enterprises, cooperatives, mutual societies, associations, and foundations that produce and offer goods, services, and knowledge, while pursuing economic and social objectives and promoting solidarity.

The term social entrepreneurship is recent and stems from the application of business management concepts and practices to the social sphere, utilizing the logic of entrepreneurial business (Mariano & Mayer, 2011). In this regard, social enterprises are becoming more professionalized and revolutionizing the business space, although there are no statistical data on their evolution over time or the quantity of such businesses in Brazil. It is considered an emerging field that seeks to highlight the processes of differentiation between general entrepreneurship and social spheres, and to develop strategies that lend it legitimacy (Barbalho & Uchoa, 2019).

Social entrepreneurship has its own particularities; one example is its focus on finding social solutions and producing goods and services for the community, with its performance being evaluated based on its social impact (Mariano & Mayer, 2011). The social entrepreneur is an agent of reality transformation, as they convert societal issues into opportunities, creating and transforming the entrepreneurial experience into entrepreneurial knowledge (Itelvino et al., 2018). They recognize social problems and seek to use entrepreneurial tools to address them (Oliveira et al., 2016).

According to Rosolen et al. (2014), the use of the term originated in the United States, employing expressions such as “social entrepreneurship,” “social enterprise,” “social business,” and “inclusive business,” which were used in a broad sense to specify innovative activities with a social objective in the private sector, the third sector, or hybrid organizations. Particularly in emerging countries, the terms “social enterprises” and “inclusive business-

es” began to be used. According to the authors, new terms are applied to initiatives that operate in the marketplace but with objectives focused on generating social value, such as social enterprises, social businesses, and inclusive businesses (Rosolen et al., 2014).

For Oliveira et al. (2016), the difference between traditional entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship lies in the latter’s focus on maximizing social returns rather than solely maximizing profit, as shown in Table 1. All financial resources are allocated to other programs and actions aimed at the community, enabling workers to develop in a healthy and sustainable manner.

**Table 1**

Similarities and Differences Between Commercial and Social Enterprises

Similarities	Differences
Need for sufficient initial and operational capital	Profit is not a final objective but a tool to sustain financial viability
Creation of profit margin to ensure financial sustainability	Profit is rarely distributed but reinvested into new social initiatives
Similar legal structure	Employees may receive zero compensation (volunteers)
Similar approach in business planning, marketing, management, and promotion	The success of a social enterprise is measured by the positive social impact it creates
Aims to deliver high-quality products and customer service	Funding sources may vary, with traditional financing tools including donations, fundraising initiatives, and more innovative sources, such as crowdfunding platforms
Motivated, skilled, and dedicated personnel	
Competitive advantage, good marketing positioning, and strong brand image	

**Note.** Fundação Erasmus (2019, p. 12)

Barki (2015) uses the term impact businesses to refer to organizations that aim to generate social impact by offering products and services that reduce the vulnerability of low-income populations while also achieving financial returns. The primary reason for the existence of an impact business is its social impact. According to Mariano and Mayer (2011), social entrepreneurship arises from business entrepreneurship aspiring to management in the social field, where principles and tools from the business sector are applied to solve social problems, and social entrepreneurs are a subset of business entrepreneurs driven by a social mission. Social entrepreneurs organize resources in environments with limited resources and deliver social value through stakeholder participation in actions. In addition to serving a market that is in need of relevant solutions for its specific context, during this process, social entrepreneurs collaborate and empower others in the creation of value (Schaefer et al., 2022), thereby developing a potential network. At the core of social entrepreneurship is the creation of social value, which refers to creating value for others in a way that has a positive impact on the community and leads to broader social change (Mukesh et al., 2024).

The term social business was introduced by Muhammad Yunus, the founder of the Grameen Bank. It may seem similar to the principles of social entrepreneurship, as it aims to merge the creation of social and economic



value within the same organizational structure. A social business is an initiative designed to address a social problem while generating sufficient revenue to cover its expenses. It does not rely on donations, and the profits generated are reinvested into the business; unlike traditional businesses, a social business considers the distribution of profits to be aligned with its mission. Yunus (2008) believes that social businesses could address some of the issues related to inequality. In this way, the concept of social entrepreneurship can be understood as a process that involves the innovative use and combination of resources to seize opportunities that catalyze social change and/or meet social needs.

A social business is characterized as a for-profit company that operates commercially and generates profit, which is then reinvested in its social mission. According to Yunus (2008), unlike non-profit organizations, these ventures produce goods and/or provide services and assume economic risks—some companies may even declare bankruptcy. Furthermore, they focus on continuous performance improvement and metrics, aiming to achieve their mission, which permeates their organizational culture. Social entrepreneurship can be regarded as a form of action involving the public, private, and civil society sectors, distinct from social economy, which encompasses organizations located between the public and private sectors that aim to provide services to society. Unlike businesses and charitable institutions that focus either on profit maximization or social missions, social enterprises incorporate both objectives at their core. Adopting plural value logics can shape new ways of doing business (Zhang et al., 2024).

Comini (2016) identified three perspectives that explain social businesses: the European, North American, and those of emerging and developing countries. In general terms, the European perspective originated from the tradition of social economy, which is based on associativism and cooperativism, representing the action of civil society organizations with public functions. As for the North American perspective, these businesses are private organizations that apply market logic to solutions for socio-environmental issues.

According to Comini (2016), there are approaches targeting low-income populations and/or minorities led by civil society organizations aimed at increasing their revenue sources. Other initiatives seek to serve low-income consumers within for-profit businesses. These initiatives may represent a core, secondary, or peripheral activity within the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) domain. Barki (2015) states that many large private companies tend to maintain a sustainability department or a foundation, or institute, in order to generate social and/or environmental benefits. Specifically, the services of social entrepreneurship initiatives may rely on mixed funding sources, incorporating resources obtained through non-commercial means, such as donations, unilateral transfers, and philanthropic investment (PNUD, 2015).

Social entrepreneurship emerges as an alternative for addressing demands that prioritize social inclusion and the empowerment of individuals, as well as activities neglected by the market or the state (Gaiotto, 2016). Marins (2018) emphasizes that social entrepreneurship arises, in the context of contemporary complexity, as a broad, transformative movement that is transversal, civic, decentralized, ethical, democratic, innovative, and exponential. It operates at the intersection of various fields of science and human action. The field of social entrepreneurship drives positive social change through the creation of social value and plays a prominent role in balancing sustainability

and economic development (Mukesh et al., 2024) through empathy, experience with social issues, and awareness of local social consciousness (Ip, 2024).

Many researchers distinguish social enterprises from corporate businesses by emphasizing the achievement of social objectives rather than economic gains (Oliveira et al., 2020; D'Amario & Comini, 2020). The paradox is that one of the main reasons for the failure of social enterprises is the lack of sustainable funding (Limeira, 2015). Social entrepreneurs aim to create social value while facing financial challenges by exploring market-based solutions and utilizing a broad range of resources (Comini, 2016).

In addition to this rational explanation regarding the economic interests of social ventures, drawing on institutional theory, Dart (2004) argues that the logic of the capitalist system, market policies, and ideological values strongly influence the social economy through a process of isomorphism, making social organizations increasingly similar to profit-oriented businesses and adopting market logic. However, it is believed that the capitalist system is also affected by social movements. Pache and Santos (2013) explain the sustainability of social ventures through the capture and creation of value concepts. They recognize that there is tension between value creation and value capture. Emphasizing one of them allows for the differentiation of entrepreneurial activities, such as: non-profit, for-profit, and hybrid.

Several typologies in the literature characterize the activities of entrepreneurs in general and social entrepreneurs in particular (Laurett et al. 2018). According to Pache and Santos (2013), for-profit organizations are commercial ventures with a social mission. For Oliveira et al. (2020), non-profit organizations are neither characterized as public nor private; they are part of the third sector. Social entrepreneurship, on the other hand, is not a distinct sector but a set of hybrid organizations and processes that can emerge in different institutional spaces and sectors. A social business is an initiative aimed at solving a social problem while generating sufficient revenue to cover its expenses. It does not rely on donations, and the profits generated are reinvested into the business.

**Table 2**

*Types of Social Entrepreneurship*

<b>Non-Profit</b>	Would adopt social and environmental missions, similar to non-profit entities, but generate income to fulfill their social mission.
<b>For-Profit</b>	Would adopt social and environmental missions, similar to for-profit businesses, generating income to fulfill their social mission.
<b>Hybrid</b>	Adopts new business models that combine social mission with commercial enterprise.

**Note.** Duarte (2017); Laurett, Paço e Mainard (2018); Oliveira et al. (2020)

Hybrid models (i.e., a blend of legal forms) are becoming increasingly popular among social enterprises, which face difficulties in the growth process due to the need for complex and dynamic interaction between organizational capabilities and the elements of the social enterprise ecosystem (Tran & Schaeffer, 2024; Lewis, 2024). This trend is influenced by the lack of support for social entrepreneurship phenomena (Laurett et al., 2018). As a result, many social enterprises have chosen to create a legal entity with both for-profit



and non-profit components in order to attract donations and generate revenue from commercial activities (Comini, 2016). There are several reasons why social enterprises opt for hybrid models (Limeira, 2015). While some of these reasons are well-founded (e.g., preventing commercial activities from dominating a social agenda), many enterprises create hybrid models when they are, in fact, unnecessary. According to Duarte (2017, p. 47), “in the hybrid model, it is possible to have a model that provides both social value and commercial revenue through a unified strategy.”

## Local economic development: entrepreneurial and territorial perspectives

The identification of business opportunities and the use of entrepreneurial skills to create a new organization or develop an existing one lies at the core of the entrepreneurship concept, which contributes to personal and professional self-realization, active citizenship, and social inclusion of individuals (Varma, 2018). Entrepreneurial activity is influenced by a set of cognitive skills (self-efficacy, scripts, cognitive styles, problem analysis, etc.) (Liryo, 2008) and non-cognitive skills (creativity, autonomy, self-confidence, etc.), and is conditioned by factors such as education, family business experience, and access to financing (Chaves, 2016), along with other environmental variables. These variables have been identified as structural conditions that either facilitate or restrict entrepreneurial activity: financial, government policies, government programs, education and training, research and development transfer, commercial and professional infrastructure, market openness/entry barriers, access to physical infrastructure, and cultural and social norms (Tran & Schaeffer, 2024).

Entrepreneurship is viewed as a process of identifying and valuing an opportunity and creating value through a bundle of resources to exploit it. This process must be innovative and wealth-enhancing, based on entrepreneurial competencies. According to Chell (2007), entrepreneurship includes both business and social ventures, and is seen as a process of recognizing and seeking opportunities in relation to the resources available to create value.

Economic growth is associated with economic development. A higher real GDP allows for more investments to be allocated to health and education. However, the link between economic growth and economic development is not guaranteed. The returns from economic growth could be wasted or retained by a small wealthy elite. As noted by Araújo et al. (2021), economic growth signifies an increase in real national income/national output. According to Andion (2003, p. 6), “the Brazilian development model is marked by a significant disparity in productivity between rural and urban areas.” For Ávila (2006), the development of a country and its society is linked to local development, meaning local development is collectively measured, considering spaces and territories. Capitals such as human and social capital become essential for the dynamics of local development (Dowbor, 2005; Tenório, 2012; Fischer, 2002).

In addition to this conception, Llorens (2001, p. 85) emphasizes that “all productive activities, whether primary, industrial, or service-oriented, in different territories, are compelled to introduce components of innovation.” However, as the author warns, not all enterprises have access to innovation and funding, largely due to their location. This is because the market is not ter-

ritorially constructed for innovative ventures. Therefore, it is necessary to build a network articulated across different innovative territorial settings in order to provide the appropriate institutional infrastructure for local development. For social enterprises, these challenges are crucial, with continuous experimentation, resilience, and organizational learning playing a central role in the renewal of hybrid organizations' capabilities (Strambach & Momanyi, 2024).

According to Swinburn, Goga, and Murphy (2006), locality, often treated as a distinguishing characteristic, refers to a relatively small area. Although the term local is often understood as limited to a specific area, it does not only refer to a particular space. A local arrangement, delimited by administrative division parameters, must also take into account the sum of characteristics such as: the history of the area, specific social and economic features, cultural traits, and even geographical characteristics.

The local scale includes diverse territories characterized by economic, social, cultural, and political homogeneity and a common identity, broadly understood by those who are part of the place. These conditions may either enhance or limit the possibilities for improvement and economic development. "The economic, social, and physical attributes of a community will determine the design and approach for implementing a local economic development strategy" (Swinburn et al., 2006, p. 1). "For local development to be possible, it is necessary to involve a group of actors from different segments within a given territory" (Tenório, 2012, p. 157), where the main challenges are to solve social and/or environmental problems and contribute to improving the quality of life of people and the environment (Ramirez et al., 2024).

The territory thus becomes the locus of local development (Buarque, 1999). Buarque (1999) further emphasizes that delimiting what is local is a complicated matter, as there is no specific or predetermined size, nor are there limits to its measurement, parameters, and/or dimensions (Nascimento et al., 2012). In this study, reasonable dimensions for the development of life were considered, such as identity with the place where people conduct their daily lives: they inhabit, relate, work, and share norms, values, and customs (Ferraz, 2008, p. 38). The focus was particularly on the aspect related to social and local entrepreneurial capacity, whose dynamics enable social impact businesses.

To present the key ideas discussed, a summary table (Figure 1) is provided on social enterprises and local development, outlining the premises that will guide the analysis of the research results.

Figure 1

Summary Table of Theoretical Discussion

<b>Social Entrepreneurship</b>	Social entrepreneurship emerges as an alternative for addressing demands that prioritize social inclusion and the empowerment of individuals, as well as activities neglected by the market or the State (Gaiotto, 2016). Marins (2018) emphasizes that social entrepreneurship arises, in contemporary complexity, as a broad, transversal, civic, decentralized, ethical, democratic, innovative, and exponential transformative movement.
<b>Characteristics and Terminology</b>	According to Rosolen et al. (2014), the use of the term began in the United States, employing expressions such as "social entrepreneurship," "social enterprise," "social business," and "inclusive business," which were used with a broad meaning to specify innovative activities with a social goal in the private sector, third sector, or hybrid organizations. Particularly in emerging countries, the terms "social businesses" and "inclusive businesses" began to be used.
<b>Social Impact and Sustainability</b>	The social impact generated, such as the reduction of inequalities, social inclusion, and the improvement of the quality of life in the communities served, is the major challenge for social entrepreneurs, who aim to create social value while simultaneously facing financial challenges by exploring market-based solutions and utilizing a wide range of resources (Comini, 2016).
<b>Challenges for Local Development</b>	For local development to be possible, it is necessary to involve a group of actors from different segments present within a given territory (Tenório, 2012, p. 157).

## METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

In this research, a qualitative approach was used to address the problem. Thus, the field research aimed to observe facts and phenomena as they occur in reality through data collection at the enterprise selected for this study. A case study was conducted, which is characterized as a type of research where the object is a unit that is analyzed in depth, aiming at a detailed examination of an environment, a single subject, or a particular situation (Dresch, 2019). A social enterprise based in Belo Horizonte/MG was selected, which exhibits the characteristics of social entrepreneurship, as outlined by Comini (2020). The commercial enterprise investigated aims to help individuals interact with nature, promoting responsibility for their own food and providing a healthier lifestyle.

It is a social enterprise dedicated to sustainable urban agriculture and the recycling of organic waste in Belo Horizonte (MG), aiming to share and promote urban gardens within the city, contributing to a more sustainable urban environment, transforming social thinking, and promoting food security. Founded in 2013, the enterprise is registered as a business, rather than as an NGO or association. With its socio-environmental purpose, it is characterized as a social enterprise (Comini, 2016) within the concepts studied in this work. Its profits are reinvested into the business itself, in addition to promoting initiatives for healthy eating, creating a community composting network, and offering courses to the local community, among other activities aimed at spreading urban organic farming. The enterprise operates two organic gardens, one in the Santa Lúcia neighborhood and another in the Buritis neighborhood, both middle to upper-class areas of the capital, with a clientele that is interested in this type of food and highly sensitive to environmental practices. These gardens function like a backyard for the participants, meaning they grow what customers are interested in purchasing to avoid waste or the need for long-distance transportation of the produce.

The social enterprise seeks local development through the planting of sustainable urban gardens. It carries out planting and recycling through the composting process. It sells organic vegetables, artisanal products, and monthly subscription baskets with organic products at different price points. Its socio-environmental goal is to “plant and recycle to change the planet” (2023). They are participants in the Participatory Guarantee System (SPG), which is a regulation and certification system involving the members of the organic production network, such as farmers, producers, and technicians, who share the responsibility for evaluating the compliance of production units with organic farming regulations.

According to their website, the enterprise was created “with the intention of establishing a link between society and nature, bringing food security and organic waste management.” To achieve this, they offer courses on setting up and maintaining gardens, composting, and other related topics, help develop garden projects, and collaborate with other enterprises to promote more sustainable organic production alternatives within the city. The organization has been working on raising awareness, expanding cultivation spaces, and seeking a more sustainable way of life. The enterprise also aims to create engagement and exchange between partners. Almost all commercial and business relationships are carried out through barter, service exchange, and mutual favors. This way of living permeates the business, characteristic of social enterprises, and is reflected in those who plant. Given that these are private gardens with centralized control for their own benefit, this enterprise serves as an example of urban social entrepreneurship.

Regarding the data collection technique, in-depth interviews were chosen, both with the entrepreneur and with individuals connected to the business, such as suppliers, customers, and employees. This choice was made due to the fact that the organization is a social enterprise with a non-profit orientation, but not categorized as a Civil Society Organization (NGO). A preliminary research was conducted through an interview held on June 17, 2023, based on a semi-structured script, which was recorded and transcribed in full. The remaining interviews took place in September 2023, also recorded and transcribed in full. The investigations aimed to understand the social enterprise, its interests and proposals, as well as the aspects of social entrepreneurship within social entrepreneurship in Belo Horizonte, the location of its operations. One entrepreneur, two employees, six customers, and two suppliers were interviewed, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Interviews Conducted

Code	Interviewee Role	Quantity	Remarks
E1	Entrepreneur	1	Interview conducted with the entrepreneur to understand the social business and its social impacts.
C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6	Customers	6	Interviews conducted with customers, focusing on the interests and proposals of the social business.
F1, F2	Suppliers	2	Interviews conducted with suppliers, addressing their relationship with the company and their perception of the business.
Em1, Em2	Employees	2	Interviews conducted with employees, focusing on the organization's operations and their perspectives on the social enterprise.

The interview guide with the entrepreneur consisted of 20 questions about the business itself and the social impact of the enterprise. The first interview, aimed at understanding the social business, lasted approximately 45 minutes. The subsequent supplementary guides were as follows: entrepreneur (complementary questions conducted after the first interview), consisting of 6 questions; supplier (6 questions); employee (6 questions); and some customers (6 questions). The average duration of the interviews was 30 minutes per interviewee, and all meetings took place at the company's headquarters. The interviews were recorded and transcribed later, then analyzed according to the research objectives.

After this phase, the responses were organized by content, following the theoretical framework established. The responses from the interviewees were triangulated with the company's documentation (including the website, published materials, and news articles), as well as simple observation through visits to the studied organization. For the data categorization strategy, the study by Austin, Stevenson, and Wei-Skillern (2006) on social entrepreneurship was used to guide the analysis process. First, the opportunity and context were examined, which together determine the opening of the business. Then, a discussion was presented regarding the dimensions of people (customers, suppliers, and employees) and the business operations of the social enterprise. Thus, the main considerations from these different actors concerning social entrepreneurship were presented through the following variables: (i) context, (ii) opportunity, (iii) people, and (iv) business.

The process of analyzing the collected and obtained data occurred according to Bardin (2016) methodology in three distinct phases and was based on a structured system designed to facilitate the understanding of the technique in a dynamic and continuous manner throughout the research development. The first phase involved the organization of the data, with the transcription of the obtained information, organizing the collection of responses. The second phase consisted of the classification of the data, identifying common points and divergences, and analyzing the development of the social enterprise in relation to its contributions to local development. The third and final phase was the analysis of the collected data and its correlation with the theoretical framework addressed in the research, highlighting new revelations that emerged from the application of the interviews. Thus, the categorization process, according to Bardin (2016), was pre-defined, and

the field data collection followed the pre-established categories based on the study by Austin, Stevenson, and Wei-Skillern (2006) on social entrepreneurship.

## ■ RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The enterprise studied is a social enterprise focused on sustainable urban agriculture and organic waste recycling in Belo Horizonte, MG, with the goal of sharing and disseminating urban gardens in the city, contributing to a more sustainable urban environment, transforming social thinking, and promoting food security. The enterprise, founded in 2013, operates two organic gardens: one in the Santa Lúcia neighborhood and another in the Buritis neighborhood, both of which are located in upper-middle-class areas of the capital. These gardens cater to a clientele interested in this type of food. The gardens function as a backyard for participants in the system, meaning that they grow what the client is interested in purchasing, avoiding waste and long transportation distances for product distribution.

To uncover the “social” in social entrepreneurship, it is important to develop the social entrepreneurship process in different contexts. In this study, the process of social entrepreneurship was analyzed in the context of a small enterprise focused on urban food cultivation (vegetables) in the city of Belo Horizonte, MG. This was done using analysis criteria developed by Austin, Stevenson, and Wei-Skillern (2006), based on the four dimensions proposed in their model: **opportunity** and **context**, followed by the dimensions of **people** and **business** within the enterprise. These authors propose an analysis model for social entrepreneurship, based on Stevenson’s definition, which emphasizes the pursuit of opportunities beyond tangible resources, highlighting the importance of managing resource networks and adapting as new information emerges. The model is based on a dynamic alignment between four interrelated components: people, context, business, and opportunity (PCBO). People refer to those who actively participate or bring resources to the enterprise; context encompasses external factors such as economic and political influences that affect success; business refers to the contract that defines exchanges and benefits in the venture; and opportunity includes the activity that involves the allocation of scarce resources with the expectation of future returns. The model underscores that these elements are interdependent, and that even small changes in one pillar can significantly affect the others.

### Opportunity

Market opportunities can be identified through an analysis of changes in the business environment, with scientific and technological developments generating new opportunities. Other transformations in the environment, such as climate, geopolitical movements, and changes in the financial system, can also influence market opportunities. It is essential to consider the use of research to gain insights into the local business environment, ensuring that the strategy can thrive in a new market. Changes in a country’s regulatory environment can also create opportunities. In the interviews, the entrepreneur



makes it clear that the business brings benefits to the community, promoting growth and improving the quality of life in the area in which it operates.

*What you can observe is this social impact. Social impact comes alongside the possibility of profit, so while in conventional business profit is a primary factor, in our case there are other factors that impact it. Sometimes we lose a bit on profit, but we increase our social and local impact. For us, this has a very significant gain in the relationship with the customer and the community. I think we see this as a great opportunity, which adds a lot of value (Entrepreneur).*

Social entrepreneurship opportunities are typically based on the need to create social value that benefits the local community. A social enterprise usually does this by addressing a problem or providing assistance in an area of need or disadvantage. Therefore, the enterprise analyzed in this study is considered a social venture precisely because it capitalizes on a market opportunity within the growing organic products sector. The creation of networks within the community is an opportunity for the organization. In this regard, a network of customers purchasing monthly baskets was observed, strengthening the exchange between the company and the community. Moreover, the community also participates in activities and events such as plantings, courses, and lectures on organic products, strengthening community bonds, territorial identity, and their importance for local development. It is understood that this expanded network, with the support of public authorities, could expand opportunities for local development, focusing on healthier, more sustainable, and food-secure eating habits, particularly for the vulnerable communities in the area. These are steps that the venture could propose and develop in the future.

## Context

The horticulture sector in the Belo Horizonte/MG region encompasses 35 producing municipalities, with the main entity in the area being the Empresa de Assistência Técnica e Extensão Rural do Estado de Minas Gerais (Emater-MG). The production in the region is highly diversified, playing a crucial role in urban food supply by producing various types of vegetables, legumes, and fruits. Most producers are family farmers cultivating small plots of land. The production in the green belt plays a fundamental role in ensuring the availability of food for the urban center, and because the demand is close to the production area, the horticultural products reach the cities at affordable prices. Its proximity to the consumer market is also important for preserving the quality of the produce and providing access to fresh food. Against this backdrop, the company analyzed in this study was designed to meet the needs of a specific market in the city of Belo Horizonte/MG, namely the Santa Lúcia neighborhood.

In addition to a promising market, the company is driven by legislation. At the state level, Law No. 23672, dated 03/07/2020, establishes principles for the state policy on investments and impact businesses and outlines the state's actions aimed at promoting impact-driven enterprises. In other words, this type of venture seeks to generate positive socio-environmental impact alongside financial or economic returns, in a sustainable manner, promoting

investments from both public and private capital into impact businesses. This new legislation facilitated the establishment of the enterprise by easing access to planting techniques and agricultural practices, as well as accelerating growth through the Serviço Brasileiro de Apoio às Micro e Pequenas Empresas – SEBRAE.

The organization has added several other benefits, seeking to bring together something already existing – vegetable production, which includes various species – while incorporating new ideas, techniques, elements, information, concepts, and people through the social enterprise. It also aimed to promote the dissemination of urban gardening culture by offering courses to the public on planting, seedling formation, composting, and other content that fosters the culture of urban agriculture. In this way, the entrepreneur emphasizes the need to form networks. Through the interviews, it was confirmed that the enterprise does not have many networks in place. Only a few suppliers and partners take advantage of the space to showcase and sell their products. However, the few networks that do exist generate benefits not only for the producers but also for the local community.

The interviews also revealed that the goal is not merely to sell the products produced on-site. The enterprise manages the waste from consumers, promotes pesticide-free planting, and provides seedlings of vegetables, herbs, fruit trees, and non-conventional edible plants (PANCs) for the creation of personal gardens. Consumers are also able to harvest products grown on-site, promoting an immersive experience in the production environment. Additionally, there is the opportunity to purchase products from local producers at a discount, supporting local commerce and diversifying the diet with agroecological products.

The company offers courses and training for beginners in vegetable gardening and composting, beyond merely selling vegetables, demonstrating its potential in building and fostering sustainable urban gardens, where planting, harvesting, and recycling food scraps are all part of the process. There are various spaces for these activities, such as garden beds with more than 30 types of conventional vegetables, in addition to non-conventional edible plants (PANCs), spices, and herbs.

Therefore, it was the ideas and new experiences that propelled the business forward. Its sustainability is attributed to the entrepreneur's enthusiasm for bringing innovations to a basic business – planting and selling vegetables – transforming it into a life experience, with a focus on food, care, and interaction with nature, while also driving local development. These aspects point to a social entrepreneurial profile grounded in civic values, collectivity, and the common good. Furthermore, it is evident that the business with a social focus seeks opportunities for growth and improvement with a long-term vision.

Social entrepreneurship arises as a response to the various challenges faced by society (Rosolen et al., 2014; Barki, 2015; Silva et al., 2019; Ramos et al., 2023), as observed in the field research, where urban agriculture becomes a tool for socio-environmental transformation in cities, increasingly overwhelmed by pollution and negative environmental impacts on communal life. In the observed context, the enterprise does not have many networks established. Only a few suppliers and partners take advantage of the space to showcase and sell their products. However, the few networks that exist

generate benefits not only for the producers but also for the community. As Interviewee 4 remarks:

*You perceive in this enterprise the social and sustainability issues, not just in the sale of products. But they buy and resell here, usually from small-scale producers. The production here is also small-scale. They collect trash, form it, and we cultivate small gardens at home.”*  
(Customer 4)

The term “aggregate” goes far beyond generating wealth. For social enterprises, communion, exchange, and local development through urban agriculture in Belo Horizonte are the business’s main purpose. Both the entrepreneur and the community recognize that the business benefits various other individuals and enterprises, beyond just the local community.

*The social benefits that social entrepreneurship can bring are seen in the generation of income for both myself and the employees here, as well as others involved. Those who are part of the network, such as partner producers, also benefit. In this way, we have created a circular and solidarity-based economy with all the partners involved in the project. Additionally, the environmental aspect is also significant here, with a strong focus on waste management. People recycle their food waste, and today, we manage to recycle twelve tons of waste per month. We also produce, on average, around 1,000 vegetables per month, along with seedlings. This becomes part of the overall impact. (Entrepreneur)*

With this model, the entrepreneur can follow a sustainable path and achieve a “win-win-win situation” where they contribute to the environment, society, and are economically profitable and productive. These dimensions, currently present in the business, were not initially planned or incorporated during the project’s conception phase. Therefore, they are considered to have been added after the decision to open the enterprise and were integrated into the corporate strategy at a later stage. However, as a social enterprise, these changes are inherent to its financial sustainability and to meeting the demands that emerged over the six years of its existence, driven by the needs of the consumers themselves.

## Resources and People

In the context of social enterprises, there is an important aspect to mention: the impact on local development. Social entrepreneurship is a significant source of impact for the world, linking work to a social, environmental, or cultural purpose that goes beyond pure financial gain. Social enterprises dedicate themselves to solving some of the world’s most pressing issues, while continuing to succeed as thriving businesses. It is understood that the investigated enterprise has impacted the people in its surroundings, not only by promoting healthy eating but also by raising ecological awareness regarding recycling and the use of pesticides in fresh food consumption.

In the case studied, this impact is observed in the neighborhoods where the urban gardens are located, as well as in other areas of the city

where the business participates in agro-ecological fairs or organic product markets. This expands its participation in local development towards more sustainable food practices and the promotion of social entrepreneurship. Public-private partnerships are a source of economic development for these areas, and along with successful private enterprises, communities can improve their social and economic situation. However, this has not yet occurred in the studied case. No substantial evidence was found of partnerships with the public sector or other businesses that could characterize large-scale economic development. The business remains localized, with significant but local impacts.

The goal is not merely to sell the products produced on-site. The enterprise manages the waste from consumers, promotes pesticide-free planting, provides seedlings of vegetables, herbs, fruit trees, and non-conventional food plants (PANCs) for building personal gardens, allows consumers to harvest products grown on-site, creating an immersive experience in the production environment, and offers the possibility of purchasing products from local producers at a discount, thus supporting local commerce and diversifying their diet with agroecological products.

Social entrepreneurship is not only a business phenomenon where companies use commercial means to achieve social objectives, but also a public and private value phenomenon in which individuals mobilize private resources to produce goods/services that simultaneously address sustainability issues and achieve personal goals. Therefore, the creation of social value, rather than wealth, is the primary driving force for social entrepreneurs (Ilahi et al., 2022). Moreover, they need to achieve financial stability to maintain this value. In this way, the owner created membership plans for consumers, where they pay monthly fees as a way to maintain a steady cash flow. In return, consumers receive a monthly basket with vegetables produced according to seasonal availability.

Entrepreneurship is a dynamic process of vision, change, and creation. It requires energy and passion in the creation and implementation of new ideas and creative solutions. The essential ingredients of this process are the willingness to take risks, the ability to build an effective team, combine the necessary resources, and a vision capable of recognizing opportunities where others see chaos. Entrepreneurs are, therefore, individuals who perceive an opportunity to create value and take risks in developing and creating innovations to realize that opportunity.

Thus, in addition to the basic function of selling products, the social enterprise promotes consumer membership, attracting peers to maintain its financial sustainability. It thus presents itself as a planting club for members, aiming to bring urban agriculture to everyone. The creation of different plans for members, based on the experience each one seeks and their personal needs, makes people associate not just with a business, but with a differentiated way of thinking.

## Business

Austin, Stevenson, and Wei-Skillern (2006) highlight the final variable as the business aspect. Social enterprises represent the primary form of “conscious capitalism,” which refers to a business model that is aware, accountable, and responsible for all of its externalities, while aligning harmoniously with both

the environment and the community in which it operates. In this context, a social enterprise can be characterized as a “truly sustainable business” that aims to address collective sustainability challenges, thereby creating value for the common good. By examining the involvement of other groups, such as employees and partners, it becomes evident how the enterprise and the innovations it brings are perceived. One of the suppliers/partners notes that the enterprise forms partnerships with other organizations that uphold the same principles. Thus, it is apparent that these partnerships are a valuable resource for all parties involved.

Since social enterprises operate locally, it is crucial for them to gain the acceptance of the local population during the initial phase. Subsequently, it is essential for them to increase participation from more individuals as they work towards achieving their goals. Social networks within these enterprises can make this possible only through the networks they build, which include local citizens, other organizations, local government, educational institutions, and community groups. Therefore, it is strongly argued that the relationships between all the actors in a social enterprise must come together for social enterprises to remain viable.

It is observed that, due to the sustainability needs and closer market engagement, social organizations tend to migrate toward market niches where their hybrid business models are better suited. Furthermore, these markets tend to be less competitive. Therefore, the planning to become a social entrepreneur was made possible by identifying niche areas where an opportunity existed. This also ensured that the efforts and resources invested were justified.

Finally, in a more specific way, the analysis was directed towards the social and economic impact. Along with access to resources, collaborative work with other organizations helps social entrepreneurs to achieve greater value. The relationship between stakeholders enables social entrepreneurs to fulfill their mission and succeed in their ventures. The network helps social entrepreneurs gain access to information, resources, support, diverse skill sets, and power represented by the knowledge produced and the potential for social innovation. It also helps them identify potential investors and share their resources with other members of the network, thus fostering sustainable local development. Conducting a social impact assessment can be challenging; however, it is crucial because it revisits the actual role played by social entrepreneurs in their communities, thus legitimizing their operations. The city of Belo Horizonte/MG still faces many challenges in the sectors of health, education, sustainable food, and housing. Overcoming these challenges may seem complex, but for social entrepreneurs, these are all opportunities where they can promote change.

## ■ FINAL REMARKS

The research demonstrated that social enterprises possess competitive advantages. The close relationships with customers and their pursuit of locally specific solutions can help reduce investment resource waste and make operations more efficient. Social enterprises attract intrinsically motivated employees who often accept lower salaries due to the nature of the venture, which, rather than prioritizing profit, focuses on social or environmental pur-



poses. As a result, these enterprises may often find themselves in situations that are not always ideal.

Additionally, social enterprises often rely on volunteers, which significantly reduces operational costs. Another competitive factor is the non-distribution of profits, resulting in lower capital costs. Last but not least, a social enterprise typically has a better alignment between individual and organizational goals, leading to lower monitoring and management costs.

It was found that the enterprise fits the definition of a social venture, as it was driven by a social entrepreneur who sought new applications for his work with the potential to solve community issues. He was willing to take risks and make efforts to create positive social change through his initiatives. Interestingly, his work stemmed from a belief rooted in the perception that this practice is a way to connect him to the purpose of his life, which reverberates in helping others (employees, customers, and suppliers) find theirs and make a difference in the world (all while earning a living).

As observed, unlike volunteering, social entrepreneurship incorporates an economic relationship within its social actions. The concept of social entrepreneurship is grounded in the creation of social value and the introduction of technological innovations, methods, services, or products that bring about social transformation. It involves social action and is linked to an economic dimension, opening new avenues for the operations of organizations, demonstrating that profit is not detached from the products or services offered by social enterprises. The research not only enabled this social perspective but also identified the principles currently driving social entrepreneurship in the researched context, such as context, opportunities, people, resources, and businesses, as well as their challenges.

As noted, social entrepreneurship emerges from business entrepreneurship, aspiring to management within the social field, where business principles are applied to solve social problems. Social entrepreneurs, above all, have a social mission. When examining the relationship between social entrepreneurship and local development through the studied enterprise, in light of the challenges that arise from the need to continually improve the social and economic systems of emerging countries, organizations within the so-called sector 2.5 are increasingly turning to processes where social entrepreneurship stands out. It was observed that the interviewees have limited knowledge of the principles of social entrepreneurship but understand that it is possible to combine profit with activities that involve social areas.

Upon examining the relationship between social entrepreneurship and local development through the researched enterprise, it was found that the business presents possibilities for social, environmental, and economic impact in the community, reinforced by the entrepreneur, who states that the business brings both social benefits and profitability to the community. In their own words, “we ended up creating this circular and solidarity-based economy.” However, challenges arise regarding the need for clarifications and incentives that attract society as a whole to this type of entrepreneurship.

Alongside providing healthy and more affordable products to the community, the business, through collaborative work with other organizations, helps social entrepreneurs achieve greater value. Social entrepreneurs engage other stakeholders and can succeed if they build bridges between public, private, and civil stakeholders, as well as the groups they aim to serve. The network helps social entrepreneurs gain access to information, resour-



es, support, various skill sets, and power, another aspect confirmed in the research. Furthermore, increased environmental awareness, recycling, and reuse, along with the business's low environmental impact, attracted a large number of interested parties, allowing for the spread of positive sustainable actions and a social business perspective.

In the context of urban gardens, relationalism enables everyday constructions, exchanges, and experiences. Its micro-social action demonstrates its power to change the local reality and political engagement. Creating a garden means believing in a transformation of space and, through this, in people. The practice of gardening is repoliticizing social space as citizenship is exercised daily, in the occupation of the city by people and their diverse groups. As this micro-politics grows, the spaces for struggle expand as well, with the belief that it is possible to transform our ways of life. It is necessary to question the economic domination over ways of life and how we are socially organized. It requires provoking changes in the meaning of ends and means, altering the logic of the socioeconomic model and the values society prioritizes. We must find new ways of living in a world with less property, more well-being, and sustainable vision. Thinking in ways that modify the system of appropriation, aiming at resource utilization while giving value to services that contribute to societal development and return as sustainable benefits.

In this sense, it is essential to focus on the local dimension of development, bringing the scale of action to the palm of one's hands, bringing together economic and social actors interested in social change. With political strength, these actors can achieve an expanded, municipal scale, meaning taking responsibility.

It is hoped that the study will contribute to a greater spread of social entrepreneurship as a transformative power and, above all, as a business model that generates profit alongside societal benefits. Although timely, as it seeks to explore and disseminate information about social entrepreneurship, the research was limited to the universe of a single company. Therefore, further research is recommended in other spheres, such as among established social entrepreneurs in other Brazilian states or even worldwide, to understand the diversity of activities they undertake.



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