

Motivations and sustainable actions implemented by entrepreneurs in the economic, environmental and social dimensions: multiple case studies in micro and small businesses

Motivações e ações sustentáveis implementadas por empreendedores nas dimensões econômica, ambiental e social: estudo de casos múltiplos em micro e pequenos negócios

Motivaciones y acciones sostenibles implementadas por emprendedores en las dimensiones económica, ambiental y social: estudio de casos múltiples en micro y pequeñas empresas

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ABSTRACT

Contextualização: The phenomenon of entrepreneurship combined with a sustainability perspective is commonly referred to as sustainable entrepreneurship, which can be considered a relevant and current subfield of entrepreneurship research. It addresses the integration of sustainable practices into businesses, considering economic, environmental, and social impacts. **Presentation of the Gap and Research Question:** Despite the growing interest in sustainable entrepreneurship, there is a gap in understanding the specific sustainable motivations and actions implemented by micro and small business entrepreneurs. The guiding question of this study is: what are the motivations and sustainable actions adopted by these entrepreneurs in the economic, environmental, and social dimensions? **Objective:** The main objective is to investigate the motivations and sustainable actions of micro and small business entrepreneurs, considering the three dimensions of sustainability. This will be achieved by developing categories and elements of analysis from a conceptual model and applying them in empirical research. **Methodology:** This study adopts a phenomenological and interpretative approach, being exploratory and descriptive. The multiple case strategy is used to collect data through semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and non-participant direct observation. Six businesses in the Greater Aracaju area were selected due to their sustainable characteristics. **Contributions/Expect Results:** It is expected that this study will provide insights into the motivations and sustainable actions of micro and small business entrepreneurs, contributing to the understanding of sustainable entrepreneurship. The results may highlight challenges faced by entrepreneurs, as well as areas of progress in sustainable practices, providing a basis for future research and practical interventions.

Keywords: Sustainable Entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial Action. Entrepreneurial Motivations. Sustainability.

RESUMO

Contextualização: O empreendedorismo sustentável, que combina empreendedorismo com uma perspectiva de sustentabilidade, é um subcampo relevante e atual da pesquisa em empreendedorismo. Ele aborda a integração de práticas sustentáveis nos negócios, considerando os impactos econômicos, ambientais e sociais. **Lacuna e Questão de Pesquisa:** Apesar do crescente interesse no empreendedorismo sustentável, há uma lacuna na compreensão das motivações e ações sustentáveis específicas implementadas por empreendedores de micro e pequenos negócios. A questão norteadora deste estudo é: quais são as motivações e ações sustentáveis adotadas por esses empreendedores nas dimensões econômica, ambiental e social? **Objetivo:** O objetivo principal é investigar as motivações e ações sustentáveis dos empreendedores de micro e pequenos negócios, considerando as três dimensões da sustentabilidade. Isso será alcançado desenvolvendo categorias e elementos de análise a partir de um modelo conceitual, e aplicando-os em uma pesquisa empírica. **Metodologia:** Este estudo adota uma abordagem fenomenológica e interpretativa, sendo exploratório e descritivo. A estratégia de múltiplos casos é utilizada para coletar dados por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas, análise de documentos e observação direta não participante. Seis negócios na Grande Aracaju foram selecionados devido às suas características sustentáveis. **Contribuições/Resultados Esperados:** Espera-se que este estudo forneça insights sobre as motivações e ações sustentáveis dos empreendedores de micro e pequenos negócios, contribuindo para a compreensão do empreendedorismo sustentável. Os resultados podem destacar desafios enfrentados pelos empreendedores, bem como áreas de progresso em relação às práticas sustentáveis, proporcionando uma base para futuras pesquisas e intervenções práticas.

Palavras-chave: Empreendedorismo sustentável. Ação empreendedora. Motivações empreendedoras. Sustentabilidade.

RESUMEM

Contextualización del tema: El emprendimiento sostenible, un subcampo relevante de la investigación en emprendimiento, combina la perspectiva empresarial con prácticas sostenibles, abarcando impactos económicos, ambientales y sociales. **Vacío y Pregunta de Investigación:** A pesar del creciente interés, persiste un vacío en la comprensión de las motivaciones y acciones sostenibles específicas adoptadas por emprendedores de micro y pequeñas empresas. Este estudio busca responder: **¿Cuáles son las motivaciones y acciones sostenibles adoptadas por estos emprendedores en las dimensiones económica, ambiental y social?** **Objetivo:** Investigar las motivaciones y acciones sostenibles de estos emprendedores en las tres dimensiones de la sostenibilidad. Para ello, se desarrollarán categorías y elementos de análisis basados en un modelo conceptual y aplicados a investigación empírica. **Metodología:** Con un enfoque fenomenológico e interpretativo, este estudio exploratorio y descritivo utiliza la estrategia de múltiples casos. La recopilación de datos incluye entrevistas semiestructuradas, análisis de documentos y observación no participante. Seis empresas sostenibles del área metropolitana de Aracaju fueron seleccionadas como muestra. **Contribuciones/Resultados Esperados:** Este estudio pretende aportar ideas sobre las motivaciones y acciones sostenibles de emprendedores de micro y pequeñas empresas, contribuyendo al conocimiento del emprendimiento sostenible. Los resultados podrían identificar desafíos enfrentados por estos emprendedores y señalar áreas de mejora en prácticas sostenibles, sirviendo como base para futuras investigaciones e intervenciones prácticas.

Palabras clave: Emprendimiento Sostenible. Acción Empresarial. Motivaciones Empresariales. Sostenibilidad.

INTRODUCTION

The prospect of resource scarcity essential to market functioning has prompted the need to study entrepreneurship from a new perspective—one that demystifies the notion of organizations solely driven by profit. This alternative perspective merges social and environmental practices with the need to achieve competitive advantage. According to Parrish (2009) and D’Souza and Mishra (2022), entrepreneurship possesses the capacity to contribute to organizational goals, public policy development, and technological advancements; however, its scope of action has expanded to include responsibility toward the environment and society.

Traditionally, entrepreneurial activities have been motivated by the creation of economic value. However, Anand et al. (2021) argue that increased awareness of social and environmental issues has led entrepreneurship to incorporate social and environmental missions. Sustainable entrepreneurship has garnered substantial academic interest in recent decades and is now recognized as a distinct field of research. It transforms market failures into business opportunities for sustainable development by connecting the economy, society, and the environment (Watson et al., 2023).

The phenomenon of entrepreneurship, when aligned with a sustainability perspective, is commonly referred to as sustainable entrepreneurship (Patzelt & Shepherd, 2011), which has become a prominent subfield within entrepreneurship research (Gast et al., 2017). Various terminologies have emerged under this umbrella, including ‘ecopreneurship’ (Schaltegger, 2002), ‘environmental entrepreneurship’ (Linnanen, 2002), ‘sustainable development entrepreneurship’ (Cohen & Winn, 2007), and ‘green entrepreneurship’ (Taylor & Walley, 2003).

Publications in this area address a variety of themes, such as the management of sustainability dimensions or the triple bottom line (Dixon & Clifford, 2006; Young & Tilley, 2006); motivations for adopting sustainable practices (Schlange, 2006); theoretical underpinnings of green entrepreneurship (Scharper, 2002); classification systems for sustainable entrepreneurs (Taylor & Walley, 2003; Schaltegger, 2002); and the exploration of entrepreneurial opportunities (Cohen & Winn, 2007; Dean & McMullen, 2005). Research specifically focusing on the motivations of sustainable entrepreneurs remains scarce (St-Jean & Labelle, 2018; Kania & Teixeira, 2019; O’Brien & Goralski, 2020; Freitas & Silva, 2023), highlighting the need for further investigation into their profiles and the underlying drivers for adopting sustainable practices (Santos & Teixeira, 2021). According to Parrish (2009), the ecopreneur serves as a central figure in addressing environmental degradation, differentiating them from entrepreneurs who are solely motivated by economic gain.

This study links entrepreneurial motivations to sustainable actions carried out by entrepreneurs in Sergipe, Brazil. Drawing from the literature on sustainable entrepreneurship, a conceptual model was developed to identify motivations and actions across economic, environmental, and social dimensions.

Importantly, this research emphasized not only businesses founded with a sustainable orientation but also established enterprises that later adopted socially and environmentally responsible practices—whether by identifying market failures, recognizing new opportunities, or responding to target audience expectations.

The focus of this study is on micro and small enterprises located in the Greater Aracaju region of Sergipe, spanning the three main economic sectors: industry, commerce, and services. These businesses are distinguished by sustainable attributes, including their products, packaging, and production processes.

This investigation emphasizes the primary motivations and sustainable actions practiced by micro and small business entrepreneurs. The relevance of the topic is justified by the relatively recent academic intersection between entrepreneurship and sustainability. This still-emerging intersection has already begun reshaping economies and organizational processes to promote financial health, social equity, and environmental resilience (Kuckertz & Wagner, 2010).

Given this context, the guiding research question emerges: What are the sustainable motivations and actions implemented by micro and small business entrepreneurs across economic, environmental, and social dimensions?

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in its examination of entrepreneurial motivations and actions through the lens of a conceptual model that addresses the three sustainability dimensions. Practically, the study seeks to inform public policy makers and entrepreneurial support organizations by contributing to the design of programs and policies aimed at fostering environmentally sustainable enterprises.

SUSTAINABLE ENTREPRENEURSHIP: CONCEPTS AND DIMENSIONS

Cohen and Winn (2007) argue that research on sustainable entrepreneurship focuses on investigating “how opportunities for future goods and services are discovered, created, and exploited, by whom, and with what economic, psychological, social, and environmental consequences” (p. 35). According to Belz and Binder (2017), sustainable entrepreneurship should recognize, develop, and leverage opportunities for individuals to create goods and services with social, economic, and ecological benefits. The central idea is that entrepreneurial activities should not destroy the ecological and social environments in which they operate (Muñoz & Cohen, 2018; Jacobi, 2023).

Sustainable entrepreneurship can be defined as “the discovery, creation, and exploitation of opportunities to create future goods and services that sustain the natural and/or community environment and provide development gains for others” (Patzelt & Shepherd, 2011, p. 632; Watson et al., 2023). Parrish (2009) presents a concept more closely integrated with sustainable development, considering it as entrepreneurship that explicitly introduces both social and environmental dimensions into business development for economic growth. Schlange (2006) suggests the idea of a qualified enterprise guided by sustainability, combining opportunities and intentions

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to simultaneously create value from economic, social, and ecological perspectives. Young and Tilley (2006) argue that environmental, social, and economic actions converge in a three-dimensional manner within sustainable entrepreneurship, enabling the integration of elements that act in unison.

Perez (2002) synthesizes that sustainability is an essential component for guiding entrepreneurship toward more balanced and lasting economic growth. Mazzucato and Perez (2022) further state that the current challenge is “to change the way the real economy works, [...] through intelligent policy direction that leverages the green economy,” promoting a balance among the concepts of sustainability, entrepreneurship, and sustainable entrepreneurship.

Table 1

Comparison of the dimensions of sustainability, entrepreneurship, and sustainable entrepreneurship

Dimensions	Sustainability	Entrepreneurship	Sustainable entrepreneurship
Economic	Efficient resource management (Sachs, 1993)	Resource management to achieve competitive advantage (Low & Macmillan, 1988)	Resource management and opportunity-seeking, combining competitive advantage and preservation of the natural environment (Sharper, 2002)
Social	Achievement of a reasonable level of social homogeneity; fair income distribution and equal access to social resources and services (Santos et al., 2006)	Non-profit initiatives seeking financing strategies or management mechanisms and the creation of social value (Mair & Marti, 2006)	Corporate social responsibility practices, i.e., concerns for the environment and the communities where organizations are located (ETHOS, 2012)
Environmental	Limiting fossil fuel consumption, recycling, reducing pollution, investing in clean technology research, and ensuring compliance with environmental protection regulations (Sachs, 1993)	The performance of an organization results from its interaction with the internal and external environment (Houben et al., 1999)	The adoption of environmentally responsible business practices keeps organizations in the market and/or opens up a range of business opportunities (Sharper, 2002)

Note. Adapted from the theoretical review.

In summary, entrepreneurs and sustainable entrepreneurship can play an important role in the pursuit of sustainability, without underestimating the need for systemic approaches, networks, and collaborative efforts to address the complexities of ecological and social problems (Eller et al., 2020).

SUSTAINABLE ENTREPRENEURIAL MOTIVATIONS

Unlike entrepreneurs driven purely by economic motivations, typical of non-sustainable businesses, the motivations of sustainable entrepreneurs are treated differently by scholars (Kaniak & Teixeira, 2018). Although the literature on companies engaged in sustainable activities is growing, there are still few studies on who the entrepreneur is that creates and manages these companies (Patzelt & Shepherd, 2011; Walley & Taylor, 2002; Duarte & Silva, 2023). The key issue revolves around understanding the reasons that lead entrepreneurs to invest in sustainable businesses, as they differ from those with purely economic motivations due to a holistic and long-term ap-

proach to business, encompassing a commitment to social and environmental well-being (Duarte & Silva, 2023).

Pastakia (2002) and Santos (2021) argue that motivations are induced by both internal and external forces. Internal forces primarily deal with ideologies and strategic concerns-values, plans, and goals that contribute to a sustainable society. External forces relate to the legal socioeconomic development of the environment in which the business operates, manifesting in the economic, social, and environmental concerns surrounding the business.

Entrepreneurs may face difficulties in pursuing sustainable entrepreneurship. Young and Tilley (2006) state that most ventures face challenges in exploring environmental sustainability. The study by Basu et al. (2008) notes that businesses with strategies focused on sustainability are more expensive than those that do not consider sustainability. Furthermore, the complexity and interconnectedness of contemporary socio-environmental problems require integrated and collaborative approaches, which can be difficult to achieve in a competitive and individualistic business context (Bansal & Song, 2017).

The literature reveals that sustainable entrepreneurs have been characterized according to typologies proposed based on their motivations and difficulties in starting or maintaining a business. Schaltegger (2002) proposed a typology with five types of eco-entrepreneurs: alternative actors, bioneers, ecopreneurs, environmental administrators, and environmental managers. Linnanen (2002) classified sustainable entrepreneurs based on two main criteria: the desire to change the world and the desire to make money. According to Walley and Taylor (2002), the most important variables for characterizing green entrepreneurs are the motivation to change current societal structures, which ranges from weak to strong, and the motivation to undertake entrepreneurship, which ranges from a purely economic orientation to a sustainability orientation. This creates four main types of green entrepreneurs: the innovative opportunist, the visionary champion, the ethical maverick, and, lastly, the ad hoc enviropreneur, who is the accidental entrepreneur. Kirwood and Walton (2010) identified five major motivators for eco-entrepreneurs: green values, earning a livelihood, passion, being one's own boss, and perceiving a market gap. Schlange (2006) also sought to identify the motivations of so-called ecopreneurs and found that the motivations of sustainable entrepreneurs are concentrated in social dimensions, as they promote and conduct activities with social and economic values at the regional level. Oscanoa (2010) characterized sources of internal motivation as ideological concerns about social and environmental problems arising from the influence of family, friends, previous experience, network, and education.

This study sought to expand knowledge of the motivations for entrepreneurship by balancing economic, environmental, and social aspects and proposed a conceptual model encompassing aspects addressed by different models presented in the literature, adapting it to the reality of companies in Sergipe.

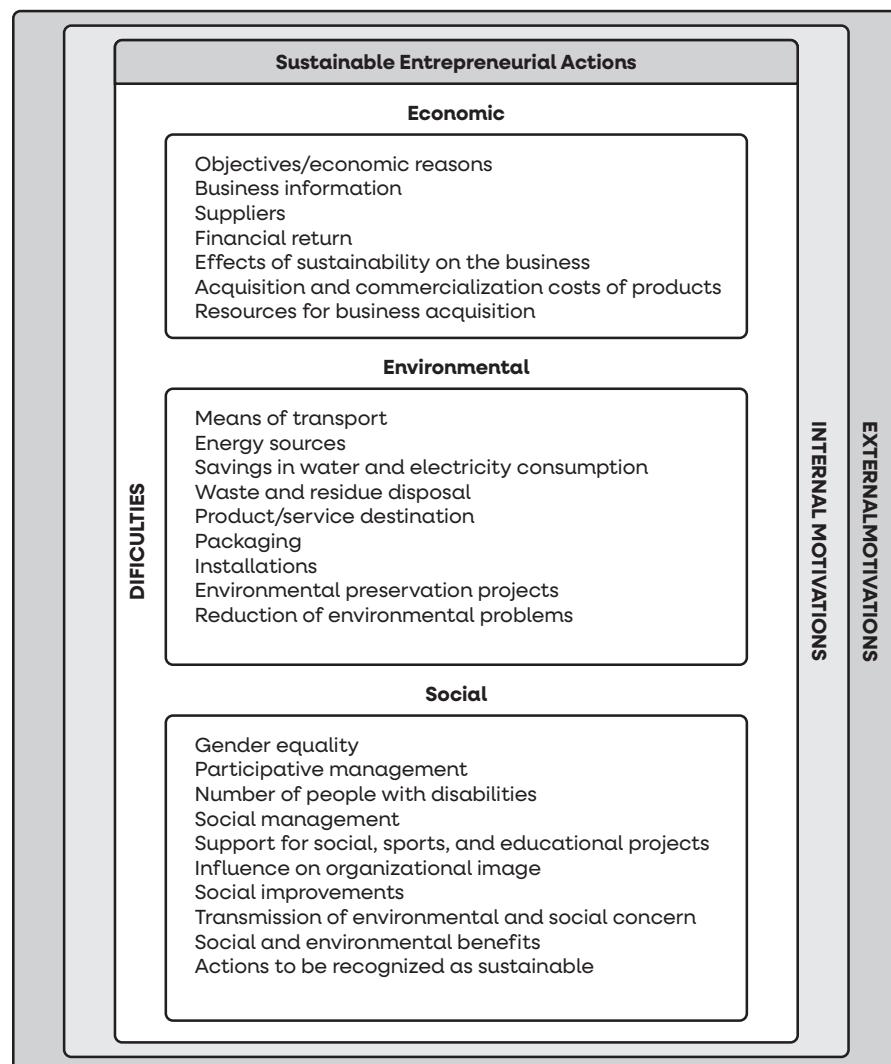
■ CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF THE STUDY

The conceptual model proposed for this study emphasizes the sustainability tripod (Dixon & Clifford, 2006; Young & Tilley, 2006) and the characteristics of the sustainability dimensions proposed by Schlange (2006). Each dimension is expanded with aspects also observed in the literature, such as acquisition and commercialization costs (Morish et al., 2011), resources for business acquisition (Sharper, 2002), services with an ecological perspective (Basu et al., 2008), the economic effects of sustainability on the business (Pimentel et al., 2012), reduction of environmental problems (Sachs, 1993; Klewitz & Zeyen, 2010), support for social, sports, and educational projects (Bansal & Both, 2000), the influence of social actions on organizational image, social improvements in the community, benefits offered and received (Pimentel et al., 2012), and actions for the company to be recognized as sustainable (Fenker & Ferreira, 2011; Morish et al., 2011).

In addition to the sustainable dimensions, the adaptation of the model considered both internal and external motivations for entrepreneurs to create or transform their company into a sustainable business (Pastakia, 2002; Taylor & Waley, 2003; Schlange, 2006; Oscañoa, 2010; Klewitz & Zeyen, 2010; Pascual et al., 2011). It is also important to note that the nomenclature for the ecological dimension was replaced by the environmental dimension to emphasize the environment itself, rather than the interaction among organisms (Odum & Barrett, 1988). The proposed conceptual model also considers the difficulties faced by entrepreneurs regarding the implementation of these actions (see Figure 1).

Figura 1

Conceptual Model of the Study



Note: Developed based on the literature review.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative approach and uses data collection, coding, and analysis techniques focused on understanding meanings rather than frequency, following the procedures of content analysis (Easterby-Smith et al., 1999; Bardin, 2002). The study applies a multiple case study strategy, which is particularly appropriate when the topic is underexplored, as it allows different cases to contribute complementary perspectives (Yin, 2005). According to Eisenhardt (1989), multiple case studies can highlight different aspects of a phenomenon, enabling more robust theory building.

To ensure research quality, construct validity was established through the use of multiple sources of evidence (interviews, documents, and observation), maintaining a chain of evidence and submitting case de-

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scriptions for participant review. Internal validity was not pursued, given the exploratory nature of the study and absence of causal propositions. External validity was addressed through analytical generalization, and reliability was ensured by following a research protocol and storing data in a dedicated database (Yin, 2010).

Data collection included semi-structured interviews with the entrepreneurs of six businesses, document analysis (e.g., brochures, websites, environmental licenses), and non-participant direct observation of facilities, products, services, and environmental practices. This triangulation of data sources strengthened the study's validity and supported the case analyses. The table 02 presents information about the interviewees and the documents consulted that supported the analysis.

Table 2

Interviewees and Documents Consulted

Enterprise	Interviewee	Interview Duration	Documents Consulted
Ecoofice	Owner	1h 20min	Documents and information available on the website, brochure.
Aruanã Eco Praia Hotel	Owner	1h 43min	Documents and information available on the website, environmental license, brochure, architectural plan.
Recigraxe	Co-owner	1h 51min	Documents and information available on the website, brochure, environmental license, operating permits.
Reciclaria	Owner	1h 28min	Documents and brochure.
Hotel Pousada do Sol	Co-owner	1h 17min	Documents and information available on the website, environmental license, brochure, architectural plan.
Ecocielo	Owner	1h 18min	Documents and brochure.

Note: Prepared based on individual case descriptions

Yin (2010) emphasizes that any application of sampling logic to case studies would be misguided, since they are not concerned with the incidence of phenomena. According to Eisenhardt (1989), an ideal number for multiple case studies would be between four and ten cases. Below this number, he considers that it would be difficult to generate a more complex theory or that its empirical basis might not be convincing. For this study, six companies located in the state of Sergipe with sustainable characteristics were chosen. These characteristics can be found simply in the name chosen for the company, as well as in the products and/or services purchased or marketed, in the packaging used, demonstrating concern for recycling, and in production processes that are less polluting for the environment. It is interesting to note that this study is not restricted to companies created with sustainable strategies; companies that adapted to these practices after creation were also included. The elements extracted from the transcribed interview were classified and grouped according to the analytical categories and elements of analysis based on the conceptual model of the study (Table 03).

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Table 03

Research Questions, Analytical Categories, and Elements of Analysis

QUESTÃO DE PESQUISA	CATEGORIAS DE ANÁLISE	ELEMENTOS DE ANÁLISE
What are the characteristics of the enterprises and the profile of the entrepreneurs?	Characteristics of sustainable enterprises	Year of foundation, sector, location, number of employees, name conception, competitors.
	Profile of sustainable entrepreneurs	Gender, age, marital status, education, previous entrepreneurial experience, opportunity perception.
What are the internal and external motivations for Sergipe entrepreneurs to invest in sustainability?	Internal Motivations (Pastakia, 2002; Taylor & Waley, 2003; Schlange, 2006; Oscanoa, 2010)	Family, friends, education, experience, network, motivations to start the business.
	External Motivations (same refs.)	Laws and regulations, market demands, external agents, access to financing, opportunity to create or make the business sustainable, motivations to start the business.
What actions are taken by these entrepreneurs in the economic, social, and environmental dimensions?	Economic Actions (Sharper, 2002; etc.)	Economic objectives/reasons, business information, suppliers, financial return, sustainability effects, acquisition and commercialization costs, resources for business acquisition.
	Environmental Actions (Sachs, 1993; etc.)	Transportation means, energy sources, water/electricity conservation, waste disposal, production process, products/services, packaging, facilities, environmental preservation projects, reduction of environmental problems.
	Social Actions (Ashley et al., 2000; etc.)	Equal rights, participatory management, people with disabilities, benefits, social project support, sports, education, organizational image influence, social improvements, environmental concern communication, tax benefits, actions for sustainability recognition.
What are the difficulties faced in adopting sustainable practices?	Difficulties Faced (Pimentel et al., 2012)	Challenges in hiring suppliers, adopting alternative sources, conserving water/electricity, product sales, implementing sustainable practices.

Note: Developed based on the literature review.

The analytical process followed Bardin's (2002) stages of content analysis: pre-analysis, exploration of the material, and treatment of results, including inference and interpretation. During pre-analysis, interviews were transcribed and organized into individual case folders. In the exploration phase, transcripts were coded according to predefined analytical categories. Finally, a cross-case comparison was conducted, guided by Eisenhardt (1989), and empirical findings were contrasted with theoretical propositions in line with Yin's (2010) logic of analytical generalization.

The categorization of data used a conceptual model developed from the literature, encompassing motivations (internal and external), sustainable actions (economic, environmental, and social), and challenges. This model structured the interview script and guided the analysis of collected data.

CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

This section presents a comparative cross-case analysis based on the study's analytical categories: characteristics of the ventures, profiles of the entrepreneurs, internal and external motivations, actions in the economic, envi-

ronmental, and social dimensions, and the challenges faced in adopting such actions.

Characteristics of the Sustainable Ventures

The ventures studied are characterized by their name, year of foundation, field of activity, geographic location, number of employees, and a brief explanation for the choice of the venture's name. Table 04 below summarizes the characteristics of the ventures examined.

Table 04

Characteristics of the ventures studied

Enterprise Name	Year Founded	Sector	Location	nº of Empl.	Name Conception
Ecoofice	2010	Commerce/ services	Suissa District	4	Based on sustainable actions, derived from "ecological office".
Aruanã Eco Praia Hotel	2009	Services	Aruana Beach	36	Combines regional aspects, environmental care, and location.
Recigraxe	2003	Industry	Cantinho do Céu - São Cristóvão	8	Represents the business's purpose: recycling fatty acids.
Reciclaria	2011	Commerce/ services	Aeroporto District	5	Supports the business's objectives: recycling things and people.
Hotel Pousada do Sol	1986	Services	Atalaia Water-front	38	Acquired via benchmarking during trips.
Ecociiclo	2009	Commerce/ services	Luzia District	8	Relates ecological conditions to the acquisition of a non-polluting vehicle.

Note. Prepared based on the individual case descriptions

After analyzing the profiles of the interviewed entrepreneurs, it was found that the average age is relatively high—approximately 47 years—which indicates that the businesses studied are not managed by young entrepreneurs. Marital status varied between widowed, married, and single, and gender was distributed between men and women. The owners of Ecociiclo and Hotel Pousada do Sol had no prior experience as entrepreneurs before starting their businesses. However, the other interviewees had either previously owned businesses or worked in sectors similar to their current ventures. These details are outlined in Table 05.

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Table 05

Entrepreneur Profiles

Enterprise	Age	Educational Background	Entrepreneurial Experience
Ecoofice	37 anos	Incomplete higher education: IT.	No previous experience, but has experience in IT sector.
Aruanã Eco Praia Hotel	44 anos	Technical degree in agriculture.	Previous experience in food and motel businesses.
Recigraxe	36 anos	University degree – Nutrition.	Previous experience in door-to-door sales.
Reciclaria	55 anos	University degree – Dentistry. Specialization: Public and Social Dentistry.	No previous experience as entrepreneur, worked in an NGO.
Hotel Pousada do Sol	51 anos	University degree: Tourism. Specialization: Hotel Management.	No family members had entrepreneurial experience.
Ecociiclo	58 anos	University degree: Biology. Specialization: Environmental Planning and Management.	No previous entrepreneurial experience.

Note. Prepared based on the individual case descriptions

Internal and External Motivations

Regarding the motivations for the interviewees to become sustainable entrepreneurs (Table 06), it is worth noting that Ecociiclo, Aruanã, and Hotel Pousada do Sol started their businesses driven by market opportunities. The interviewee from Ecoofice sought financial independence, the entrepreneur from Reciclaria aimed for personal fulfillment, and the interviewee from Recigraxe was motivated by necessity. Pastakia (2002) states that entrepreneurs' motivations are influenced by both internal and external forces. However, in contrast to this claim, it was observed that one of the entrepreneurs studied (Recigraxe) reported not being internally motivated, and another (Ecoofice) lacked external motivation to create a sustainability-oriented business.

Each entrepreneur presented unique sources of motivation. Family was the most frequently cited internal motivator, whether due to family habits (Ecociiclo), encouragement from children, parents, and siblings (Reciclaria, Hotel Pousada do Sol), or spousal support (Ecoofice). Scholars such as Taylor and Waley (2003) had already observed that the reasons some entrepreneurs started sustainable businesses were linked to both light sociocultural influences—such as personal contacts and education—and more structured influences like regulations and economic factors, the latter classified in this study as external motivations.

External motivations are manifested through the economic, social, and environmental concerns surrounding the businesses (Pastakia, 2002). In terms of external sources of motivation, market demand emerged as the primary reason for adopting sustainable practices at Ecociiclo, Reciclaria, Aruanã, and Hotel Pousada do Sol—the latter only recognizing this after 2002. Another notable source of external motivation was support from SEBRAE, which was cited by three interviewees (Hotel Pousada do Sol, Aruanã, and Recigraxe) as a significant incentive and guiding force for establishing the ventures or designing organizational routines and policies. Only the entrepreneur from Ecociiclo explicitly mentioned environmental laws and

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regulations—specifically Law No. 6938/81—as a source of external motivation for adopting sustainable business practices.

As for the perceived opportunities that led the entrepreneurs to create or transition to sustainable businesses, Aruanã Eco Praia Hotel, Ecociiclo, and Reciclaria identified the potential to operate within a niche still underexplored in the Sergipe market. This finding aligns with the studies by Pascual, Klink, and Grisales (2011) and Schlange (2006), where the authors argue that the entrepreneurial vision for sustainability involves creating something innovative and previously non-existent. These insights are summarized in Table 06.

Table 06

Sustainable Motivations

Enterprise	Motivation for Starting the Business	Internal Motivation Sources	External Motivation Sources
Ecoofice	Financial independence	Wife	Did not perceive sustainable opportunity when starting the business.
Aruanã Eco Praia Hotel	Market opportunity	Educational background	Market demand, SEBRAE
Recigraxe	Need	No internal motivations	Entrepreneurs from Salvador, SEBRAE
Reciclaria	Personal fulfillment	Family	Market demand
Hotel Pousada do Sol	Market opportunity	Family, network	Market demand, SEBRAE
Ecociiclo	Market opportunity	Family, educational background	Market demand, environmental laws and regulations

Note. Prepared based on the individual case descriptions

Actions in the Economic Dimension

Actions in the economic dimension include the financial goals related to the creation of the business, information obtained about the venture, the hiring of regional suppliers, financial returns from investing in sustainable practices, sales related to sustainability, and the entrepreneur's growth outlook. According to Sharper (2002), the economic dimension is responsible for resource management and opportunity-seeking, aligning competitive advantage with environmental preservation. It was observed that the economic reasons for founding the ventures often overlap with the motivations that led the interviewees to become entrepreneurs. These reasons varied among respondents, with the exception of the entrepreneurs from Aruanã and Ecociiclo, who launched their ventures with a clear expectation of financial return.

Tang, Kacmar, and Busenitz (2010) argue that information supports the integration of new knowledge and adaptation to new situations. They discuss entrepreneurs' contact networks and emphasize the evolution and judgment of acquired information in the process of transforming it into new opportunities. In this study, it was identified that the internet was the most common information channel used by the interviewees to research similar ventures. In addition, contact networks (Aruanã and Ecociiclo), travel expe-

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riences (Aruanã and Hotel Pousada do Sol), the influence of professionals such as a business owner from Salvador (Recigraxe) and an architect (Hotel Pousada do Sol), the guidelines from the franchisor (Ecoofice), and studies on the subject (Ecociiclo) were all cited as sources of information.

Except for Ecoofice, all the other ventures use inputs and supplies from regional suppliers. However, some specific materials and supplies are sourced from other states, such as São Paulo, Minas Gerais, and Santa Catarina. According to Schlange (2006), improving relationships with regional suppliers promotes regional value creation and the dissemination of socially responsible practices.

Sustainability-related aspects have a positive impact on four out of the six businesses studied. For Aruanã and Recigraxe, the entrepreneurs associated the rise in public awareness with an increased demand for socially and environmentally responsible products and services. On the other hand, the interviewees from Ecoofice and Ecociiclo weighed in negatively on environmental issues, pointing out that the population still lacks sufficient environmental awareness to prioritize such products and services.

The entrepreneur from Hotel Pousada do Sol believes that environmentally oriented offerings help attract a specific clientele, while Reciclaria associates its social and environmental aspects positively with sales—although it also stresses that public awareness is still incipient. Reciclaria was the only business that did not highlight economic interests as dominant; in contrast, for the other companies, the need for profit and survival may outweigh social and environmental considerations. Table 07 provides a summary of these economic actions.

Table 07

Actions in the Economic Dimension

Enterprise	Economic Reason	Information Sources	Suppliers	Impact on the Business
Ecoofice	Financial independence	From franchisee and emails.	From South and Southeast, indicated by franchisor.	Negative
Aruanã Eco Praia Hotel	Favorable market situation	Network and trips.	Mostly regional, some from SC and SP.	Positive
Recigraxe	Need to generate income	Salvador entrepreneur and internet research.	Mostly regional, specific materials from South and Southeast.	Positive
Reciclaria	No economic reasons revealed	Partner's knowledge, courses, internet.	All suppliers are regional.	Positive
Hotel Pousada do Sol	Additional family income	Architect, trips, internet.	Some regional, some from South and Southeast.	Positive
Ecociiclo	Favorable market	Internet and business studies.	Some regional, some from MG, SP, SC.	Negative

Nota. Elaborado com base na descrição individual dos casos

Actions in the Environmental Dimension

The environmental dimension, as proposed by Schlange (2006), encompasses the use of environmentally friendly vehicles and fuels, alternative energy sources and/or efficient use of electricity, minimization of emissions and

waste, the production process, and the products offered. It was observed that all ventures use cars, utility vehicles, and trucks for deliveries and to receive materials from suppliers. Gasoline and diesel are the most used fuels due to their market affordability. It is worth highlighting that Aruanã Eco Praia Hotel uses biodiesel to operate its generator, and Ecociclo employs bicycles to deliver lightweight products.

Regarding alternative energy sources, Aruanã Eco Praia Hotel and Hotel Pousada do Sol use solar energy to heat water in their guest rooms. Reciclaria lights its green areas using wind energy. The remaining businesses do not employ alternative energy sources. However, all implement energy-saving measures. Aruanã and Hotel Pousada do Sol stand out for investing in intelligent equipment, energy-efficient lighting, and infrastructure, while others have adopted more direct staff-led initiatives.

All ventures studied engage in water-saving efforts through the use of artesian wells (Aruanã, Hotel Pousada do Sol, Reciclaria), timed faucets (Ecoofice, Aruanã, Hotel Pousada do Sol), regulated toilet flush systems (Aruanã, Hotel Pousada do Sol), water reuse systems (Recigraxe, Hotel Pousada do Sol), and awareness campaigns targeting employees and customers (Aruanã, Hotel Pousada do Sol).

Among the studied ventures, Aruanã Eco Praia Hotel is the most structured in terms of awareness campaigns for energy and water conservation, utilizing its HR department to offer lectures, training, and daily monitoring of employee routines. This practice reflects the findings of Fedozzi et al. (2012) and Nowduri (2012), who argue that one key condition for implementing sustainability is educating employees on sustainability topics. Hotel Pousada do Sol also stands out for having offered sustainability training to all employees in partnership with SEBRAE.

Although the other ventures do not run formal campaigns, all indicated that they communicate environmental concerns through informal conversations or meetings. Waste management is addressed by all businesses. Recigraxe is the only one that does not use separate waste bins; the others have acquired or adapted containers for correct disposal. Ecoofice reuses paper for print testing, while Recigraxe repurposes waste from edible oil decantation to fuel its boiler and as feed for shrimp farms. Aligleri et al. (2009, p. 156) underscore the importance of waste management, stressing that “companies must be concerned with packaging disposal, waste volume, and post-consumer product storage.” As with energy and water conservation, guidance on proper waste disposal is usually provided through informal discussions. Aruanã, Reciclaria, and Hotel Pousada do Sol also offer formal training to support these practices.

All interviewees believed that their businesses reduce environmental harm—such as river pollution (Ecoofice, Recigraxe, Hotel Pousada do Sol, Ecociclo), air pollution through biodiesel use (Aruanã), electricity savings, and green area preservation (Aruanã, Hotel Pousada do Sol, Reciclaria). These actions are summarized in Table 08.

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Table 08

Actions in the Environmental Dimension – Operations

Enterprise	Vehicles/ Fuel Used	Alternative Energy Source	Energy and Water Saving Practices	Waste Management
Ecoofice	Car, motorcycle, truck (gasoline/diesel)	None	Cool lamps, timed faucets, staff awareness	Selective collection, paper reuse
Aruanã Eco Praia Hotel	Car, van, truck (gasoline/diesel)	Solar	Boiler, cool lamps, smart locks, artesian well, sensor faucets, regulated toilets, awareness leaflets	Selective collection
Recigraxe	Car, truck (gasoline/diesel)	None	No air conditioning, use of sanitizer	Reuses waste for boiler heating and shrimp feed
Reciclaria	Car, truck (gasoline/diesel)	Wind	Scheduling machine use, no electric resistance equipment, artesian well	Selective collection, food reuse
Hotel Pousada do Sol	Car, truck (gasoline/diesel)	Solar	Boiler, split AC, cool lamps, smart locks, artesian well, regulated toilets, timed faucets	Selective collection
Ecociiclo	Car, motorcycle, truck, bicycle (gasoline/diesel)	None	Staff awareness, monitoring consumption routines	Selective collection

Note. Prepared based on the individual case descriptions

In addition, all ventures offer products and/or services that are less harmful to the environment. Reciclaria stands out by producing all its goods—whether crafts or furniture—from donated materials, reclaimed wood, or street-collected items. Bansal and Roth (2000) emphasize that today's companies compete by delivering effective environmental results, such as turning off lights, recycling waste, and adopting clean technologies or reliable products.

Except for Ecociiclo, none of the businesses run formal environmental preservation projects. Notably, many entrepreneurs misunderstood the question, assuming that maintaining green areas, cultivating gardens, or distributing flyers constituted preservation projects.

Regarding packaging, only Ecociiclo does not use eco-friendly alternatives, as its products are sold in the suppliers' original packaging to preserve brand and warranty. In contrast, Ecoofice is required by its franchisor to use packaging made of recycled paper and eco-ink for toner and cartridge returns—unlike the others, where the use of sustainable packaging was entrepreneur-led.

The businesses studied made conscious efforts to adapt their physical infrastructure and layout to minimize environmental impacts. Aruanã Eco Praia Hotel was designed with environmental care from the beginning—preserving topography, using sustainable materials, and maximizing natural light. Similarly, Reciclaria, which is conceptually sustainable, features bamboo and palm-leaf structures, dirt floors, and furniture made from recycled fruit crates. Other ventures adopted strategies such as using white paint to reflect light, ecological roofing and flooring, and natural stone in high-traffic areas. These practices align with Schaltegger and Wagner's (2011) argument that businesses must adjust operational processes to fit sustainable market demands.

All entrepreneurs believe that their business operations help minimize environmental harm—be it river pollution (Ecoofice, Recigraxe, Hotel

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Pousada do Sol, Ecociiclo), air pollution through biodiesel (Aruanã), electricity conservation, or green space preservation (Aruanã, Hotel Pousada do Sol, Reciclaria). These points are summarized in Table 09.

Table 09

Actions in the Environmental Dimension – Products, Packaging, and Infrastructure

Enterprise	Products	Packaging	Facilities	Environmental Preservation Projects	Reduction of Environmental Problems
Ecoofice	Less aggressive, eco-logical refills	All made from recycled material	White walls and doors, window for sunlight	None	Wastewater disposal outside sewage, dry waste collection
Aruanã Eco Praia Hotel	Organic fruits, partnerships with eco-tourism	Does not use packaging	Cement floor, recycled furniture, sunlit areas, eco tiles	None	Reduced local flooding, guest and staff awareness
Recigraxe	Cleaning products from recycled oil	Some recycled/biodegradable	High ceiling, white walls	None	Reduced river pollution
Reciclaria	Eco crafts, demolition wood furniture, natural food	Paper bags	Sand floor, palm thatch roofs, bamboo structures	None	Waste recycling, reduced animal slaughter, preserved green areas
Hotel Pousada do Sol	Local/natural products, recycled gifts	Does not use packaging, uses non-aggressive cleaning materials	Stone floor, treated eucalyptus, light walls, eco floor	None	Reduced energy and water use, construction of local sewage system
Ecociiclo	Bicycles, biodegradable degreaser	Uses plastic packaging	White walls/furniture, transparent tiles, cool lamps, large window	Has	Tree planting, reduced pollution

Note. Prepared based on the individual case descriptions

Actions in the Social Dimension

One of the key aspects analyzed in the social dimension is gender equality. In this regard, all the ventures studied employ both men and women. The gender ratio varies depending on the nature of the activities performed—for instance, hotels tend to employ more women (e.g., housekeeping roles), while Recigraxe has a higher percentage of male employees due to the physically demanding nature of the work.

Managerial positions are held by women in all companies, except for the hotels, where management is evenly split between genders. None of the ventures employ individuals with disabilities. Concerning participatory management, all interviewees stated that employees are involved in decision-making processes, either through meetings or informal conversations. Participation at Aruanã is directly tied to the hotel's category upgrade, while Recigraxe ensures employees in strategic areas are fully informed about decisions.

Regarding employee benefits, all companies comply with legal requirements. In addition, some go beyond the law: Aruanã offers health plans and profit-sharing; Reciclaria provides subsidized meals and productivity bonuses; Recigraxe, Hotel Pousada do Sol, and Ecociiclo promote training courses and festive celebrations. Ecoofice is the only venture that currently

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offers only legally mandated benefits, although the entrepreneur plans to introduce incentives such as paid leave and performance bonuses. These findings align with studies by Pimentel et al. (2012) and Chaves & Lima (2021), which reveal that small and medium enterprises in Ceará often provide additional benefits beyond legal obligations.

Table 10

Actions in the Social Dimension

Enterprise	Gender Equality/ Management Positions	Participatory Management	Benefits
Ecoofice	Both genders employed, female manager	Staff participate in decisions	Only legal benefits
Aruanã Eco Praia Hotel	Mostly women, management equally divided	Staff participate in decisions	Legal benefits, health plan, profit sharing
Recigraxe	Mostly men in management	Strategic staff participate	Legal benefits, celebrations
Reciclaria	Both genders employed, female manager	Staff participate in decisions	Legal benefits, on-site meals, productivity bonuses
Hotel Pousada do Sol	Mostly women, management equally divided	Staff participate in decisions	Legal benefits, training, festive celebrations
Ecocielo	Mostly men in management	Staff participate in decisions	Legal benefits, products at cost price

Note. Prepared based on the individual case descriptions

Social Support Actions, Community Impact, and Recognition

The ventures studied support social, educational, and/or sports-related initiatives. Some make occasional donations (Ecoofice), while others allocate an annual budget for these actions. Reciclaria stands out for incorporating social practices into its routine activities by offering classes and training courses to the local community. Two ventures also support regional athletes: Ecocielo sponsors cyclists in local and national competitions, and Hotel Pousada do Sol supports the state judo champion and local surfers.

Motivations for engaging in social practices vary among entrepreneurs (Bansal & Roth, 2000). For instance, Recigraxe and Reciclaria cited business-related benefits—such as increased oil collection and reinvestment of revenues. The Hotel Pousada do Sol entrepreneur reported being influenced by competitors' behavior. In contrast, other entrepreneurs were driven by altruism (Ecoofice, Ecocielo) or by a sense of collectivism embedded in their organizational culture (Aruanã). All interviewees agreed that social initiatives have a positive impact.

According to Young and Tilley (2006), such initiatives can be understood as **socioeffectiveness**, where companies aim to generate sustainable and positive social change within their communities. Interviewees' perceptions of community improvement varied. Ecoofice's representative stated that their business has limited community engagement. With the exception of Aruanã Eco Praia Hotel, which is geographically isolated from residential areas, the other ventures believed that generating local employment contributes to community development. Recigraxe and Aruanã also cited stormwater drainage and sewage infrastructure improvements as key contributions.

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These findings differ from Pimentel et al. (2012), who found that companies often showed minimal involvement in community activities. As with the other dimensions, informal conversations remain the main channel for conveying social and environmental concerns to staff. However, other tools such as training sessions (Recigraxe, Hotel Pousada do Sol, Aruanã) and the entrepreneurs' own actions (Reciclaria, Ecociiclo) also serve to communicate these values.

An interesting aspect is that Aruanã Eco Praia Hotel uses its recruitment process to filter candidates based on their awareness of social and environmental issues, facilitating internal alignment. All businesses studied adopted initiatives to promote their sustainability credentials—through flyers (Ecoofice, Recigraxe, Ecociiclo), social media (Reciclaria, Hotel Pousada do Sol), institutional affiliations (Aruanã with SBClass), awareness lectures (Recigraxe), dedicated websites, tourism platforms (Hotel Pousada do Sol), or public events such as bike rides (Ecociiclo). These efforts are summarized in Table 11.

Table 11

Social Actions

Support	Social Improvements	Communication Methods	Recognition Methods
Occasionally	None	Informal conversations	Brochure distribution
Social, educational, theater projects	Limited (hotel is remote)	Training and meetings	Website, Facebook, SBClass association
Lectures at institutions	Job creation, community improvement	Informal conversations, meetings	Lectures
Courses and classes for community	Local community support	Entrepreneur's actions	Facebook promotion
Social projects, local athletes	Jobs and donations	Informal conversations, meetings, training	Website, booking.com, Facebook
Social projects, local athletes	Inclusion of people	Informal conversations, meetings	Brochures, events, cycling tours

Note. Prepared based on the individual case descriptions

Difficulties Faced

According to Young and Tilley (2006), most businesses struggle to fully embrace sufficiency, long-term vision, and especially environmental sustainability. In this study, the difficulties faced by sustainable entrepreneurs relate to supplier contracting, product/service commercialization, adoption of alternative energy sources, water and electricity conservation, and the implementation of sustainable practices.

Older and more established businesses initially faced challenges in finding suppliers due to limited access to technology. Today, interviewees generally report no difficulty in supplier contracting; however, the entrepreneur from Recigraxe noted that bureaucracy and the requirement for negative debt certificates remain a barrier. Regarding the adoption of alternative energy sources, the entrepreneur from Hotel Pousada do Sol recalled the lack of specialized labor in Sergipe at the time of installing solar heating systems as

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a major obstacle. The other two businesses using alternative energy (Aruanã Eco Praia Hotel and Reciclaria) did not report such difficulties.

In terms of water and energy savings, all entrepreneurs except those from Ecoofice and Hotel Pousada do Sol cited employee awareness as the main barrier. The Hotel Pousada do Sol interviewee emphasized the high maintenance costs of the water reuse system, while the Aruanã representative pointed out the elevated upfront investment for implementing such systems.

As for product sales, the entrepreneurs from the hotels and Ecociiclo reported no difficulty, linking the growing public awareness with increased demand for environmentally responsible offerings. In contrast, Ecoofice, Recigraxe, and Reciclaria reported difficulties in marketing their eco-oriented products or services, highlighting the need for greater public environmental awareness. Linnanen (2002) emphasized that one of the main barriers for environmental entrepreneurs is market creation, arguing that ethical logic often clashes with an immature culture and economy not yet ready to support environmental innovation.

Regarding the implementation of sustainable practices, Ecoofice faced difficulties in conducting social actions due to limited working capital. The Aruanã entrepreneur mentioned the high cost of materials used in the business's physical construction as a challenge. Recigraxe pointed to the increasing complexity of legal requirements. Reciclaria cited maintenance of its vegetable garden and difficulty recruiting volunteers, while the entrepreneur from Ecociiclo highlighted the complexity of correctly implementing the recycling process. These difficulties are summarized in Table 12.

Table 12

Difficulties Faced

Enterprise	Hiring Suppliers	Adoption of Alternative Energy Sources	Actions to Save Energy and Water	Product Sales	Implementation of Sustainable Practices
Ecoofice	No difficulties	Does not have alternative energy sources	None	Population needs to develop environmental awareness	Insufficient working capital for significant social actions
Aruanã Eco Praia Hotel	Initial difficulties, none now	No difficulties	Staff awareness, cost of water reuse system	None	Cost of materials for business construction
Recigraxe	Bureaucracy in registration	Does not have alternative energy sources	Staff awareness	Population needs to develop environmental awareness	Increased legal requirements
Reciclaria	No difficulties	No difficulties	Staff awareness	Population needs to develop environmental awareness	Maintaining garden, hiring volunteers
Hotel Pousada do Sol	Initial difficulties due to technology/ access, none now	Difficulty hiring specialized labor for solar heating panels	Cost of maintaining water reuse system	None	Maintaining green areas
Ecociiclo	No difficulties	Does not have alternative energy sources	Staff awareness	None	Implementation of recycling process

Note. Prepared based on the individual case descriptions

■ FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The sustainable philosophy should not be exclusive to ventures that market products and/or services with environmentally friendly characteristics; all businesses in the market should implement practices aimed at environmental preservation. Sustainable entrepreneurship is still in its early stages—few ventures operate based on the triple bottom line and carry out actions in the economic, environmental, and social dimensions in a balanced manner.

Based on the analyzed cases, this study provides evidence that the entrepreneurs practice sustainable actions, such as the acquisition and commercialization of eco-friendly products, the use of alternative energy sources, efforts to save water and electricity, proper waste and residue disposal, support for social projects, sponsorship of athletes and educational events, and initiatives that generate positive change in the communities where their businesses are located.

Actions taken across the three sustainability dimensions can serve as strategic tools for these entrepreneurs to increase profits and grow their businesses. Although the initial costs of adopting alternative energy sources or eco-efficient equipment and products are high, these investments are offset by financial returns and a likely increase in customer demand—as the market is increasingly demanding regarding environmental preservation. It is clear that these entrepreneurs highlight every sustainable feature of their businesses through social media, websites, printed materials, and by integrating environmental and social responsibility into their mission and vision statements.

Furthermore, in the analyzed cases, it was evident that these practices generate personal satisfaction for the entrepreneurs—not only due to the financial returns, but also because they feel they are contributing to environmental preservation and the well-being of the communities in which they operate. This satisfaction was apparent throughout the study, from the initial contacts to the on-site visits, during which the entrepreneurs expressed pride in owning businesses where environmental and social concerns were visibly integrated. It became clear that despite the challenges associated with the costs of sustainable products and the need to raise awareness among internal and external stakeholders, these entrepreneurs are gradually progressing in implementing practices that reflect the principles of the triple bottom line—even though many obstacles still remain.

It is recommended that future studies adopt alternative models available in the literature, such as the framework proposed by Schirmer et al. (2012), which provides a more detailed view of each sustainability dimension, and highlights how the intersection between any two dimensions results in socioeconomic, eco-efficient, and/or socio-environmental actions.



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