

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

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# Sustainable recovery in small businesses: Analysis of sustainable practices and the goals for sustainable development

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## Abstract

This article aims to present the analysis of sustainability practices and the objectives of sustainable development and recovery in small businesses carried out through survey research. The work was based on the understanding of how the theme applies to the objectives of sustainability in small businesses, using the application of a questionnaire in 24 social enterprises of the agribusiness industry in the state of Rio Grande do Sul (RS), present at the largest Fair of Cooperativism in Latin America. The research was exploratory with an approach classified as descriptive, quantitative, and a data survey of 24 valid samples. As a result of the research, it was found that small businesses are focused on the recovery of sustainability, presenting results with significant advances in practical actions of more sustainable and innovative management and with greater cooperation among enterprises. The research makes explicit the possibility of expanding the sample, analyzing small businesses in other regions of the State of Rio Grande do Sul and of the country, with the survey of future research on the theme and case studies in small businesses, expanding the source of evidence to allow a more practical and critical view. Since this is an unprecedented study, the research sought to present to the scientific community the importance of what is currently being produced on the subject, by presenting the innovative and relevant result of the analysis of sustainable recovery in small businesses and sustainable practices.

## KEYWORDS

SDGs, small business, sustainability, sustainable development, sustainable recovery

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Recovery for sustainability is a theme that has been growing worldwide, especially after the establishment of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals—SDGs. To advance the established goals, there was the need for recovery to solve global problems with solutions that respect the environment and social justice, within the limits of environmental sustainability and without compromising future generations (Nikolić & Vukić, 2021). Sustainable practices are reflected in behavioral changes

toward a more rational and efficient management of all resources that allows for less environmental pressure and impact (Klarin, 2018). In this sense, the SDGs are essential vectors for the development process and competitiveness of small businesses. Since the 1990s, the economy has been marked by the opening of new markets and technological advances. There are great challenges in the field of organizational sciences where yesterday's knowledge and organizational strategies cannot guarantee tomorrow's future (Antunes & Pinheiro, 2020). In recent decades, a steady trend of studies on sustainability is observed,

aiming to enrich and improve the explanatory capacity of theories based on the achievement of sustainable development, incorporated into socioeconomic formation (Manioudis & Meramveliotakis, 2022).

The current scenario is seen by the United Nations Organization—UN and other institutions as an opportunity for nations to resume sustainability in a correct, balanced way, presenting bolder environmental plans (United Nations, 2021). They are an opportunity to mobilize funding, develop projects, and actions for economic recovery (Obergassel et al., 2021). Achieving sustainable recovery is more than simply looking at the growth trend. At the same time, the environmental and sustainability implications of economic recovery measures have not been systematically studied. If we do, it is likely that we can draw important lessons about how to implement sustainable recovery packages more effectively (Obergassel et al., 2021).

Through the Literature Review, it highlights the fact that while previous research has addressed several recognized dimensions of sustainable recovery, the research has not been coupled with a unifying theory to help clarify our understanding of how sustainable recovery can be achieved. As have those who are designing a meaningful curriculum for the future based on global citizenship and sustainable development (Iyengar, 2020). Sustainability in this evolution has, over the years, presented different concepts, events, and projects for the development of sustainability. In the perception of Leal Filho (2011), this evolution was divided into three stages, the first corresponding to the years 1987–1997, was focused on the interests of nations, in the second stage (1998–2002) for individuals and for entities, and in the third stage that extends from 2003 to the present day, this perception became of interest to both parties.

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In the context of globalization, for Prieto-Jiménez et al. (2021), with the arrival of the Millennium Development Goals formulated by the

UN in 2000, sustainability was established as one of the Goals. However, in 2015, realizing that the desired impact was not being achieved, it was outlined that sustainability should take a central position, and the Development Goals (SDGs) were established giving a more holistic view for global development. However, in light of the above, this study aims to analyze the sustainable practices and Sustainable Development Goals that are applied in Small Businesses. Then, the theoretical foundation, method, results, and analysis are presented, and finally the final considerations and references.

## 2 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The current moment that society finds itself in, is seen as an opportunity for international collaboration and cooperation to carefully manage the social, environmental, and economic dimensions, aiming to overcome the current impacts and economic scenarios, to increase the resilience of societies and countries, producing a strategy to monitor, treat, mitigate, and recover from their impacts (Berawi, 2021). The Sustainable Development Goals set out actions to promote prosperity and well-being (Berawi, 2021). They are goals for transformative improvement for all countries to work together to achieve these common goals and cover three pillars of sustainability, people (social goals), prosperity (economic goals), and planet (environmental goals). And it aims, among others, to decouple economic growth and environmental degradation, and to address climate change and its impacts, to create a better world for future generations (Suriyankietkaew & Nimsai, 2021).

Climate change, global warming, and the realistic threat of future resource shortages for the world's rapidly growing population have contributed to pushing green processes and sustainability and not just productivity. Therefore, processes within different fields are being revamped to achieve greater sustainability (Herrero & Ibañez, 2018), and properly implemented and publicized environmental initiatives can contribute to building a good image and perception of internal and external audiences about a given organization (Bleck, 2021). According to Herrero and Ibañez (2018), promoting sustainable development implies not inducing any harm to the environment, avoiding damage and resource depletion, and including innovation by a variety of selection and use of renewable plant resources; reducing energy consumption, energy recovery, and use of innovative technologies; production of coproducts instead of waste, and so on.

Technological development in the use of renewable energy resources, construction of urban water systems, and sustainable public infrastructure, increased production of eco-friendly materials and products are among the ways in which technology will contribute significantly to achieving development goals (Berawi, 2021). Or the creation of packages for sustainable reclamation (Obergassel et al., 2021) such as revegetation techniques for degraded areas (Ribeiro et al., 2015); Life Cycle Engineering in Biocomposites (Fitzgerald et al., 2021) or the production of bio-jewelry (Freitas et al., 2018) among many other initiatives. With this evidence presented, the main strategies used, according to Bleck (2021), to legitimize the organizations'

performance are based on institutional change, stakeholder alignment, collaboration networks, and participation in lectures and events, considering their social group, their personal experiences, and their education, this being the mechanism for glimpsing opportunities for entrepreneurship.

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One realizes the importance that sustainability currently occupies for organizations and among the advantages of using this sustainable methodology is the improved financial performance, stimulation of innovation, better management, and the involvement of stakeholders in their processes (Josende Paz & Mahlmann Kipper, 2016). However, two challenges are confirmed in the works: the need for an investigation of the maturity of the organization in using sustainable methodologies and whether the organization's human resources are prepared for this organizational change (Josende Paz & Mahlmann Kipper, 2016). Therefore, to ensure urban economic resilience, stronger support for small and medium-sized enterprises through business incubators and startups will be required (Berawi, 2021). Currently the choice of business models, for Bleck (2021), is not based on maximizing profits, but on a lifestyle that the entrepreneur has or wants to have and on the sharing of social values that enables greater consumer engagement, resulting in the strengthening of the business.

Thus, according to Boszczowski & Teixeira (2012), opportunities for sustainable businesses are recognized when the entrepreneur cognitively relates his previous knowledge of a social or environmental cause to the means of satisfying it. It is not only large corporations that seek growth with corporate sustainability, micro and small entrepreneurs also need to reflect on the impact that their business causes both in society and in the ecosystem and seek to design and execute a set of conscious actions that are economically favorable, but respectful

of the environment and society in which it is inserted (Tagliari et al., 2021). Highlights that sustainable entrepreneurship will be more than image enhancement before customers and society or customer loyalty or only in compliance with policies, procedures, corporate principles, and environmental legislation in force (Tavernard & Lisboa, 2010). But, also in the preservation of the quality of life of the inhabitants of the forest areas, ecological balance, generation of work, and commercialization of their products, with tax incentives, specific credit lines, and other improvements. Entrepreneurs will evaluate sustainable business opportunities based on the social, environmental, and economic value that can be created in the exploitation of this opportunity (Boszczowski & Teixeira, 2012).

## 2.1 | Sustainable practices and the goals for sustainable development

Sustainability aims to meet the needs of present generations without compromising the ability to meet the needs of future generations, and the public and private sectors must be involved in addressing socio-environmental problems (Burch, 2021). That said, sustainable practice can be conceptualized as a complex of organizational competencies to seek sustainable balance through recycling, interdependence, partnership, flexibility, and diversity. Therefore, it is possible to determine sustainability as a fundamental principle to promote the solidary protection of material and immaterial law, by protecting sustainable development, guided by economic, social, and environmental development.

In addition, the public authorities must formulate public policies, as well as plan decision-making to carry out the maintenance of resources, as well as reconcile the exploitation of natural resources with the economic progress of the country. Since, it is essential to pay attention to the interests of national security and the protection of the dignity of human life (Almeida, 2019). Given this, sustainability aims to solve economic, social, cultural, environmental, and also social justice problems through the Triple Bottom Line (TBL). In this way, it seeks to promote support to the accounting structure and aims to contribute to evaluating the performance at the economic, social, and environmental level in the face of sustainable development, based on economic prosperity with environmental quality and social equity.

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## *exploitation of natural resources with the economic progress of the country.*

According to Forbes (2021), about 72% of Brazilian companies use the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) standards to define social, environmental, and governmental performance indicators. In Brazil, the Corporate Sustainability Index (ISE), has as its main objective to reflect the return on the commitment to sustainability and social responsibility practices. Furthermore, sustainability aims to increase efficiency, as well as reduce inputs, simplify the production process, and reduce costs in accordance with environmental responsibility (Schaller, 2020).

Therefore, in the face of growing environmental impacts resulting from pollution and global warming, sustainable development goals comprise the purpose of eradicating poverty, promoting gender equality, and eradicating hunger. In view of this and according to the teachings of Khalid (2021), it is necessary to ensure nutritional security with social inclusion, by reflecting on the commitment to non-financial sustainable development goals to create investment values. Furthermore, it is also noteworthy that the goal of sustainable development intends to promote a sustainable industry with ample infrastructure and innovation, through the safe production process, by empowering the social community through responsible consumption and production.

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The objectives of sustainable development, according to the development summit held by the United Nations in 2015 (ONU, 2015), comprise 17 objectives, in addition to 169 goals guided by sustainability, by establishing strategies, including environmental management systems, through pollution prevention technologies to develop sustainable consumption and production practices (Dotto et al., 2022). Listed below are the 17 objectives of sustainable practice as defined by the Sustainable Development Goals, supported by 167 countries, by means of 330 indicators establishing a guideline for the response to the different problems, which results in a plan with concrete goals, determined

by national policies and international cooperation activities, delimited by the United Nations Organization (ONU, 2022), as shown in Exhibit 1.

Based on the 2020 Sustainability Report, it is worth noting that of the 5200 companies headquartered in 52 countries, there are 100 participating companies in Brazil, 4 of which are listed among the 250 largest companies in the study, and that of these, about 85% of Brazilian companies prepare the Environmental Social Governance (ESG) report. Moreover, according to Morningstar (2020), in 2020, ESG and Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance (ASG) investment funds raised about R\$2.5 billion, with more than half of the funds created in the last 12 months. Therefore, the Brazilian Institute of Corporate Governance (IBGC, 2022) classifies the stages of sustainable practices as shown in Exhibit 2.

Therefore, of the 200 largest Gross Domestic Product (GDP), worldwide, according to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2022), 157 are companies, according to the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD, 2020), the development of sustainable business models should generate at least US\$12 trillion per year and 380 million jobs by 2030. In this sense, it is necessary to encourage companies to adopt actions and practices to promote sustainable development through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Given that, according to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2019), between 2010 and 2019, the Brazilian population increased by 10%, while the waste generated had a growth of 18%, generating waste a speed greater than population growth entails inadequate disposal in urban centers.

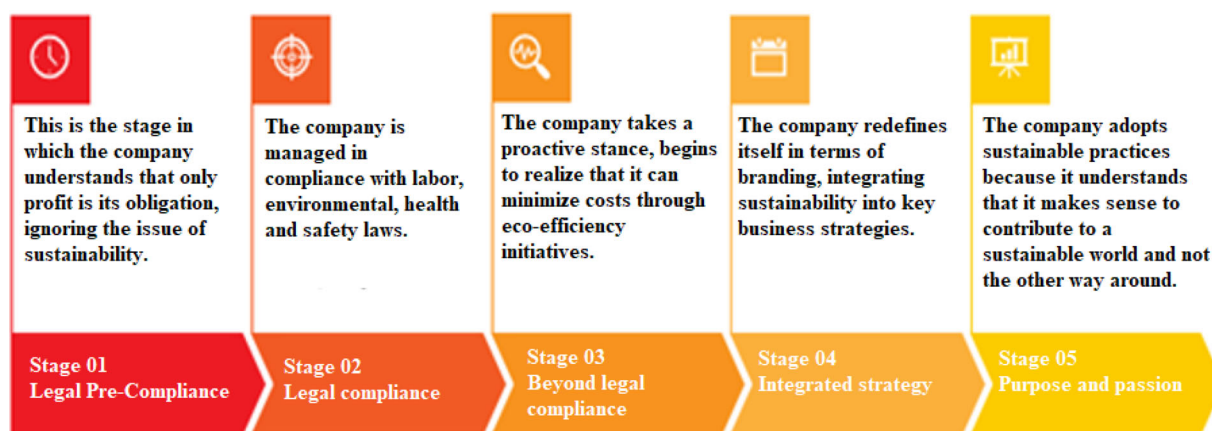
Thus, in Exhibit 3 it is possible to see the main sustainable practices that are essential to reinforce initiatives linked to social and environmental aspects, besides focusing on environmental management.

Therefore, the International Integrated Reporting Council (IIRC), comprises a tool to simplify and democratize the way to manage the values of sustainable applicability, and the Global Compact Network Brazil, starts to define the ESG as the capital market vision of sustainability. Therefore, it is necessary to promote the sustaining of society by applying an Environmental Management System (EMS), in the face of environmental collaboration for sustainable consumption and production goals in compliance with Environmental Quality Standards (ISO 14001). In this context, Control Union Certifications (2019), further reveals that organic-based production systems minimize the impact of humans on the environment by respecting natural life cycles without using genetically modified organisms.

Thus, it is noteworthy that for Picazo (2020), it is necessary to promote actions to combat the global change of ecosystems, since in the year 2021, it was possible to analyze growth in the agribusiness sector, of about 7.4%, according to data from foundation Getúlio Vargas (FGV, 2018). Given this, the model of practices directed to the sustainable development objectives deals with validating the analysis of the data obtained in the research and understanding the sustainable attitudes implemented through actions in the search for the recovery of sustainability of agribusinesses and the social impacts interpreted by the entrepreneur in the search for the implementation of sustainability with innovation and technology, in addition to public policies directed to environmental preservation.



**EXHIBIT 1** Sustainable development goals (United Nations Organization - ONU, 2015). [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]



**EXHIBIT 2** Stages of sustainability (adapted from King e Ryberg, 2020). [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

In this sense, Exhibit 4 shows the members of the National Commission for the Sustainable Development Goals (CNODS), in Brazil, who participated in the elaboration of the Partnerships and Means of Implementation:

Therefore, the management trend, to show the dynamic and integrated capacity to management strategies seeks to reflect in innovative sustainability practices with a systemic business philosophy (Tran et al., 2021). Thus, the joint participation of the first, second, and third sectors, along with third parties and the external community contributes to avoid waste arising from raw materials and energy used to implement reverse logistics, being possible to replace disposable product packaging when implementing innovation practices allied with responsible consumption and production. To this end, the sustainable development objectives must observe the conservation and recovery of ecosystems, with state planning and management plans, as revealed by Müller and Scheffer (2022), when highlighting that sustainabil-

ity is classified as a dynamic state of regeneration and expansion of resources.

Thus, by creating industrial policies of innovation, technology, and restructuring of companies for targets in a co-participatory way, as well as implementing Corporate Social and Environmental Responsibility (CSR) policies following the guidelines of the United Nations Global Compact, it is feasible to boost innovation in technological development to create opportunities in the direction of disruptive and sustainable business models, in addition to stimulating change in production systems, as well as collaborating to supply basic world food needs. In view of this, the 2030 Agenda (ONU) addresses sustainability at the social, economic, and environmental levels, with the aim of promoting peace and justice, as determined by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (RIO-92), as well as the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), with the primary function of regulating Agenda 21, the Rio





**EXHIBIT 3** Main sustainability practices (adapted from Freitas, 2021). [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]



**EXHIBIT 4** The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Brazil (adapted from Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Declaration on Environment and Development, the Declaration of Principles on Forests, and the Convention on Biodiversity that deals with climate change and desertification.

### 3 | METHOD

The present research is classified as descriptive, quantitative, and survey. The population subject of the study are small businesses, also known as traders of social enterprises, that aim for profit and have the purpose of solving existing problems or difficulties (Muñoz & Kimmitt, 2019), which positively impacts the community or society in which it operates (Zebryte & Jorquera, 2017). The sample corresponds to 24 partner-administrators, production, sales, and administrative personnel, managers, and other leaders of Agroindustry social enterprises in the state of Rio Grande do Sul (RS) who participated in the 28th International Fair of Cooperativism and Solidarity Economy (FEICOOP) in the city of Santa Maria, RS, Brazil, which took place between July 15 and 17, 2022.

Prior to the data collection stage, a pre-test of the questionnaire was carried out with 10 specialists from The Inter-University Sustainable Development Research Programme (IUSDRP) on the theme of sustainability in social enterprises. After validation, the research instrument

was ready for data collection. At this stage, the researchers participated in FEICOOP to obtain information from the study population and during the 2-day event, the questionnaires were applied to representatives of small businesses, with the aim of understanding how the businesses are interpreting their own actions in the search for a recovery of sustainability. Exhibit 5, attached in Appendix A, presents the instrument adopted for the survey.

The research instrument applied comprised 17 questions to analyze the profile of the social venture and how the entrepreneur interprets the recovery of sustainability. The research instrument corresponded to statements segregated into categories related to sustainable actions in the venture, the evaluation of the role of the social entrepreneur as a transformation agent, the level of performance in favor of sustainable development in practice, the greatest challenges of the implementation of recovery for development in social enterprises, and the level of importance of the 17 SDGs in the context in which the venture is inserted, in addition to questions about suggestions to ensure the performance of sustainable recovery in social enterprises.

It is noteworthy that the questions were developed based on a literature review, which sought to understand how businesses promote the recovery of sustainability in the context of social enterprise, which enabled the analysis of the main practices and actions performed and how professionals are innovating in the face of various challenges,

Dear.,

We would like to invite you to participate in a survey that aims to assist in the sustainable recovery of small social enterprises, considering universities as potential agents of local change for the Recovery of Sustainability. We ask you to select the alternative, on a scale of 5 (completely agree), 4 (agree), 3 (average), 2 (disagree) and 1 (completely disagree), which represents the degree of application of sustainability in your enterprise.

1) Gender: ( ) Female ( ) Male ( ) Other ( ) Prefer not to say

2) Age in years: \_\_\_\_\_

3) What is your professional activity: ( ) Self-employed ( ) Informal Entrepreneur ( ) MEI ( ) EPP ( ) Agroindustry ( ) Other, \_\_\_\_\_

4) City: \_\_\_\_\_

4.1) State ( ) RS ( ) Other, which \_\_\_\_\_

5) Name of the Enterprise/Project: \_\_\_\_\_

6) Business segment: ( ) Food ( ) Beverages ( ) Crafts ( ) Other \_\_\_\_\_

7) What is your monthly income (approximate salary):

( ) 1 to 3 salaries ( ) 4 to 5 salaries ( ) 6 to 7 salaries ( ) 8 to 10 ( ) More than 10 salaries

8) How many employees do you have in your enterprise: \_\_\_\_\_

9) What is your role within the company: \_\_\_\_\_

10) Main products offered: \_\_\_\_\_

11) Do you have a project or action with Universities? (to describe)

11.1) Mark the following questions, based on the actions of your enterprise

Nº	Practices and actions developed in your enterprise	Scale				
		5 – Completely Agree				
		1 – Strongly Disagree				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	I believe that sustainability practices/actions increase the probability of my business being more innovative/creative	1	2	3	4	5
2	I believe that partnerships with other businesses strengthen the innovation/creativity of my business.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Businesses that adhere to sustainability practices strengthen the sustainable development of the planet	1	2	3	4	5
4	Cooperation between enterprises strengthens sales, the solidary economy and innovation.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I use renewable energy in my business	1	2	3	4	5
6	I use LED bulbs	1	2	3	4	5
7	I carry out the implementation of sustainable practices for the treatment, reuse and recycling of waste and materials	1	2	3	4	5
8	I manage water consumption	1	2	3	4	5
9	I use practices to reduce the consumption of disposable materials	1	2	3	4	5
10	Incentive to reduce the use of vehicles	1	2	3	4	5
11	Foster partnerships with the community	1	2	3	4	5
12	Sustainability is embedded in strategic planning (in business plans)	1	2	3	4	5
13	Control costs for sustainability	1	2	3	4	5

**EXHIBIT 5** Research instrument. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

12) How do you evaluate your role (contribution) as an agent of transformation of sustainable recovery in the place where your business is located?

( ) Very important ( ) Important ( ) Medium ( ) Little important ( ) Not at all important

13) To what extent does your performance in your enterprise contemplate (will it contemplate) sustainable development in practice?

( ) Completely contemplates ( ) Partially contemplates ( ) Regular ( ) Very little contemplates ( ) Does not contemplate

14) In your view, what could be the biggest challenges in implementing recovery for development in social enterprises? (possibility of multiple choice)

( ) Adoption of facilitating practices and tools;

( ) Access to support projects and programs for the implementation of sustainability recovery;

( ) Development of joint programs with interested parties: academia, companies, public organizations and civil society in general;

( ) Financing of actions to implement sustainability practices and policies;

( ) Efficiency, transparency, safety and ethical standards.

( ) Lack of support from governments;

( ) Lack of awareness of those involved;

( ) Lack of commitment to sustainability and innovation actions;

( ) Lack of support in the introduction of control systems;

( ) Lack of incentives for innovation and sustainability;

( ) Lack of dialogue between academia, organizations and society;

( ) Lack of training and cooperation among change agents;

( ) Lack of legislation and guidelines for sustainable development;

( ) Lack of technology and support tools.

15) Below are the 17 goals for sustainable development. Mark the level of importance in the context you are inserted. That is, mark the level of importance of the SDG.

Goals for Sustainable Development: with some examples	Not important (1)	Little important (2)	Regular (3)	Important (4)	Very important (5)
1) Poverty eradication (Developing products or services that benefit and improve the quality of life of economically vulnerable groups)					
2) Zero hunger and sustainable agriculture (Support small food producers and family farming)					
3) Health and Well-Being (Encouraging healthy behaviors among its stakeholders and improving its employees' access to health care)					
4) Quality education (Ensure that employees in your direct operations and supply chain have access to professional training and learning opportunities)					
5) Gender Equality (Treating women and men fairly, with equal opportunities for professional					

**EXHIBIT 5** Continued



growth and equalization of positions and salaries)					
6) Drinking Water and Sanitation (Implement water management strategies that are environmentally sustainable and economically beneficial in the hydrographic region where it operates)					
7) Accessible and Clean Energy (Increase your energy efficiency, using renewable sources and taking these same actions to your supply chain)					
8) Decent work and economic growth (Ensure decent working conditions for employees throughout your operation and throughout your business and supply chain)					
9) Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (Invests in technology to create products, services and business models that promote a sustainable, modern and resilient infrastructure)					
10) Reduction of inequalities (Creates and implements products, services and business models that explicitly target the needs of disadvantaged and marginalized populations. Develops purchasing policies that benefit small businesses in the region in which it operates)					
11) Sustainable Cities and Communities (Research, develop and deploy products and services that improve access to resilient buildings, efficient, clean and modern mobility and green common spaces)					
12) Responsible consumption and production (Develops, implements and shares solutions to track and disclose the origin of its products, inform the consumer)					
13) Action against global climate change (Substantially reduces emissions associated with own operations and those of the supply chain, in line with climate regulation mechanisms)					
14) Life in the water (Research, develop and implement products, services and business models that eliminate impacts on ocean ecosystems and collaborate for their restoration)					
15) Life on Earth (Implement policies and practices to protect natural ecosystems that are					

EXHIBIT 5 Continued

affected by your activities and the actions of your supply chain)						
16) Peace, justice and effective institutions (Identify and take effective measures against corruption and violence, in your own operations and those of your supply chain)						
17) Partnerships and means of implementation (Act together with the government and civil society in favor of the Sustainable Development Goals)						
16) Do you have suggestions on how to ensure/improve performance for the sustainable recovery of social enterprises?						

EXHIBIT 5 Continued

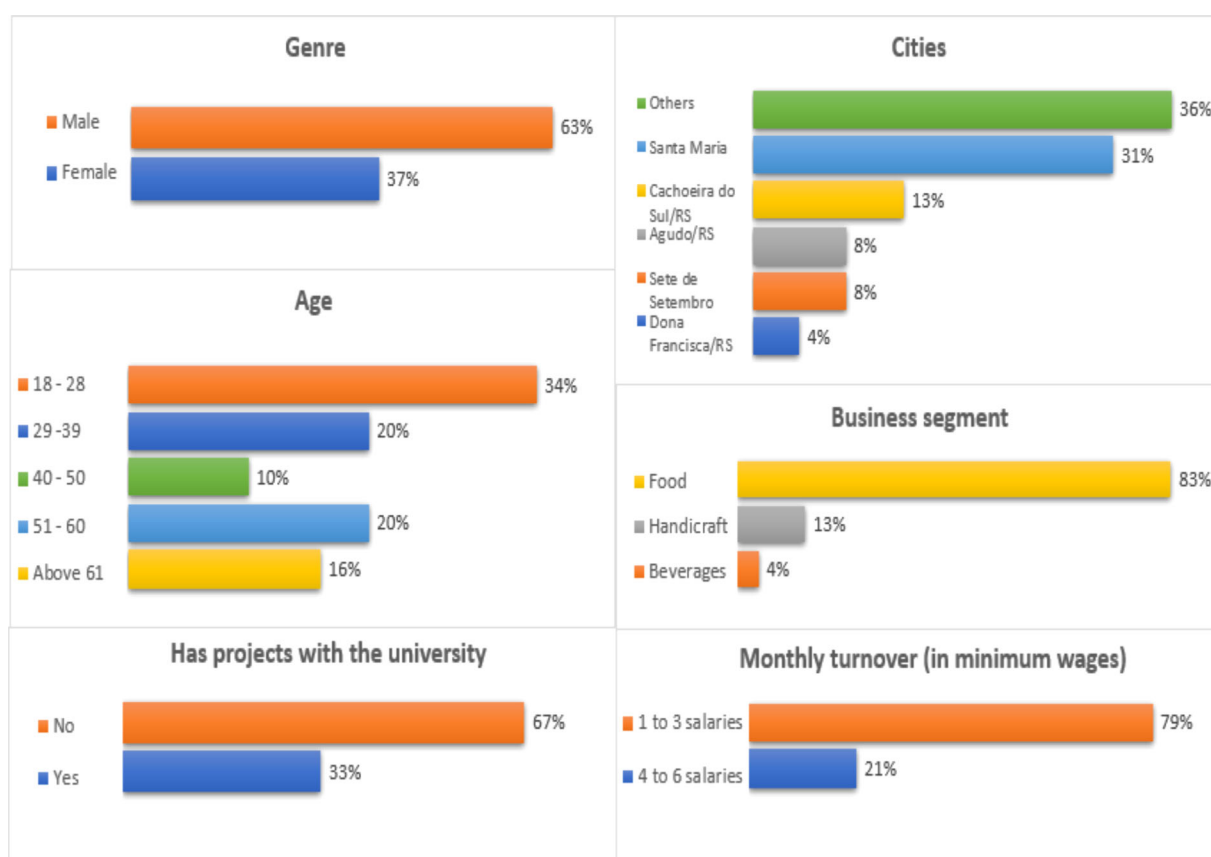


EXHIBIT 6 Characteristics of organizations and managers. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

especially regarding the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Thus, after the collection stage, the data were tabulated and analyzed through descriptive statistical analysis, with the help of the software Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS), in order to understand the frequency of the statements and questions made to the respondents, identifying comprehensively how social entrepreneurs are working with the recovery of sustainability and promoting innovations in this area in local businesses. Thus, in the next section, the

analysis and discussion of the results obtained from this study are presented.

## 4 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs

(World Commission 1987, p. 37). In this way, sustainable practice tends to be associated with sustainable development goals defined by challenges that humanity must face (Klarin, 2018). Therefore, the concept of sustainable development is based on the understanding of economic sustainability focused on maintaining an environment necessary for economic and social growth (Manioudis & Meramveliotakis, 2022). The economic, social, and environmental implications stand out in the face of the important urgency for a more critical and strategic look at the key dimensions of sustainable development in maintaining the market inherent in agricultural industrialization (Damke et al., 2022).

Therefore, sustainability is responsible for enhancing its environmental concepts, practices, and systems, fostering the development of the fundamental role of sustainable goals in the performance of an environmentally sustainable future (Avila et al., 2019). Thus, sustainability is well integrated into the mission and strategic objectives with the moral responsibility to spread throughout society the values and knowledge needed to create sustainable development strategies (Giovannelli et al., 2021). In this way, different sustainability policies can contribute significant information on how to strategically manage their waste in various departments and environments towards sustainability goals (Behravesht et al., 2022).

In Exhibit 6, the characteristics of the survey respondents are presented.

Based on the information collected from the study population, this section presents the results obtained through the frequency analysis of the results. This study obtained 24 valid responses. The remaining information regarding the characterization of the study sample is presented in Exhibit 6. This sampling method strengthens the validity and reliability of the research design. Sampling and data collection are inherent in similar studies, such as the one conducted by Leal Filho et al. (2019), published in the Journal of Cleaner Production, in which a sample of 21 responses was used, considering the understanding of strategies for sustainable development.

*Based on the information collected from the study population, this section presents the results obtained through the frequency analysis of the results.*

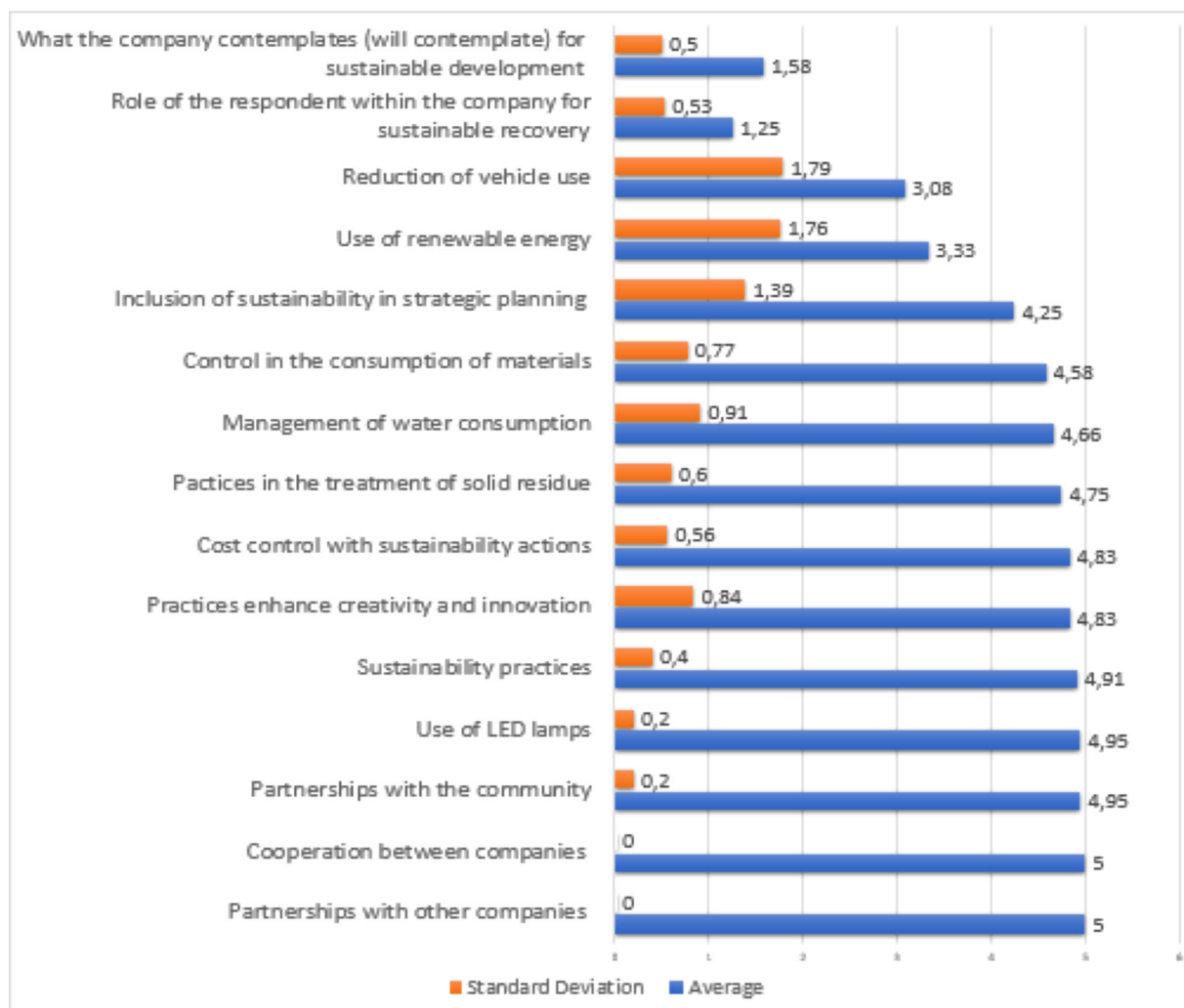
The information presented in Exhibit 6 shows that 63% of the survey respondents are male, with different ages ranging from 18 to 65 years old, indicating that there is a great search and incentive for young people to participate in the development of small businesses. In addition, most of the analyzed businesses operate in the agro-industry and food industry, which enables the creation of income for entrepreneurs, mostly from 1 to 3 minimum wages. Most of these enterprises (16

enterprises) do not have projects with higher education institutions and are located in several cities in the state of RS, especially in the cities of Santa Maria and Cachoeira do Sul, producing and selling products such as: juices, sausages, colonial products, cakes, breads, chocolates, among others. Exhibit 7 shows the main practices and actions developed by entrepreneurs, in order to make their business more sustainable.

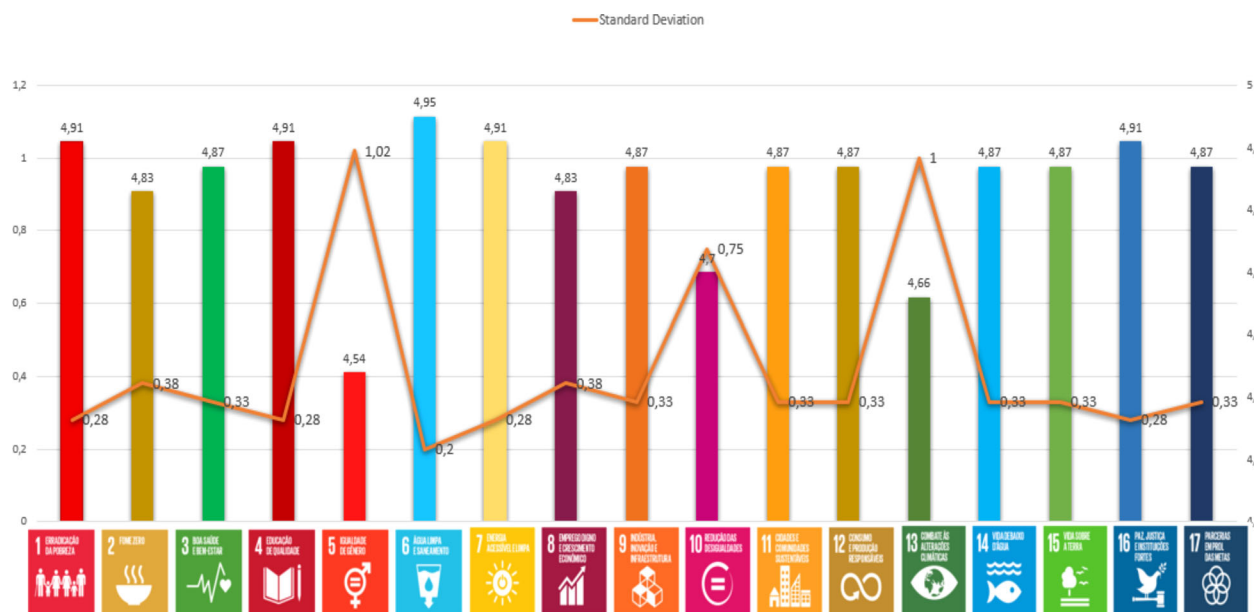
Based on the data presented in Exhibit 7, with regard to the perception of managers it is noted that all the entrepreneurs interviewed believe that the formation of partnerships and cooperation between companies boosts aspects such as innovation, creativity, in addition to strengthening the sales of your company. The union between company and community, is also well regarded by managers, given their strong agreement that the results present, these issues are also presented in studies conducted by Ávila et al. (2019), Leal Filho et al. (2019), and Brandli et al. (2015) as important tools for breaking barriers found in the search for sustainable development of institutions. Furthermore, the managers' perception of the impact of sustainability on their business also stands out, given that there are issues that drive the adoption and development of sustainability, one of which according to Leal Filho et al. (2021) is to incorporate sustainability into the institution's planning, which is evidenced in the results obtained in the study. However, the standard deviation of 1.39, may be an indication that not all companies analyzed have this perception, since the average of responses was 4.25.

About practices developed by the companies, the most noteworthy are the use of LED lamps, projects aimed at recycling materials, the conscious use of resources, the use of renewable energy, incentives to reduce the use of motor vehicles, and the conscious consumption of water. With regard to their role in the development of sustainability in the region where their company operates, the mean and standard deviation indicates that managers perceive their role as very important (1.25), while the standard deviation of (0.53) indicates that this perception is proportional in most of the sample analyzed. In the same way, regarding the performance of their enterprise for sustainable development, the information obtained indicates that the respondents believe that by playing an important role in the conscious consumption of resources and the fact that they generate employment and income for several people, their organizations have a very important role for the development of these issues, as well as for the region where they operate.

Moreover, from the entrepreneur's point of view, the biggest challenges to implement sustainability in his organization would be: lack of tax incentives, lack of support from governmental institutions, lack of economic support for these issues (financing), allied, the lack of instruments capable of providing information and assisting in the control of the institution's processes. The questions presented above indicate the perception of sustainability of individuals, however, to complement the analysis, questions were presented regarding the 17 goals of sustainable development, seeking to identify the perception of respondents regarding the level of importance of each of the SDGs in the context in which it is inserted. The answers obtained in relation to this question are presented in the following Exhibit 8.



**EXHIBIT 7** Practices and actions developed by the enterprises. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]



**EXHIBIT 8** Level of importance of each SDG. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

With regard to the SDGs, with the exception of SDG 5 and SDG 13, all the others presented averages higher than 4.7%, thus indicating that these SDGs, in the perception of the components of the study sample, have a high level of importance in the context in which it is inserted. Regarding SDG 5 (Gender equality) and SDG 13 (Action against global climate change), the data, despite presenting relatively low averages, present a higher standard deviation, indicating that the perception of these issues is divergent in some cases of the sample.

*With regard to the SDGs, with the exception of SDG 5 and SDG 13, all the others presented averages higher than 4.7%, thus indicating that these SDGs, in the perception of the components of the study sample, have a high level of importance in the context in which it is inserted.*

Among the most prominent Goals are SDG 1 (Poverty Eradication), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 6 (Drinking Water and Sanitation), and SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), indicating that in the perception of respondents, issues related to inclusion, development, environment, and quality of life are key issues for the development of sustainability in society. After presenting the considerations about the results obtained in the study, the next section aims to present the final considerations and main implications of the findings obtained in the study.

## 5 | CONCLUSIONS

The descriptive and quantitative study aimed to analyze the sustainable practices and the Sustainable Development Goals that are applied in Small Businesses. The research was based on a questionnaire applied to 24 small businesses at the largest Cooperative Fair in Latin America, held in July of the current year. The results were very significant, as it shows that small businesses are focused on the recovery of sustainability. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals have scores higher than 4.50% of applicability. A very significant result for the field of sustainable development, gaining momentum for advances in more complex actions and practices. Regarding sustainability practices, the partnerships with other businesses for innovation and creativity, as well as the cooperation between enterprises, were the great highlights. All the participants gave the maximum score. Other important highlights

include: fostering partnerships with the community, use of LED lamps, adherence to sustainability practices, the likelihood of the business being more creative.

The sustainable development goals are responsible for making business more efficient, through an economic system based on business models (Kirchherr et al., 2017). It is a program developed by the UN (United Nations), composed of 17 goals and 169 targets, responsible for establishing sustainability practices and actions, in a transparent way and with the purpose of fostering competitiveness among investors and entrepreneurs in the face of sustainable development. Therefore, the process of sustainable development in business involves the definition of indicators that also influence the future period of organizations. This model reflects the aspirations of several nations worldwide, ensuring economic prosperity, environmental quality, and social equity for present and future generations (Kammer & Christopherson, 2018).

Treatment of waste and materials, and so on. However, it is noteworthy that small businesses adopt practices at the organizational management level, energy management, waste management, and innovation, which allow businesses to not only contribute to sustainable development, but also to motivate other ventures to follow the path of sustainability. For future studies, there is the possibility of expanding the sample, and applying it to small businesses in other regions of the state of Rio Grande do Sul and of the country. In addition, case studies in small businesses, expanding the source of evidence may allow a more practical, critical, and innovative view, to become examples and motivation for other companies.

A future study would complement this research with in-depth interviews and/or case studies to help develop a deeper understanding of the sustainable development and recovery practices in small companies located in the region of Rio Grande do Sul/RS, Brazil, as well as being able to expand to other regions of the country to conduct comparative studies and to know other realities.

As for the limitations, it is worth mentioning that companies that had sustainability practices and actions were selected; however, the number of participants became small, but qualified. Based on this adopted research strategy, other studies have already been conducted, such as Wijayasundara et al. (2022), Giovanelli et al. (2021), Leal Filho et al. (2019), Silva et al. (2023), with success.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no competing interests.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

I, Lucas Veiga Avila, corresponding author of the article: Sustainable recovery in small businesses: analysis of sustainable practices and the goals for sustainable development. The authors declare their clear awareness that they agree with the availability of the data used in



this article. This declaration of data availability is made to promote transparency and knowledge sharing, as well as to encourage the advancement of academic research.

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## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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