

Research article (Theoretical-empirical)

## Embroidering resistance: The development of a female social enterprise in a quilombola community in Ceará, Brazil

Ana Carla Eugenio da Silva<sup>a</sup>  , Diego de Queiroz Machado<sup>a</sup>  ,  
Augusto César de Aquino Cabral<sup>a</sup>  , and Sandra Maria dos Santos<sup>a</sup>  

<sup>a</sup>Universidade Federal do Ceará, Fortaleza, Brazil



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#### Corresponding author

Diego de Queiroz Machado  
[diegomachado@ufc.br](mailto:diegomachado@ufc.br)

### Abstract

**Study objective:** The purpose of this research is to analyze the organizational, cultural, and community factors that have influenced the development of the Coletivo Bordando Resistência in the quilombola community of Alto Alegre (Horizonte, Ceará), examining the context in which the social enterprise originated, the social actors involved, the sustainability strategies adopted, and how challenges are addressed. **Methodology/approach:** The research employs a qualitative, descriptive approach, using a single-case study design. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six members of the collective, and the data were analyzed using content analysis. **Main results:** The findings indicate that the collective has a significant impact on identity reinforcement, appreciation of quilombola culture, and women's income generation in vulnerable contexts. **Relevance/originality:** The study addresses a theoretical gap by exploring the intersection of social entrepreneurship, quilombola culture, and female autonomy, offering a situated and interdisciplinary perspective on practices of resistance and empowerment. **Theoretical/methodological contributions:** The study contributes to the field of social entrepreneurship by presenting an empirical case that integrates symbolic, cultural, and economic dimensions. Methodologically, it proposes analytical categories that may be applied in other community entrepreneurship contexts. **Social/managerial contributions:** The research underscores the importance of quilombola women's leadership in building solidarity networks, preserving collective memory, and fostering sustainable development. It also emphasizes the need for public policies and institutional recognition to strengthen such initiatives.

**Keywords:** Social Entrepreneurship. Female Entrepreneurship. Quilombola Community.

## Bordando resistências: Desenvolvimento de um empreendimento social feminino em uma comunidade quilombola do Ceará

### Resumo

**Objetivo do estudo:** Analisar os fatores organizacionais, culturais e comunitários que influenciaram o desenvolvimento do Coletivo Bordando Resistência na comunidade quilombola de Alto Alegre (Horizonte/CE), examinando o contexto de origem do empreendimento social, os atores sociais envolvidos, as estratégias de sustentação adotadas e as formas de enfrentamento de desafios. **Metodologia/abordagem:** Adotou-se uma abordagem qualitativa e descritiva, com estratégia metodológica baseada no estudo de caso. Foram realizadas entrevistas semiestruturadas com seis bordadeiras do coletivo, e os dados foram tratados por meio da técnica de Análise de Conteúdo. **Principais resultados:** Os achados indicam que o coletivo promove impactos significativos no fortalecimento identitário, na valorização da cultura quilombola e na geração de renda para mulheres em contexto de vulnerabilidade. **Relevância/originalidade:** A pesquisa explora uma lacuna teórica ao investigar a interseção entre empreendedorismo social, cultura quilombola e autonomia feminina, oferecendo uma perspectiva situada e interdisciplinar sobre práticas de resistência e de empoderamento. **Contribuições teóricas/metodológicas:** O estudo contribui para o campo do empreendedorismo social ao apresentar um caso empírico que articula dimensões simbólicas, culturais e econômicas. Metodologicamente, propõe categorias de análise aplicáveis a outros contextos de empreendedorismo comunitário. **Contribuições sociais/para a gestão:** O artigo evidencia a importância do protagonismo feminino quilombola na construção de redes de solidariedade, no resgate da memória coletiva e na promoção do desenvolvimento sustentável. Destaca, ainda, a necessidade de políticas públicas de apoio e de reconhecimento institucional para fortalecer tais iniciativas.

**Palavras-chave:** Empreendedorismo Social. Empreendedorismo Feminino. Comunidade Quilombola.

## INTRODUCTION

Women's social entrepreneurship involves women leading enterprises that purposefully blend economic and social goals (Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2016). Stahl et al. (2023) note that women's social entrepreneurship not only merges profit with impact but also builds nurturing, collective settings that challenge gender roles and solidify women's identities as entrepreneurs. These women seize opportunities that exceed market demands and fuel social change, including job creation, income growth, the empowerment of marginalized groups, and the advancement of local community dynamics (Torres & Avolio, 2024).

Women's social entrepreneurship is a developing research field characterized by the integration of economic goals with women-led social change in marginalized settings (Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2016; Stahl et al., 2023). This approach is studied as a path to income generation, collective identity building, and the formation of community structure. However, the literature lacks analysis of the organizational, cultural, and community dynamics shaping women-led social enterprises in traditional settings, such as quilombos.

Given this context, the overall objective of this study is to analyze the organizational, cultural, and community factors that influenced the development of the Coletivo Bordando Resistência in the Quilombo community of Alto Alegre (Horizonte, Ceará), examining the context in which the social enterprise originated, the social actors involved, the sustainability strategies adopted, and how challenges are addressed, all of which, together, sustain its trajectory as a women-led social enterprise focused on cultural appreciation and the promotion of financial autonomy.

The Bordando Resistência collective was chosen for its prominence as a women's social enterprise in a quilombola setting. Founded in 2017 through an initiative to empower women in Alto Alegre, the group began with discussion circles and evolved into a vibrant, expanding organization (Santos et al., 2022). Motivated by economic need and a drive for autonomy, the women transformed everyday craft into a thriving social enterprise, drawing support from both local and external collaborators focused on race and gender equality (International Association of Educating Cities, 2024).

Embroidery, already integrated into residents' lives, became more than a crafty hobby and developed into a tool for financial security and community empowerment. For Black, rural, and marginalized women, this creative skill is a reliable source of income, providing resources and opportunities essential to financial independence (Santos et al., 2022).

This research is grounded in theories of social entrepreneurship, in dialogue with the literature on women's empowerment and social capital. It adopts the dimensions proposed by Stevens et al. (2015) as an analytical framework. Thus, organizational and cultural factors that shaped the trajectory of the Bordando Resistência Collective were analyzed, structured around three axes: values, which reveal the balance between profit-oriented and social welfare-oriented logics; organizational identity, in its normative and utilitarian aspects; and attention to social and economic goals, which expresses the tension between community impact and financial sustainability. This framework allowed us to examine how symbolic, cultural, and economic elements interact in the experiences of quilombola embroiderers, highlighting both strategies of resistance and the challenges faced in consolidating the collective.

In the academic field, this research stands out for its interdisciplinary approach, engaging with studies on social entrepreneurship and Quilombola culture. Although these fields have received greater attention in recent years, there remains a scarcity of studies on the intersection of Quilombola culture, entrepreneurship, and women's autonomy. The literature has prioritized impact analyses or general descriptions of experiences

but lacks in-depth investigations of the internal and contextual elements underpinning the trajectories of collective initiatives led by women in territories of resistance (Kai & Queiroz, 2022; Lacerda & Silva, 2018; Stevens et al., 2015). In this sense, this article helps fill this gap by offering a situated perspective on how values, organizational identities, and community dynamics interact in the development of a female quilombola social enterprise.

From a social perspective, the research is justified by the urgent need to strengthen quilombola communities and their women, who have historically faced marginalization in economic, cultural, and political spheres. The Bordando Resistência collective promotes women's empowerment, the revival of ancestral cultural values, and social inclusion, contributing to raising awareness of the struggle for gender equality and recognition of quilombola identities (Lacerda & Silva, 2018; Ferreira et al., 2020).

Furthermore, research into these practices can reinforce the importance of community leadership in building networks of solidarity and sustainable development.

## WOMEN-LED SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

Social entrepreneurship is defined as the creation of businesses that use market-based strategies to generate social change (Torres & Avolio, 2024). These enterprises are commonly recognized as hybrid organizations, as they intentionally combine economic goals with social objectives. As Datta and Gailey (2012) point out, social enterprises operate simultaneously to achieve financial sustainability and promote social impact and are thus characterized by a dual-purpose logic. This hybrid nature allows such initiatives to act as agents of transformation, promoting inclusion, social justice, and local development without sacrificing the economic viability that sustains them in the long term.

When considering women's social entrepreneurship, it is possible to examine both the enabling factors and constraints, as well as the experiences that shape it. According to Yunis et al. (2018), the decision to pursue this path may be motivated by an intense need for personal fulfillment and autonomy, as well as by the desire to bring about social change for the benefit of women. Furthermore, the pursuit of self-realization in entrepreneurship can be seen as a means to achieve financial independence and recognition of women's status.

Stevens et al. (2015) identify three main elements that define the social and economic missions of social organizations: values, organizational identity, and focus on objectives. The values dimension analyzes the balance between self-centered, profit-oriented values and values oriented towards social well-being, which directly influence organizational decisions. Organizational identity can take two forms: normative, which reflects a commitment to altruistic ideals and the creation of social value, and utilitarian, which prioritizes economic efficiency and profit. Attention to objectives, on the other hand, emphasizes social goals over economic ones, highlighting the constant tension between social impact and financial viability. These dimensions are interconnected and reflect the central challenge faced by social enterprises: simultaneously balancing their social and economic purposes.

Recent research has highlighted the importance of better understanding women's specific experiences in social entrepreneurship. According to Magdalene (2024), it is essential to understand how values, support networks, and cultural contexts influence women's entrepreneurial initiatives and practices, given the decisive role these factors play in shaping and strengthening their projects.

In this context, initiatives such as cooperatives and networks of women entrepreneurs illustrate how social capital can be used to empower women, contributing to the building of more just and sustainable communities (Torres & Avolio, 2024; Yunis et al., 2018; Brogan & Dooley, 2023).



Women's social entrepreneurship faces a series of obstacles that hinder its consolidation and growth. Among these, restricted access to financing and the absence of supportive public policies stand out, factors that limit the capacity for expansion of these ventures (Torres & Avolio, 2024). Another recurring challenge is gender bias, which restricts the opportunities available to women and perpetuates institutional barriers (Yunis et al., 2018). These barriers are exacerbated in the context of developing countries, where patriarchal norms, economic instability, and a lack of government support compromise the viability of these initiatives.

Furthermore, the lack of psychological and institutional empowerment, coupled with financial difficulties, often leads women to opt for traditional jobs rather than dedicating themselves to their social projects. This process limits the expected impact and reduces the innovation potential of these ventures (Brieger et al., 2019).

These obstacles become even more evident when analyzed within the Quilombola context. Fonseca et al. (2022) highlight handicrafts as a form of cultural entrepreneurship, essential for the recovery of identity-based values and for strengthening the resilience of rural Black communities. Beyond its symbolic dimension, handicrafts also express a relationship between consumers and products, insofar as the items are interpreted as symbols of resistance, female empowerment, and cultural preservation. However, such communities face additional difficulties in consolidating their initiatives in the market, including limited access to resources and challenges in adding value to their products in a capitalist context.

### QUILOMBO: A SPACE OF RESISTANCE

The concept of the quilombo has been historically reinterpreted and redefined. Initially, during the colonial period, quilombos were communities formed by enslaved people who fled oppression and established autonomous territories where they could rebuild their lives and maintain their African cultural traditions. According to Trindade and Pinho (2022), these communities represented not only a space of resistance against slavery but also a form of political and social organization based on collectivity and self-sustainability.

However, the definition of a quilombo goes beyond refuge and escape; it involves ongoing struggles for recognition, identity, and territory that persist to this day. Under the 1988 Constitution, quilombos were recognized as remnant communities, granting them territorial rights, though the implementation of this recognition has been marked by challenges and state resistance. Beatriz Nascimento expands this conception by understanding the quilombo as a space of historical and contemporary resistance that is not limited to a fixed territory but also manifests in the social and cultural dynamics of Black populations in Brazil. This perspective breaks with the traditionalist view that reduced quilombos to marginal spaces, highlighting their central role in the construction of new forms of belonging and citizenship for people of African descent (Cunha, 2012; Smith et al., 2021)

Currently, quilombos are contested territories, where communities continue to face threats of expropriation and land-related violence, reinforcing the need for public policies that ensure land titling and the preservation of their ways of life (Silva & Souza, 2021). Beyond the territorial dimension, quilombos serve as spaces for the transmission of ancestral knowledge, cultural practices, and collective forms of organization, reaffirming their importance as historical and cultural heritage (Pereira & Magalhães, 2022). Thus, the quilombo struggle is a continuation of resistance to structural racism and social inequality, reaffirming the need to understand the quilombo as a dynamic category that articulates identity, culture, and territory.

Women's participation has been essential in advancing quilombo education, culture, and the preservation of ancestral knowledge, contributing to the strengthening of quilombo identity and the securing of community-focused public policies, while confronting gender barriers to ensure their presence and voice in decision-making (Rocha et al., 2018; Costa & Souza, 2023).

### METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

This research adopts a qualitative methodology. The choice of a qualitative approach is justified by the need to deeply understand the meanings, perceptions, and experiences that participants in the Coletivo Bordando Resistência attribute to their experience with women's social entrepreneurship. As Flick (2009) points out, this approach makes it possible to examine phenomena in their natural contexts, allowing for a sensitive approach to the complexity of the social and cultural processes involved, without the limitations of quantitative measurement.

Furthermore, the study is a single-case study focusing on the Bordando Resistência collective's specific experience within the quilombola community of Alto Alegre. According to Stake (2005) and Yin (2015), this strategy is particularly suitable when seeking an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon in its real context, considering its unique characteristics, complexities, and interrelationships with the environment in which it occurs.

Field research was conducted to collect primary data through interviews with the embroiderers of the Bordando Resistência collective. Initial contact was established with one of the collective's members to present the research and request support for carrying out the study. The response was positive, and the participants expressed their willingness to collaborate with the investigation.

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, the research utilized secondary sources in the public domain, such as news reports and institutional publications that document the history of the Bordando Resistência collective, available on websites such as the International Association of Educating Cities (2024), the Horizonte City Hall website (2024), and the Clic Horizonte portal (2024).

These sources were analyzed hastily to contextualize and corroborate the participants' narratives, thereby constituting a form of qualitative triangulation that strengthens the validity and interpretive coherence of the findings (Flick, 2009).

The study site was intentionally chosen: the Alto Alegre Quilombo, with a specific focus on the Bordando Resistência collective's context.

The Quilombo de Alto Alegre, located in the municipality of Horizonte in the Metropolitan Region of Fortaleza, Ceará, is a remnant quilombo community that has built its identity on resistance and the struggle for rights. Comprising approximately 375 families, the territory was officially recognized as a quilombo by the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA) and regularized in 2015, guaranteeing 498 hectares for the community. This period was marked by an intense process of community organization and political mobilization, culminating in the founding of the Association of Remnants of Quilombos of Alto Alegre and Adjacencies (ARQUA), which became an important instrument in the struggle for land titling and access to basic rights, such as health and education (Rocha et al., 2018; Costa & Souza, 2023).

The 15 members of the Bordando Resistência collective were invited to participate in the study, and, based on availability, six women embroiderers agreed to take part. Data collection took place in February 2025 through interviews conducted within the quilombo community itself. Participants were selected based on

their direct involvement with the collective, including founders and later members, enabling the capture of diverse perspectives on the initiative's creation, consolidation, and challenges.

As this is a qualitative study, the selection of participants was guided by criteria of relevance and analytical depth, without the intention of generalizing the results (Minayo & Costa, 2018). Recent studies indicate that theoretical saturation can be achieved with a few interviews when narratives are homogeneous and dense (Guest et al., 2020; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). This condition was observed in the present study, as the embroiderers' experiences showed significant convergence regarding the meanings attributed to collective work, female autonomy, and the strengthening of quilombola identity.

The research adhered to all ethical principles outlined in Resolution No. 510/2016 of the National Health Council, which regulates research in the Humanities and Social Sciences. All participants were informed about the study's objectives and signed the Informed Consent Form (ICF), authorizing the recording of interviews and the use of information exclusively for academic purposes. The anonymity of the respondents was ensured; they are identified in the text only by the letter "B" (for embroiderer) followed by a sequential number (as shown in Table 1), and the confidentiality of the recordings and transcripts was maintained.

**Table 1**

*Profile of the interviewees*

Participant	Age	Education	Main Occupation
B1	49	Bachelor's degree	Teacher
B2	21	Completed higher education	Artisan
B3	41	Completed primary education	Artisan
B4	63	Incomplete primary education	Artisan
B5	47	Postgraduate degree	Teacher
B6	46	Postgraduate degree	Teacher

Note: Elaborated by the authors (2025).

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, chosen for their flexibility in posing questions and for allowing the exploration of new issues that arose during the conversation without losing focus on the research's central objective.

The interview guide was developed based on the theoretical dimensions proposed by Stevens et al. (2015): values, organizational identity, and attention to social and economic goals, which guided both the construction of the questions and the analysis of the results. The instrument was structured around specific objectives and analytical dimensions, as presented in Table 2, while retaining flexibility to allow participants to introduce new themes and delve deeper into emerging experiences during the conversations.

This combination of core questions and dialogic openness is characteristic of semi-structured interviews, allowing the embroiderers' statements to reveal meanings, memories, and practices that go beyond the initial script (Flick, 2009; Minayo & Costa, 2018).

The interviews were transcribed in full by hand, taking into account pauses, intonations, and significant expressions in the speech, which allowed for greater familiarity with the empirical content and a deeper interpretive analysis (Minayo & Costa, 2018). Data analysis was also conducted manually, following the steps proposed by Bardin (2016): (1) pre-analysis, involving a cursory reading of the transcripts and organization of the material; (2) content exploration, through coding and categorization of the units of record; and (3) processing and interpretation, relating the findings to the theoretical dimensions of the study, values,

**Table 2**

*Interview Script*

Dimension	Questions
Organizational Identity	1. How did the project come about?
	2. What was the initial motivation: Was it an economic, cultural, or community-strengthening need?
	3. Who were the first people to participate, and why?
	4. What has changed in the community since the project started?
Attention to Social and Economic Goals	5. What do you do to sell the project's products?
	6. How is the project's money used?
	7. What difficulties do you face in keeping the project running?
	8. Does the project receive help from any organization or the government?
	9. Do you have any way of teaching other people in the community to participate in the project?
Values and Organizational Identity	10. Who has helped the project grow since the beginning?
	11. Does the project receive support from people outside the community? How?
	12. Have you partnered with other organizations or groups?
	13. What type of support (money, materials, knowledge) was most important for the project?
	14. How does the community view the project today?
	15. What would you like to improve in the project with more support?

Note: Elaborated by the authors (2025).

organizational identity, and attention to social and economic goals (Stevens et al., 2015). The choice of manual procedure, rather than the use of qualitative analysis software, is due to the small scale of the corpus and the interest in preserving the contextual and situated interpretation of the embroiderers' narratives.

To ensure data reliability and consistency, two complementary strategies were adopted. The first consisted of triangulating sources by comparing information from the interviews with that found in news reports and public institutional records about the Bordando Resistência Collective, available on the websites mentioned earlier. The second strategy involved interpretive validation with participants during the interview phase, in which the embroiderers had the opportunity to confirm, adjust, or supplement information about the collective's history and functioning. These practices contributed to increasing the reliability of the interpretations and strengthening the bond between the researcher and the participants, in accordance with the principles of qualitative research (Flick, 2009; Minayo & Costa, 2018).

The categories were defined based on the research objective, aligned with the interviewees' statements, and the dimensions mentioned earlier. Table 3 presents the defined categories and subcategories.

The limitations of this study include the small sample size and the absence of longitudinal follow-up, which constrain the analysis of intergenerational impacts. However, the study prioritizes interpretive depth, a central characteristic of qualitative research.

**Table 3***Categories and subcategories of analysis*

Category	Subcategory
Context of origin of the social enterprise	Relationship with previous projects
	Motivation for the creation of the enterprise
	Changes in the community before and after the project
Social actors involved	Participation of the embroiderers and founders
	Role of the former Secretary of Culture and other public managers
Sustainability strategies	Internal organization and resource allocation
	Visibility and dissemination strategies
	Strategic partnerships
Addressing challenges	Difficulties in valuing handcrafted work
	Financial sustainability and institutional support
	Access to materials and physical structure
	Issues of mobilization and recruitment of new participants

Note: Elaborated by the authors (2025).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Below are the results from the interviews, along with a discussion of these findings by the listed categories and subcategories.

The analysis of the results was structured around the theoretical dimensions proposed by Stevens et al. (2015): values, organizational identity, and attention to social and economic goals, which guided the interpretation of participants' statements and the construction of analytical categories. The four central categories identified: (1) the context of origin of the social enterprise, (2) social actors involved, (3) sustainability strategies, and (4) overcoming challenges, reflect the trajectory of the Coletivo Bordando Resistência from its formation to its consolidation as a quilombola women's social enterprise. This analytical framework allowed us to empirically link the findings to theoretical dimensions, highlighting how organizational, cultural, and community factors interact to strengthen collective identity, generate income, and promote women's empowerment within the Alto Alegre community.

### Context of origin of the social enterprise

In the category "Context of origin of the social enterprise," all interviewees linked the emergence of Bordando Resistência to the conclusion of the Libertando literacy project. As B1 explained, "With the end of that project, there were many women, older ladies, who were not ready to enter the job market (...) so the idea came up to teach these women to embroider so they could bring in some extra income for the family."

The continuity of the bond built in the previous project was also highlighted, as B2 recounts: "The former Secretary of Culture held a meeting for us to learn the basics (...) then someone suggested: how about we embroider the community's history? That is how it

started." This cultural focus was reinforced in B3's account, who recalls: "One of the oldest members of our group suggested telling our story. And that's how the name of our first exhibition came about: 'Because Cazuza resisted, we resist too.'" These accounts show that the collective initially emerged from economic need but soon incorporated a cultural and identity-based dimension, transforming embroidery into a tool of resistance and a means of community memory.

Initially, the group consisted of about 15 women, some of whom had already participated in the literacy project. At first, the plan was limited to a basic embroidery course. However, over the course of the meetings, the idea emerged to use embroidery to tell the story of the quilombola community. This new direction emerged from a spontaneous conversation among the participants, and the proposal was embraced by the group, leading to the creation of the first exhibition, "Because Cazuza Resisted, We Also Resist," which depicted the life story of the quilombola Negro Cazuza, a figure so important to the community's history. This exhibition was an important milestone for the Bordando Resistência collective and for the community.

Regarding the subcategory "Motivation for creating the enterprise," the embroiderers' statements indicate that the central objective was initially economic, providing a source of income for women not in the formal labor market. However, the project quickly took on a cultural and social dimension as well, strengthening community bonds and serving as a tool for preserving local history through embroidery (Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2016). Over time, the participants realized that the activity went beyond the financial aspect, becoming a space for strengthening identity and resistance, as well as for emotional support (Torres & Avolio, 2024).

Regarding the third subcategory: "Changes in the community before and after the project," the statements show that before the creation of Bordando Resistência, the quilombola community faced various challenges related to visibility, recognition of its history, and the inclusion of its women in the labor market. The community was rarely remembered and often received attention only on commemorative dates, such as Black Awareness Month. Furthermore, local history was transmitted orally, without material records to ensure its preservation and dissemination. As B5 explains in her statement, highlighting the importance of the project that won an award and took her to South Korea:

The recognition: our story was recognized through a single thread in South Korea. So, by embroidering our history, we gained significant recognition. The community itself didn't really recognize its own history, but through embroidery, they came to know the whole story, and it received widespread recognition beyond our community, even outside the country.

After the project was implemented, the community underwent significant transformations. The embroidery brought greater visibility to the quilombo territory, sparking public and external institutional interest. The exhibition "Because Cazuza Resisted, We Resist Too" documented the journey of the Black leader Cazuza and the community itself, transforming embroidery into an instrument of resistance, cultural preservation, and collective memory. The literature indicates that social enterprises led by women not only represent an economic strategy but also function as spaces for negotiating cultural recognition and strengthening community identity. Through artistic and cultural production, these initiatives contribute to the recovery and appreciation of previously marginalized collective memories (Torres & Avolio, 2024).

The group's growing recognition also led to structural improvements in the community. Some streets were paved, cultural spaces were created, and the project's visibility spurred others' interest in participating. Many of the women, who had initially dropped out of the project, began seeking opportunities for integration, realizing the initiative's positive impact.

### Social actors involved

In the category “Social actors involved,” the first subcategory, “Participation of embroiderers and founders,” shows that embroiderers play a central role in the project’s construction and continuity. From the start, the initiative was formed by a group of women who came together to learn embroidery and generate income. Many of them remained in the collective, facing challenges and adapting to changes over time. In addition to craft production, they took on responsibility for managing the project, seeking funding opportunities, participating in fairs and events, and promoting workshops to expand community participation. Some embroiderers point out that the group goes beyond manual labor, functioning as a space for support and emotional empowerment, where women share experiences and build bonds of solidarity, for example:

I think I’d say it was all of us together. We have the former secretary of culture, you know, who’s one of the coordinators, right? She’s our strong foundation, and all of us together, our own desire to be together, we feel the need to meet, to be together, to share everything we know, not just embroidery, you know, but our knowledge, because we don’t have a specific age range, from 20 to 40, no. In our group, the oldest is, I think, around 75, and the youngest is 5, you know, so it’s a mix of generations, and knowledge is passed on through our conversations, embroidering and talking and passing on knowledge to the younger ones, while also drawing on the younger ones’ experience as we’re already adults (B1).

Regarding the “role of the former secretary of culture and other public officials,” the former secretary of culture played a fundamental role in the project’s inception and is mentioned by all the embroiderers; she remains the project’s coordinator to this day and is also one of the initiative’s main supporters. It was she who, upon realizing the need to continue the Libertando literacy project, proposed forming a group of embroiderers. Her support was essential both in the initial coordination and in fostering appreciation for the community’s history and culture through embroidery. In addition, the participation of public officials at strategic moments enabled the group to access exhibition spaces and funding opportunities, including those under the Aldir Blanc Law and the Paulo Gustavo Law. Despite occasional support, the project does not receive ongoing government funding and operates independently.

Participant B5 reported on the institutional support she receives from the city government: “From the city government, it’s just sponsorships, for transportation, things like that, but it’s a project; it’s a totally independent group.” Institutional support, even if sporadic, plays an important role in enabling women-led social enterprises, whether through the provision of spaces, logistical support, or access to public funding programs (Torres & Avolio, 2024).

Although it does not have fixed institutional partnerships, Bordando Resistência receives support from various organizations and cultural collectives. One example is Santa Helena School, which made financial contributions at key moments, enabling the group to participate in events. Additionally, institutions such as Casa Bendita donate materials, such as thread and fabric, thereby reducing the group’s production costs. Other initiatives, such as Linhas do Mar, Mil Agulhas, and Gotas de Esperança for Brumadinho, have involved the collective in embroidery projects with national and international impact, increasing its visibility.

### Estratégias de sustentação

In the “Sustainability Strategies” category and the “Internal Organization and Resource Allocation” subcategory, the interviews indicate that, to ensure the project’s continuity, the group developed

internal organizational strategies to sustain the initiative. Initially, resources were divided equally among the embroiderers, but over time, the need for a more equitable model became apparent.

Currently, financial distribution is based on individual production: those who embroider receive a proportional share, ensuring a fair remuneration. In addition, a portion of product sales income is allocated to replenishing essential materials, such as fabrics and threads. This organizational structure strengthens the participants’ commitment, ensuring that the project continues to operate autonomously and sustainably: “[...] the girls are teachers, right, and when they’re working, the income is divided among five people who don’t have steady jobs” (B2). Women social entrepreneurs often face challenges in distributing resources within their businesses. Many opt for a collaborative model, in which equity and sustainability are prioritized, ensuring that earnings are divided fairly and encouraging active participation (Torres & Avolio, 2024).

In the subcategory “Visibility and Promotion Strategies,” B3 reports that, at the start of the project in 2017, product sales were exclusively online, especially during the pandemic, when sales were conducted online and items, such as backdrops and dolls, were shipped by mail. Over time, the group acquired its own physical space, the studio, where the pieces began to be displayed and sold in person. Currently, the project maintains both in-person sales through studio visits and online sales, ensuring greater reach and a more diverse set of sales channels.

According to respondent B6, the project’s products are marketed primarily through participation in fairs and events whenever the group receives invitations. In addition to attending events organized by Sesc, the group also seeks to exhibit and sell its products at the Artisan Market and the House of Artisans, both located in the Horizonte region. The sales strategy focuses on these opportunities, with an emphasis on fairs held in various venues, including beaches. However, certain limitations, such as renovations at specific sales locations, can temporarily disrupt this dynamic, requiring adjustments to product marketing.

Under the “Strategic Partnerships” category, partnerships with external institutions and groups have played an essential role in strengthening Bordando Resistência. Although it is an independent project, the group has established strategic collaborations with schools, art collectives, and cultural support institutions. Other partnerships, such as the one with Casa Bendita, enabled the receipt of material donations, reducing the project’s operational costs. Furthermore, involvement in cultural initiatives, such as Linhas do Mar and Mil Agulhas, expanded the group’s network of contacts and reinforced its presence in the activist embroidery scene. Participant B3 reports on some partnerships already established:

We had Linhas do Mar, where the entire Brazilian coast made an embroidered beach umbrella. And then, here in Ceará, there was Bordando de Resistência, and in Rio de Janeiro, another embroidery group, and we formed that partnership. There was also Gotas de Esperança for Brumadinho, which was around the time the dam burst. We made some embroidered drops with messages of hope. We also collaborated with other Brazilian groups. And Mil Agulhas, which was a Latin American project. We also partnered with various groups from other countries to carry out this project.

According to participant B6, although the project does not receive ongoing formal support, it receives indirect support through invitations to participate in events and exhibitions at different venues. The group is frequently invited to present its work at art shops, galleries, and large-scale events in Fortaleza. Among the most prominent venues is Estação das Artes, where Bordando Resistência maintains a constant presence, exhibiting its embroidery and increasing the project’s visibility. These invitations represent an important form of support, as they expand the initiative’s public reach and strengthen it.

## Overcoming Challenges

Within the category “Facing Challenges” and the subcategory “Difficulties in Valuing Handicraft Work,” one of the most frequently mentioned challenges is the lack of recognition of embroidery as an artistic and cultural practice. At the start of the project, many community members viewed embroidery merely as a hobby or a course with little future potential. Some women dropped out of the initiative because they believed there would be no financial return or recognition.

In addition, pricing embroidered products also faced resistance, as many people considered the prices too high, given the time and manual labor involved in production. In her remarks, B2 explains that “when we started, people would say things like, ‘I don’t want to go because I have things to do at home; these women have nothing to do, they just spend their time embroidering.’” In fact, artisanal work in quilombola communities faces challenges related to the valuation and recognition of the activity as a legitimate source of income. Educating consumers about the cultural and economic value of handicrafts is essential to overcoming this barrier (Fonseca et al., 2022).

In the subcategory “Financial Sustainability and Institutional Support,” it was noted that sustaining the project has always been a challenge, especially due to the lack of ongoing funding. Although the group has secured some resources through grants, such as those under the Aldir Blanc Law and the Paulo Gustavo Law, funding remains sporadic and does not guarantee the collective’s financial stability. The project operates independently, without direct support from the government or large organizations, which requires autonomous strategies for generating income. Embroidery sales are the primary source of funds, but demand fluctuates, affecting financial sustainability. Additionally, the division of earnings has undergone adjustments over time to ensure a fairer distribution among the embroiderers.

Regarding the “Access to materials and physical infrastructure” category, it is evident that another factor influencing the project’s trajectory was access to essential production supplies. At first, purchasing materials such as fabrics, embroidery hoops, and threads was a financial challenge for the embroiderers. Over time, the group began receiving donations from organizations like Casa Bendita, which helped reduce costs. However, the project’s physical infrastructure still poses an obstacle. The initial workshop was small and makeshift, making it difficult to conduct activities. Currently, the group uses a larger space provided by the city government, but it is located outside the community, which poses logistical challenges that limit some women’s participation. The collective’s aspiration is to secure its own space within the community, ensuring greater autonomy and accessibility for all participants.

Women’s social entrepreneurship is often anchored in community support networks, which ensure its continuity even in the face of economic and institutional challenges (Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2016). According to participant B5, the lack of a dedicated space has been a major challenge for the project. Initially, the group renovated a small house in the community through sponsorship, but the location proved inadequate for hosting visitors and students interested in the embroiderers’ work. As a temporary solution, the city government provided a larger building in a neighboring community, offering better facilities but making it difficult for local participants to access. Despite this limitation, the group remains committed to securing a permanent space within the community itself, a dream that is becoming increasingly real.

According to participant B6, the group’s main need is to secure its own studio within the community, a space that allows activities to be carried out in a more accessible and comfortable way for the participants. Currently, the location of the space provided makes it difficult to recruit new embroiderers and hold courses, as many people are unable to travel to the site. The search for sponsors and external supporters has been a strategy to make this goal feasible,

enabling the group to secure a permanent space in the community, facilitate access, expand activities, and ensure greater autonomy for the project’s continuity.

Participation in the project has also undergone changes over time. In the subcategory “Issues of mobilization and recruitment of new participants,” we see that at the outset, many dropouts occurred, mainly because some women did not believe the initiative would continue or did not see an immediate return. With Bordando Resistência’s recognition, demand for the group increased, and some former members expressed regret for having left the project in its early years. However, there are still difficulties in attracting new embroiderers on a permanent basis. Many people show interest, but they do not always commit to learning and production. The group seeks to overcome this challenge by promoting open workshops, embroidery circles, and educational activities to engage the community, especially children and young people, and to ensure the tradition’s continuity.

Today, those who were there from the very beginning but left now regret it. They asked how they could come back because they saw that our project was really moving forward and regretted having left. Because they thought they didn’t have the faith to move forward. And today they see that our project is truly beyond what they imagined (B5).

As embroiderer B3 explained, the project hosts embroidery circles open to the public, bringing together women and children to embroider and share experiences through group conversations. In addition to this practice, the group developed the “Embroidering Memories” initiative, through which children in the community learned to embroider by listening to local stories. After hearing the stories, they drew and transformed the narratives into embroidery, creating an embroidered book. This material began to be used as a pedagogical tool for storytelling in early childhood education, expanding the project’s cultural and educational impact.

## Embroidering Meanings: Discussion of the categories of analysis

Based on the results obtained, it is possible to discuss each category that underpins the factors influencing the development of the Bordando Resistência Collective. Initially, for the category “Context of origin of the social enterprise,” it was observed that the collective’s origin aligns with studies indicating how women-led social enterprises, especially in peripheral contexts, often emerge as direct responses to the absence or insufficiency of public policies aimed at productive inclusion (Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2016). Furthermore, the connection to prior practices and networks, such as the “Libertando” project, demonstrates the importance of contextual antecedents and values developed throughout the participants’ life trajectories, such as empathy, collective responsibility, and a desire for social transformation, which underpin the perceived viability and engagement in entrepreneurial initiatives with community purposes (Magdalene, 2024; Brieger et al., 2019).

Although initially motivated by economic necessity, the enterprise was quickly reframed by the participants as a space for cultural, affective, and psychological expression. As B3 reported, “It was at that moment that we realized embroidery wasn’t just lace; it was also our history being displayed.” This sentiment was reinforced by B6: “The most beautiful thing was the unity, each one helping the other, teaching those who didn’t know, and everyone learning together.” The embroiderers also noticed significant changes in their self-esteem and in the community’s recognition of them, as highlighted by B4: “After the exhibitions, we started to be more respected; people saw that our work had value.”

These accounts show that embroidery has adopted a new meaning as a practice that strengthens identity and gives visibility to collective memory, transcending its purely economic nature. This experience reinforces the transformative role of social enterprises as agents of symbolic empowerment and community-building; in line with the literature, it is evident how women in similar contexts

experience their entrepreneurial practices as ways to reaffirm cultural values, reconstruct identities, and produce collective meanings (Stahl et al., 2023; Torres & Avolio, 2024).

Regarding the category “Social actors involved,” it was observed that the leading role of quilombola women was central to the creation and sustainment of the Bordando Resistência Collective, from the production of pieces to the management and promotion of its activities. This leadership extends beyond craftwork, encompassing the creation of spaces for affection, welcome, and the exchange of intergenerational knowledge. This dynamic aligns with what Grimes, Gehman, and Cao (2018) term “identity work,” a process in which women entrepreneurs collectively construct and reaffirm their identities through socially meaningful practices. The literature shows that, in many contexts of exclusion, women assume community leadership roles, anchored in values such as solidarity, autonomy, and belonging (Torres & Avolio, 2024; Brieger et al., 2019).

In addition to the embroiderers' central role, the former secretary of culture stands out as a key facilitator. As B5 stated, “The former secretary of culture was very important, because she was the one who brought this idea of embroidery to us, organized the first meetings, and helped us gain more visibility.” This institutional mediation was also decisive for applying to calls for proposals, as B2 recalls: “If it weren't for the help of the Department of Culture, we wouldn't have been able to participate in the first calls for proposals, because we didn't know how it worked.”

Although the group defines itself as autonomous, the embroiderers acknowledge that coordination with public officials and partner institutions has been fundamental to their sustainability. As B6 highlighted, “The partnerships were fundamental, because on our own we wouldn't have been able to get materials or even a space to showcase our work.” These accounts reinforce the importance of institutional support networks and align with Brogan and Dooley's (2024) findings by highlighting how strategic partnerships can facilitate women's empowerment in social enterprises.

In the “Sustainability Strategies” category, the accounts highlight how the Coletivo Bordando Resistência structured its financial management in a flexible, supportive manner. According to B2, “At first, we divided all the money that came in equally. Later, we realized it was better for each of us to keep what we produced, but always set aside a portion for the group to buy materials.” This shift in internal logic, from an egalitarian to an equitable model, demonstrates the presence of emancipatory values that, according to Brieger et al. (2019), are fundamental to maintaining cohesion and justice in women-led enterprises.

In addition, the interviewees highlighted the importance of visibility strategies. As B3 recalled, “We started participating in fairs and exhibitions, and that helped a lot because people got to know our work.” This initiative was amplified using social media, since, as B6 stated, “Instagram was very important, because we started showing our embroidery, and people from outside came to buy and even invited us to exhibit.” These actions consolidated the group's visual identity and expanded the symbolic recognition of artisanal production as a form of political and cultural expression, in line with the analyses of Stahl et al. (2023).

Another relevant aspect was the establishment of strategic partnerships with institutions and initiatives that contributed significantly to the collective's sustainability, notably Santa Helena School, Casa Bendita, and the Linhas do Mar and Mil Agulhas projects. These alliances facilitated access to supplies, sales venues, and training, demonstrating that the enterprise's sustainability depends not only on self-management but also on networking. According to Brogan and Dooley (2024), women-led social enterprises in community contexts often expand their capacity for action through collaborative ties, which combine material resources, symbolic support, and engagement in public and institutional spaces.

Finally, the analysis of the “Overcoming Challenges” category highlighted that, since its inception, the collective has faced internal and external resistance to the legitimacy of embroidery as a productive activity. As B1 reported, “At first, there were people who said that embroidery didn't make money, that it was a waste of time.” This perception was reinforced by B4: “There was prejudice, yes; many people didn't believe in it. But after they saw our exhibitions, they began to respect us.”

The difficulties also involved economic sustainability, since, according to B5, “the biggest challenge is income, because there isn't always a market, there aren't always people buying, and we have to figure things out to keep the group going.” Even so, the embroiderers sought strategies for reinvention to keep the collective practice alive, as B6 highlighted: “We didn't give up; we kept coming up with new things, bringing in the children, holding workshops, so that embroidery would stay alive.”

These accounts illustrate the initial devaluation of women's artisanal practices in peripheral contexts, a phenomenon that, according to Kimbu and Ngoasong (2016), is associated with the invisibilization of women's knowledge in informal markets and the discontinuity of public policies focused on the care economy and culture. The achievement of recognition through exhibitions and awards demonstrates that embroidery has been reframed as a practice of resistance and identity affirmation, in line with the literature analyzing the role of women's social entrepreneurship in transforming stigma into cultural and political visibility.

However, the group still faces persistent challenges, including income instability and a lack of ongoing financial support. This situation undermines the group's capacity for planning and sustainability, reflecting the scenario described by Torres and Avolio (2024), in which women social entrepreneurs face structural obstacles to consolidating their efforts over the long term.

To address these challenges, the group invests in educational initiatives, such as the “Embroidering Memories” project, which involves children and adolescents from the community, ensuring generational continuity and expanding the political-pedagogical significance of embroidery. As B6 noted, “We didn't give up; we kept coming up with new ideas, bringing in the children, holding workshops, so that embroidery would stay alive.”

This perception is reinforced by B2: “When we teach the younger girls to embroider, it's as if the community's history were being passed down from generation to generation.” These accounts demonstrate that confronting challenges is also a form of resistance and constant reinvention of collective practice, ensuring the preservation of memory and the continuity of community engagement.

An integrated analysis of the findings shows that the development of the Bordando Resistência Collective results from the interdependence among organizational, cultural, and community factors, which interact as complementary dimensions of a single process of social empowerment. Organizational factors manifest in self-management practices, the sharing of responsibilities, and the pursuit of economic sustainability, pillars that underpin the initiative's continuity. Cultural factors emerge from the revival of embroidery as a language of identity and an instrument of resistance, reaffirming Quilombola values and women's sense of belonging to their community. Community factors, on the other hand, are expressed through solidarity networks, external partnerships, and the mobilization of collective support, thereby increasing the group's visibility and consolidating recognition of its social relevance, as summarized in Table 4.

This interconnection reveals that the enterprise's strengthening stems not only from economic factors but, above all, from the embroiderers' ability to transform cultural values into social capital, thereby articulating identity, cooperation, and collective purpose. The case of the Bordando Resistência Collective, therefore, demonstrates that female quilombola social entrepreneurship



operates as a hybrid practice in which economic, symbolic, and community activities intertwine, producing social innovation anchored in culture and solidarity.

**Table 4**

*Integration between analytical factors and theoretical dimensions of the Bordando Resistência Collective*

Factors	Empirical manifestations in the Bordando Resistência Collective	Corresponding theoretical dimensions (Stevens et al., 2015)
Organizational factors	Self-management practices; sharing of responsibilities; pursuit of financial sustainability; visibility and market expansion strategies.	Attention to social and economic goals: balance between financial viability and social impact.
Cultural factors	Rescue of embroidery as an expression of Quilombola identity; transmission of ancestral knowledge; symbolic appreciation of collective work; female empowerment through art.	Values: articulation between ethical, identity, and solidarity principles that guide collective action.
Community factors	Mobilization of local and external solidarity networks; support from public institutions; strengthening of intergenerational ties; community social engagement.	Organizational identity: collective construction of the mission and social purpose of the enterprise.

Note: Elaborated by the authors based on research data (2025) and the theoretical dimensions of Stevens et al. (2015).

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

With the overall objective of analyzing the organizational, cultural, and community factors that influenced the development of the Bordando Resistência Collective in the Quilombo community of Alto Alegre (Horizonte, Ceará), by examining the context in which the social enterprise originated, the social actors involved, the sustainability strategies adopted, and the ways in which challenges were addressed, this research highlighted the significant impact of this collective on the Alto Alegre quilombo community, as it not only generated income for the embroiderers but also brought visibility to the community, which generated tangible and structural benefits, in addition to promoting a way to bring the history and culture of the quilombo to various spaces.

The community's recognition of the project was gradual. At first, many people did not believe the initiative was viable, and some women gave up because they did not see an immediate return. However, as the group expanded and the work gained visibility, perceptions shifted. Today, there is greater interest within the community in participating in and learning embroidery, especially among children and young people. Additionally, external solidarity networks also play an important role, helping to publicize and fund the activities. Invitations to events, exhibitions, and fairs enable "Bordando Resistência" to reach new audiences and strengthen its impact.

Overall, it became evident how strongly the "Bordando Resistências" project exemplifies social entrepreneurship within a quilombola community. The analysis of this case allowed us to

understand how craft and cultural activity can serve as a model for generating income and autonomy, and to provide insights for improving public policies aimed at local development. Documenting the strategies and challenges of this collective can also inspire other quilombola communities and vulnerable groups to structure similar initiatives.

This study, therefore, contributes to the field of social entrepreneurship by presenting an empirical case that articulates the symbolic, cultural, and economic dimensions. Methodologically, categories of analysis applicable to other contexts of community entrepreneurship were identified. Furthermore, the article highlights the leading role of Quilombola women in building solidarity networks, recovering collective memory, and promoting sustainable development, while also emphasizing the need for supportive public policies and institutional recognition to strengthen these initiatives.

From a social perspective, the research highlights the leading role of Quilombola women, emphasizing how this action strengthens identities, expands solidarity networks, and generates alternative sources of income. The results reinforce the strategic role of institutional partnerships and public support policies, pointing to pathways for initiatives that support the solidarity economy, culture, and women's autonomy in territories of resistance.

It is recognized, however, that significant gaps remain. The research did not, for example, analyze the intergenerational impacts of entrepreneurial practices on young people in the community, nor did it explore the collective's long-term economic sustainability without continuous financial support. These aspects constitute research agendas that can inform new studies, broadening the debate on the transformative potential of women-led social enterprises and their relationships with public policies, support networks, and processes of cultural valorization in traditional communities.

Based on the results of this study, future research can expand our understanding of the impacts of women-led social enterprises in traditional communities, especially regarding long-term financial sustainability and mechanisms for institutional coordination. Furthermore, it would be relevant to explore the intergenerational effects of these initiatives, examining how traditional knowledge, such as embroidery, is transmitted and reinterpreted by children and youth within educational and cultural practices. Another promising avenue concerns the analysis of public policies aimed at strengthening women's social entrepreneurship in traditional communities, investigating the obstacles these initiatives face in accessing resources and obtaining institutional recognition. Finally, studies with an ethnographic and participatory focus would be fundamental for understanding, in a more sensitive and situated manner, the affective and symbolic dynamics that shape social enterprises in quilombola territories.

In theoretical terms, this study advances the debate on women's social entrepreneurship in quilombola contexts by articulating dimensions of cultural identity, self-management, and empowerment within a community-based perspective. The analysis of the Coletivo Bordando Resistência broadens understanding of the interactions among organizational, cultural, and community factors, proposing an integrated view of the formation of hybrid social enterprises in which symbolic value and social capital enable economic sustainability and social transformation.

From a practical and political standpoint, the research provides insights for formulating public policies and support programs for community-based social entrepreneurship, highlighting the importance of continuous institutional support and the valorization of traditional knowledge as drivers of social innovation.

## Conflict of interest statement

*The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.*



**Authors' statement of individual contributions**

Roles	Contributions			
	Silva A. C. E.	Machado D. Q.	Cabral A. C. A.	Santos S. M.
Conceptualization	■			
Methodology	■			
Software	■			
Validation		■	■	■
Formal analysis		■		
Investigation	■			
Resources	■			
Data Curation		■		
Writing - Original Draft	■			
Writing - Review & Editing		■	■	■
Visualization		■		
Supervision		■		
Project administration		■		
Funding acquisition			N.A.	

Note: Acc. CRediT (Contributor Roles Taxonomy): <https://credit.niso.org/>

**Open Science: Data availability**

The entire dataset supporting the results of this study was published in the article itself.

**Badge Description**



The entire dataset supporting the results of this study was published in the article itself.



Not applicable



Not applicable



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