

Innovating Markets, Empowering Communities: The Role of University-Based Solidarity Fairs

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Abstract

This study analyzes the social innovation potential of solidarity economy fairs organized at Unidavi University, in the Alto Vale do Itajaí region, in Brazil, as an alternative to traditional capitalist market structures. Grounded in principles of collaboration, self-management, and social equity, the initiative seeks to address persistent challenges faced by local solidarity enterprises, including limited visibility, restricted commercialization channels, and weak coordination among actors. Proposed by the GTEC | Unidavi Social Incubator, the fairs are conceived as a university-based platform that integrates market access with network-building, fostering cooperative relationships between family farmers, artisans, and other solidarity entrepreneurs. Adopting a descriptive-exploratory design with a mixed-methods approach, the research will be conducted throughout 2025, encompassing two editions of the fairs. Data collection includes participant observation and structured questionnaires administered to exhibitors. Qualitative data will be examined through content analysis, while quantitative findings will be organized into tables and graphs to assess impacts on sales, communication, and business visibility. Expected outcomes include increased income generation, strengthened collaborative networks, and enhanced financial sustainability for participants. Academically, the initiative promotes integration between teaching, research, and extension, encouraging responsible consumption and contributing to inclusive and sustainable regional development.

