Thematic Report: Fashion and creative economy

Ecomoda and Rio de Janeiro as a background for design initiatives in contemporary handicraft and sewing groups

Ecomoda e o Rio de Janeiro (RJ) como cenário para ações de design em grupos de artesanato e costura na contemporaneidade

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ABSTRACT

In the search for alternative and local productions of fashion articles with social engagement, this article proposes a reflection on the development of the urban space of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to understand it as a scenario for design initiatives in groups of artisans and seamstresses. The development of Rio de Janeiro's urban space and its peculiarities, such as the growth of favelas in more valued places like the central and southern region of the city, in addition to the integration difficulties of these territories and their residents, were of great relevance for the analysis. The valorization of the social production of these territories represents the solution for integration, favoring the development not only of the favelas, but also of the city as a whole. Local production, in addition to the characteristic of cultural valorization, can promote social and economic development, as well as assist in environmental preservation, which was demonstrated with the description of the case study, namely the Ecomoda project. The project features a socio-environmental pedagogical initiative in which there had been design interference in groups of artisans and seamstresses.

Keywords: Rio de Janeiro. Ecomoda. Design. Handicrafts. Sewing.

RESUMO

Na busca de produções alternativas e locais para artigos de moda com engajamento social, o presente artigo propõe uma reflexão sobre o desenvolvimento do espaço urbano do Rio de Janeiro (RJ), a fim de entendê-lo como cenário para ações de design em grupos de artesãos e costureiras. O desenvolvimento do espaço urbano carioca e suas peculiaridades, como o crescimento das favelas em locais mais valorizados, como as regiões central e sul da cidade, além das dificuldades de integração desses territórios e seus moradores, foram de grande relevância para a reflexão. A valorização da produção social desses territórios representa a solução para a integração, favorecendo o desenvolvimento não apenas das favelas, mas de toda a cidade. A produção local, além da característica de valorização cultural, é capaz de promover desenvolvimento social e econômico, bem como auxiliar na preservação ambiental, o que foi demonstrado com a descrição do estudo de caso Ecomoda. O projeto caracteriza uma ação pedagógica socioambiental em que houve interferência de design em grupos de artesãos e costureiras.

Palavras-chave: *Rio de Janeiro. Ecomoda. Design. Artesanato. Costura.*

INTRODUCTION

This article results from reflections of the PhD research of one of the authors. The research was guided by the following question: do socially responsible design initiatives, in partnership with groups of artisans and seamstresses, indicate ways towards a new model for the production of fashion goods? Based on this question, the research sought to understand how the role of designers in groups of seamstresses and artisans could contribute to the valorization of local production and dissociate it from mass production, which nowadays represents the predominant fashion production model in the sector.

The term *fashion* is open to many interpretations, and many of them have been presented by researchers in the field. To define it, we follow the precepts of Lipovetsky (2011), who identifies fashion as a modern phenomenon characterized by the diffusion and repetition of habits expressed by society. According to the author, fashion also refers to the act of dressing, directly related to change and to the new. In the conceptualization of the term, we emphasize the importance of the new and the change in the understanding of its dynamics.

The author of the PhD research and one of the authors of the present article, with considerable experience in the fashion retail market, have closely witnessed the great transformation that the sector underwent in the last years of the 20th century. Driven by profit, large domestic fashion retail companies began to concentrate their productions in the East, mainly in China. This production model, called *fast fashion*, seeks to accelerate capital turnover by reducing the cost of production and increasing profits. According to Contino (2019), fast fashion represents a new productive system created by changes in cultural, political, and economic practices in post-modernism. This quest for greater profits causes the devaluation of all components of production, including (especially) the labor force.

Conceptualizing fashion based on the valorization of change and the new helps us to understand how the fast fashion production model was formed, stimulated by the logic of capitalism.

Although fast fashion is currently the predominant production model in the fashion industry, the valorization of local production and the use of pre-industrial activities, such as handicraft, may point to more sustainable practices. Throughout the research, we realized that a possible more sustainable production path can be followed through the use and promotion of sewing and handicraft activities, but unfortunately this connection with local fashion retail companies has not been established yet.

Although the design activity is linked to industrial production, the connection as an artisanal production process has always existed. Handicraft practices[1] have supported design as a methodological teaching tool, for example (CRUZ; COUTO; PORTAS, 2021). The union between both practices also contributes as a form of

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1   The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines handicrafts as handmade products using tools or even mechanical means. For it to be considered an artisanal product, it is important that the artisan's manual interference is the main component of the production.

cultural valorization. Thus, the handicraft activity may represent an alternative path, dissociating itself from mass industrial models imposed by globalization as from the end of the 20th century.

In the case of the production of fashion goods, we also highlight the activity of domestic sewing. According to Caires and Morais (2018), "another important contribution is the recovery of the cultural identity of artisanal groups, whose knowledge and practices have been recognized and incorporated into this new way of thinking about and producing fashion" (free translation). According to the authors, fashion goods produced in workshops, cooperative businesses, and small workshops help in the development of traditional locations that did not participate in the dominant production process.

The exploration of the labor force present in the fashion sector motivated the researcher to seek alternative production paths through groups of local seamstresses and artisans and to carry out the research that resulted in this article. As a native of Rio de Janeiro, living and working in Rio de Janeiro (state of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) for decades, the researcher wondered why fashion retail companies rarely used the local workforce in their productions. There are thousands of seamstresses and artisans in the state who could have more opportunities if there were the interest of local companies and effective public policies to stimulate local production.

According to Cippola and Bartholo (2014), designers work in their local context, facilitating changes and dialoguing with people. A common characteristic of human beings is to establish bonds with the place where they were born and live as well as their subsequent professional action to improve those places.

Following the same precept, the anthropologist Gilberto Velho (1999) advocates the choice of a place known to the researcher, which he calls family culture. We observe the characters and dynamics of our territory on a daily basis. In big cities, the dynamics are intense and the characters are anonymous. The research of a family society supports social encounters between the researcher and well-known people and also provides a debate with other researchers, enriching the result.

From this perspective, Reis and Urani (2011) argue that the geographical map of the city is juxtaposed with the affective map of its inhabitants. Hence, the population is involved with the problems of the place they live. "By loving your city, your population appropriates it and begins to participate and demand transformations. For this reason, expanding individual maps — mental and affective — is also fundamental to reduce social inequalities in the urban context" (REIS; URANI, 2011, p. 35, free translation).

The objective of this article is to reflect on the development of urban space in Rio de Janeiro and how local peculiarities — such as the formation of favelas in urban centers — present themselves as a background for design initiatives in groups of artisans and seamstresses. As a complement, we also present the description of a case study. With this example, the local creative and productive potential becomes clear, which can be facilitated by design interference — although, unfortunately, this potential is still little explored.

The issue was qualitatively addressed, and the article sought to achieve its objective by a descriptive and exploratory research. The researcher's direct contact with the situation was paramount to understand and interpret the phenomenon.

A broader contextualization is the starting point of the study, based on bibliographic research conducted with analytical reading of books, articles, documents, and websites. In the case of the article, only part of this broader research was presented, regarding the development of urban space in Rio de Janeiro and the presentation of concepts relevant to the context.

In the research from which the article originated, four cases were surveyed in Rio de Janeiro, in which there was design interference with handicraft and sewing groups. As not all cases would fit this article, the authors decided to describe the one that was most relevant to the proposal. In addition to bibliographic research, semi-structured interviews were conducted for this case study and also a systematic analysis in social networks. This methodology stage will be further explained in the corresponding section.

The article was divided into three parts. The first presents, based on the interdisciplinarity between geography and design, important concepts for the design research that show territorial valorization. Following this path of territorial valorization, the second part describes the formation of urban space in Rio de Janeiro as a background for design initiatives in groups of artisans and seamstresses. Finally, the third part of the article includes a case study, called Ecomoda, which exemplified the generation of socio-environmental development in communities in Rio de Janeiro.

INTERDISCIPLINARITY BETWEEN DESIGN AND GEOGRAPHY AND TERRITORIAL VALORIZATION

According to Sommerman (2008), interdisciplinarity takes place when two or more disciplines establish links with each other, producing broader knowledge. In the suggested interdisciplinarity, there is no intention of creating a discipline, but rather developing a practice that relies on knowledge of both areas.

Due to its contemporary origin, compared with other fields of knowledge, design education in Brazil began in the 1960s. Design has developed and strengthened as an interdisciplinary area represented by a set of disciplines through dialogue and interaction.

In the present analysis, geography has strengthened the area of design by encouraging the understanding of urban spaces in Rio de Janeiro, where design initiatives were identified in groups that practice handicrafts and sewing. The analysis of urban spaces is connected to the actions of designers by the methodological practices of the design field.

In view of the interdisciplinarity between design and geography, some concepts were developed by researchers and have greatly contributed to design research. Design and territory, for example, according to Krucken (2017), consist in the valorization of products and processes by encouraging the use of local resources, practicing the "exercise of making a place." According to the author, some

characteristics of design and territory are: "Valuing products and processes located in the territory; promoting the political and aesthetic potential of the place; dealing with convergences and divergences: new business models, new paths for artisanal production" (KRUCKEN, 2017, p. 327, free translation).

Another concept that also demonstrates this interdisciplinarity is placemaking, defended by Manzini (2017) as a new direction from design to social innovation that places the designer as an agent who will assist in the social construction of places. According to the author, for a place to exist, it is essential that the individuals who inhabit it speak about and act on it, for example, in residents' associations. The meaning of a place emerges from local dialogues and discourses. In this sense, placemaking provides the search for well-being related to the construction and reconstruction of places from the point of view of their inhabitants.

The concept of creative cities, which was popularized by the precepts of the British city planner Charles Landry, also portrays this interdisciplinary condition between design and geography. It represents a new development perspective for cities and was of great importance in presenting the ideas in the present article.

Accordingly, Ferreira (2017) describes that the urban space primarily represents a place that brings together cultural manifestations of the inhabitants. Thus, he defends the retrieval of the city as a work, and not as a commodity. According to the author, "the city is meant to be fully experienced by all citizens, so it is necessary to articulate art, culture, communication, and political direction to carry out the true transformation of urban space" (FERREIRA, 2017, p. 101, free translation). Ribeiro (2005, p. 418, free translation) adds: "It is necessary to go further, considering the very social production of social reality, which includes 'being together' and also the entanglements allowed by the urban experience."

Therefore, the concept of creative cities is presented as strategic. Landry (2011) shows that the creative city encourages public participation, promoting an open source of co-creation and also communication and collaboration in the urban context, considering residents as protagonists and agents of change. Within this context, it is worth highlighting the history of places and their culture and, based on local potential and interests, to project their future.

The concept of creative cities originated in economically developed countries, when the displacement of industries from these locations to other countries changed the scenario, which created the need to transform it (LANDRY, 2011).

Culture may suggest one of the forms of urban regeneration, revealing creative industry as a catalyst for local transformation. Thus, the creative industry assumes this important role as an economic axis, enriching the creation of an urban identity (LANDRY, 2011).

According to Figueiredo (2015), creative economy, represented by activities such as art, fashion, design, cinema, music, and architecture, for example, is not a new field of activity. The novelty lies in the focus given to it in recent years.

For Reis and Urani (2011), the essence of the concept of creative cities is the need to recreate public space, areas where there is a connection between people

and spaces in local communities. In addition to the local community, the action of other agents, such as institutions and organizations, companies, governments, and civil society, is paramount. One of the faced problems is the alternation of governance, an issue that can be minimized with the involvement of civil society.

Figueiredo (2015) explains the relationship between creative economy and its characteristics of incentive to the production and consumption of cultural and entertainment activities, valuing local culture with creative cities, as it helps to promote alternative development for cities.

According to Reis and Urani (2011), three circumstances are fundamental to the conceptualization of creative cities: innovations, connections, and culture. The authors also highlight two threats to the development of creative cities: gentrification and socioeconomic polarization.

It should be noted that the concepts of creative economy and creative cities focus on valuing local production and culture organized in a network, a relevant characteristic in the current context of globalization.

The concepts of creative cities and creative economy are still under transformation and construction, adapting to the locations and their cultural, economic, political, and social characteristics. As aforementioned, the concept of creative cities began in economically developed countries.

In Europe, there is the example of the study coordinated by the Milan Polytechnic, the Emerging User Demands for Sustainable Solutions (EMUDE). The research supports actions that promote scenarios of creative places in several locations on the continent. The European territory underwent major changes with the vacancy of industries during the transition from an industrial period to a post-industrial period. The reuse of industrial ruins welcomed new experiences and interpretations that occurred with the change. By analyzing the results of the EMUDE study, we can observe the renewal and revitalization of the community, of social and cultural life (FRANQUEIRA, 2010).

Santos (2007) warns that most of the theories of social sciences were produced in countries of the Northern Hemisphere and that, when transported to countries of the South, these theories do not apply to the local reality, being misplaced.

To illustrate the analysis, we present the example of Medellín, a city in Colombia, a developing country that in the mid-20th century was a reference for commerce, leisure, and fashion. In the 1990s, as a consequence of violence, the city lost this position and became directly associated with drug trafficking, and came to be considered one of the most violent cities in the world. Nowadays, Medellín regained the position it had lost and offers opportunities for inclusion, a transformation achieved by culture, education, and transparency (MELGUIZO, 2011).

Melguizo (2011), who was Secretary of Culture and Social Development of the Colombian city, explains that the transformation was only possible due to changes in the way of governing the city and in politics. The government relied on the support and collaboration of civil society, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community organizations, private companies, and universities,

strengthening an independent civic movement. Focusing on culture and education, self-esteem was restored and citizenship was consolidated. The city was discredited after so many years of violence, but in recent years, after social transformations, Medellín has become a tourist hub again. Tourism assumed the role of vector for the development of the local economic sector. Melguizo (2011, p. 48, free translation) concludes:

> The words opportunities, inclusion, and equality are the core of our compass and the essence of everything we do in education, culture, social urbanism, job creation, etc. We are not working according to a model for transforming the image of the city. The ongoing transformation in Medellín is based on changing the object, not its image. Everything we do in Medellín, from a public perspective, must generate results in terms of coexistence and inclusion. These are our two biggest challenges.

Gentrification and socioeconomic polarization, which hinder the evolution towards creative cities, as highlighted by Reis and Urani (2011), are present in the public administration and society of Rio de Janeiro.

As our focus is to reflect on the development of urban space in Rio de Janeiro as a background for design initiatives in handicraft and sewing groups, following the development of creative economy and the creative city, we will complement the text with a local example.

It was in the city of Rio de Janeiro, more specifically in the Maré favela, that the Italian designer Chiara Del Gaudio (2014) conducted her PhD research. The researcher deemed that it would be appropriate for designers to take action in places with fragile, conflicting, and marginalized social contexts, due to the need for improvement and transformation. Designers could contribute participatory experiences by the design strategy to promote social innovation, but this situation had been little investigated (DEL GAUDIO, 2014).

Del Gaudio (2014) perceived the need and a desire for territorial inclusion between the favela and the city, and saw the designer as an agent that could promote this inclusion. The design strategy in participatory and collaborative experiences with local partners could assist in the process of social improvement. She explains: "The favelas seemed to me to be an adequate territory for developing a project aimed at improving the local social fabric: the rights of citizens were violated and their attitude of active citizenship was almost non-existent" (DEL GAUDIO, 2014, p. 79, free translation).

However, based on this excerpt, the challenges faced by the researcher to work in places where democracy is fragile or non-existent, such as Rio de Janeiro's favelas, are clear, "a territory where people have no right to express themselves, to fight for their own rights, where their affirmation is linked to threats to their own lives" (DEL GAUDIO, 2014, p. 250, free translation).

Our premises corroborate the ideas of Del Gaudio (2014), envisioning the potential for design to act in collaborative community groups favored by the peculiar geographical organization of the city of Rio de Janeiro.

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RIO DE JANEIRO AS A BACKGROUND FOR DESIGN INITIATIVES IN HANDICRAFT AND SEWING GROUPS

The term *favela* denotes a social category in the city of Rio de Janeiro, and its integration with the urban context is a fundamental factor for the development of the city, but this integration will only be possible by the valorization of local social productions.

The nature of the city is quite diverse, with forests, mangroves, massifs, coast-line, and rivers, and the spatial occupation took place in a very particular way. In most metropolises, neighborhoods and peripheral municipalities develop, such as those of Baixada Fluminense, for example. In Rio de Janeiro, the population in sit-uations of social vulnerability also inhabits the most valued neighborhoods. This is due to its peculiar geography, with the formation of favelas in the hills of the central and southern regions of the city.

The development of Rio de Janeiro's society and urban landscape demon-strates the relevance of favelas in the city's economic, urban, political, cultural, and social structure.

According to Barbosa and Silva (2013), the occupation of hills and mangroves, the least valued places, highlights a remarkable landscape in Rio de Janeiro, com-posing a typical contemporary dwelling called favela.

Initially, the city's official documents used the nomenclature "low-income agglomerations" — which, in 1982, was replaced by favela, a more popular name among its inhabitants. The term "favela" affirms an identity, although it often car-ries a derogatory and prejudiced stigma.

Cavallieri (2009) points out that the concept of favela became nationalized with the structuring of Rio's hills. Burgos (2009) adds that the polysemy of the term denotes the social category connected to the meaning of the idea of city. Different aspects of the term are highlighted by Silva et al. (2009, p. 96-97, free translation):

> [Considering the] sociopolitical profile: [...] the favela is a territory without guarantees of the exercise of social rights, a fact that has implied the low expectation of those same rights on the part of its residents [...].
>
> [Considering the] socioeconomic profile: [...] the favela is a territory where formal market investments are precarious, especially in real estate, finan-ce, and services [...].
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> [Considering the] socio-urban profile: [...] the favela means an urban dwelling that synthesizes the unequal conditions of Brazilian urbanization and, at the same time, the struggle of citizens for the legitimate right to inhabit the city [...].
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> [Considering the] sociocultural profile: [...] overcoming the stigmas of vio-lent and miserable territories, the favela presents itself with the richness of its plurality of consciousness of social subjects in terms of their cultural, symbolic, and human differences.

As a consequence of disorganized urban growth, favelas present major problems such as unsafe buildings constructed in places subject to landslides

and floods, lack of basic sanitation services, in addition to the dominance exercised by criminal groups in some places. Considered the antithesis of order, favelas have established themselves as components of the urban landscape (BARBOSA; SILVA, 2013).

The importance of the social representation of favelas was demonstrated in the work of some intellectuals as from the second half of the last century. Until that period, governments acted to exclude those places and their residents from society, taking actions such as building walls to contain growth and hide buildings, or even transferring residents to other regions. These attitudes were widely questioned, and society began to demand a change in position from the government.

The recognition and valorization of the cultural strength of favelas have been intensified in this century. The Favela Observatory (*Observatório de Favelas*), a public-interest civil society organization, was inaugurated in 2001 with the purpose of reflecting on the representations of the favela in a critical and broadened manner. The State and the population must realize that the favela is a fundamental territory that belongs to the city, the state, and the country. The stereotypical idea must be deconstructed, and a new image must be reconstructed based on the heterogeneities that exist between favelas, reflecting their contexts, diversity, histories, and culture. Historically, favelas are represented by their absence and, despite their differences, they are treated in a homogeneous manner.

Silva et al. (2009) also point out the importance of appropriating and using urban space in its entirety as a social right, reflecting the right to the city. Actions in favelas favor what the authorities call the fight against violence, thus favoring those who do not live in the favelas, but the main beneficiaries should be their residents, with the guarantee of their rights.

Favelas began to transform this segregated historical condition and to seek recognition as a place for living and producing identities. The socio-biodiversity of the favelas represents part of the solution to the problems faced by the city, and the solution will come from its recognition (DUARTE, 2009).

It is noteworthy that residents of the favelas, as a means of protecting themselves from imposed exclusion, developed their own forms of sociability. Specific rules are created aiming at solidarity, acceptance, resistance, and cultural preservation.

All territories and all residents must be considered when making decisions to build a more inclusive city that provides opportunities for everyone. Urban space is a place where differences meet, produced by different ways of life and experiences.

> And, contradictorily, favelas are expressions of the daily affirmation of living and inventing the city, as a shared human work.
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> However, far from representing chaotic, lawless, and uncontrolled territories that threaten the city — as stated in the most conservative speeches —, favelas constitute valuable experiences for rethinking and remaking the city as a whole. The favelas are, in fact, one of the most vital expressions of the daily experience of the poor, in a permanent process of redefining the city (BARBOSA; SILVA, 2013, p. 124, free translation).

We completed the analysis of the issue of the integration of favelas with urban space in Rio de Janeiro with the precepts of Councilwoman Marielle Franco set out in her master's dissertation, entitled *UPP – A redução da favela a três letras: uma análise da política de segurança pública do estado do Rio de Janeiro* [Pacifying Police Unit (UPP) — The reduction of favela to three letters: an analysis of the public security policy of the state of Rio de Janeiro]. Marielle Franco is an example of an intellectual who grew up in a favela and used her personal experience and efforts as a form of resistance, disseminating urgent and fundamental ideas for the desired resignification of the city's favelas. In 2018, her life and her term as city councilwoman were interrupted when she was assassinated.

According to her, the model of Pacifying Police Units (*Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora* – UPPs) was inspired by the city of Medellín; however, as aforementioned, the Colombian model prioritized investments in the social area, and not just in the security forces. The Rio de Janeiro's model was unable to follow the same path; the social actions called *UPP Social* (Social UPP) were implemented only two or three years after the installation of the police and did not remain for long (FRANCO, 2014).

The UPP program was implemented by the government of Rio de Janeiro in 2008 with the main purpose of acting in public security, seeking to dismantle organized crime and drug trafficking in the favelas. The action was a strategy coordinated by the municipal, state, and federal governments, also supported by NGOs and organized civil entities. UPPs were installed in areas with high levels of poverty, low infrastructure, low average level of education, and where armed and organized criminal groups existed.

The author's question concerning the real intention of the UPPs is based on the concept of a "commodity city," mentioned by Ferreira (2017), reinforced by the model of the UPPs, which intended to prepare the city for major events, responding to the wishes of private sector investors who interfered with local public administration. According to Franco (2014), the UPPs thus resumed concepts of the exclusion of the residents of favelas that were being overcome. The State relinquishes its duty as a citizen agent and favors the market, forgetting the legal city project.

Franco (2014) intended, with her research, to value the production power of favelas and their residents, who develop forms of resistance and regulation through culture, of alternative housing solutions, in addition to social encounters. Organized sectors that collaborate with relevant projects in social relations pointing to models of society that differ from the current one are paramount, as they are capable of providing conditions for major changes, reducing inequalities. Nevertheless, this approach began to be overlooked, and police actions were reinforced as a central issue.

> Nonetheless, regardless of the strong socio-spatial stigmatization, the favela is also marked by characteristics that place it in contradiction with the dominant ideology. In its core, a group of social movements and institutions from the third sector is formed, involving thousands of residents, whether around educational, cultural, political, sports, or other projects,

> or around political and demanding actions. This process creates contradictions and problems. Although marked by high levels of underemployment and informality in labor relations, a low degree of sovereignty over the city as a whole, low social investment, and other similar problems, the favela ends up presenting a life, actions, and perspectives that place it, at certain times or circumstances, as one of the protagonists in the development of the city itself (FRANCO, 2014, p. 63, free translation).

The author criticizes the fragility of the project, but highlights the "important contributions to new projects of human and social relations" (FRANCO, 2014, p. 47, free translation). According to her, the Social UPPs had a very short period of duration and were closed between the end of 2012 and the beginning of 2013, on the grounds of insecurity among outsourced workers and of not functioning properly.

Integrating favelas with the urban context of the city, as advocated by the Favela Observatory, would be a fundamental movement for transforming Rio de Janeiro into a creative city, but this connection is still far from being achieved. The initial idea of the UPP project, implemented in the city in 2008 with the creation of Social UPPs, represented an attempt and a hope, but unfortunately it did not promote the desired citizenship for this population.

We will complement the article with a description of the Ecomoda case. We chose this example because it demonstrates important arguments that were described in this text: it was originated in Social UPPs and represented the design initiative in Rio de Janeiro's favelas through activities, such as sewing and handicrafts, aimed at socio-environmental development.

ECOMODA: ALMIR FRANÇA[2]

In the last decades of the last century, the designer and pedagogue Almir França stood out as an important figure in the alternative fashion scene in Rio de Janeiro. The information described in this section was obtained from a semi-structured interview conducted with him in 2019. The initial idea of the research was to begin a face-to-face immersion in the Ecomoda project in 2020, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic the study was completed by exchanging messages via the WhatsApp application and systematic monitoring via the social network Instagram. We also carried out an in-depth study using reports researched on the internet.

One afternoon, França welcomed one of the authors of the article in his studio, located in a townhouse, a typical building in the region, in Praça da Bandeira, in the northern part of Rio de Janeiro. Inside, a dense decoration full of details: mannequins and racks with extremely elaborate garments, retro-style objects and furniture, handmade techniques, such as decoupage and mosaic mixing unusual materials and covering furniture, walls, the floor, and the ceiling. One cannot fail to

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2   It is worth emphasizing the scope of the term *ecomoda.* When searching it on the social network Instagram, we can find dozens of projects that include it. The Ecomoda project referred to in this article is always linked to Almir França.

become aware of a setting filled with information, symbology, and meaning such as an art installation. As described by França (2019a, free translation), "an unfinished *parangolé*". He also expressed his admiration for the references to Bispo do Rosário (Brazilian plastic artist) and the greater valorization, in his work, for the creative process than the final result.

França (2019) began the interview by explaining the first model of the Ecomoda project, which took place in 2010 in the Mangueira favela, enabled by the UPP program. The initial proposal of the UPPs project, as previously explained, was to address the structural problems of Rio de Janeiro's communities, and not just focus on the security aspect. Ecomoda was born from this program, encouraged by the Department of the Environment. The overall objective was to work on environmental education in communities, and the broader objective was to teach fashion classes by reusing garbage, often generated by the fashion industry itself. Hence, the project would generate work and income for that population, in addition to helping to reduce waste. The Mangueira project was funded by resources from the State Fund for Environmental Conservation and Urban Development (FRANÇA, 2019a).

The Ecomoda course in the Mangueira favela lasted one year and counted on trained teachers who were experts in the field. Almir França's idea was to replicate the model in other communities (FRANÇA, 2019a).

The project needed to overcome obstacles and adapt to various situations such as internal community disputes. Disagreements within the classroom involving students from rival families and factions were common (FRANÇA, 2019a).

Political issues, such as the change of state governor and internal disputes within the favela, brought the project to an end at that location, but some women continue with a sewing collective and are still in contact with Almir França (FRANÇA, 2019a).

After this first year in Mangueira, França began to be sought after by companies and institutions seeking solutions to the problem of textile waste. At the time, for example, the then Secretary of the Environment offered him a ton of uniforms of law enforcement officers working on the Brazilian Prohibition Law (Law No. 11,705) that needed to be discarded. From then on, Almir realized the dimension that the Ecomoda project was taking on and the impact it was causing both on the environment and the society. He used these data and numbers as a tool to seek new partners and incentives to multiply the project elsewhere.

After the Mangueira's model, Ecomoda was extended to other communities in other neighborhoods of the city, in Baixada Fluminense and other municipalities in the state of Rio de Janeiro. Teresópolis, a mountainous municipality in the metropolitan region; Santa Maria Madalena and Trajano de Morais, in the central region of the state; and São João da Barra, located in the northern region, were some municipalities where Ecomoda operated. França (2019a) points out that Ecomoda's main concern is the empowerment of the local population. The broader objective of the project continued to be to teach fashion through waste, but the incentives, approaches, developed products, and the benefiting audience varied according to the locations where it was implemented.

In Santa Maria Madalena and Trajano de Morais, for example, the State Department of the Environment and Sustainability and the State Environmental Institute (*Instituto Estadual do Ambiente* – Inea) promoted, through Ecomoda, an environmental education project aimed at young people aged 15 to 29 years. The intention was for young people to develop a local intervention action plan for monitoring and controlling the environment, aimed at implementing social and environmental public policies (FRANÇA, 2019a).

Ecomoda was also present in the Rocinha favela, in partnership with the waste pickers cooperative *De Olho no Lixo* (Be aware of the trash). Other institutions were also involved in this project, such as the State Department of the Environment and Sustainability, Inea, and Viva Rio SocioAmbiental, with resources from the Rio de Janeiro State Supermarket Association. Ecomoda used the material collected by waste pickers to educate and develop products. The reused materials were banners, CDs, fabrics, and even plastic bags. Ecomoda students developed crochet techniques using discarded plastic bags (FRANÇA, 2019a).

According to Grinberg (2018, free translation), "at the Rocinha unit, where students produced purses containing plastic bags from supermarkets, the concern is to prevent more waste from ending up in São Conrado's *língua negra* [pollution spot crossing the beach]". In Rocinha, the raw material was not only textile waste, but encompassed garbage more broadly, according to the material collected by the waste pickers cooperative. The crochet technique was used because this is a very common artisanal technique among residents of the favela, composed mostly of Northeastern Brazil immigrants or descendants of immigrants.

Another partnership between Ecomoda and the *De Olho no Lixo* project was in the Roquete Pinto community, in the Maré complex. Because of the proximity to Guanabara Bay, the raw material most used in this region were fishing nets that would be discarded. Ecomoda also operated in the Jacarezinho favela (FRANÇA, 2019a).

In the Salgueiro community, located in São Gonçalo, Almir França was approached by a group of women victims of domestic violence with the intention of developing a project involving sewing and handicrafts. They carried out a work with fish scales, an abundant raw material in the region, which houses fishing cooperatives (FRANÇA, 2019a).

Other centers of operation of Ecomoda were communities and municipalities in the Baixada Fluminense region such as Ana Clara, Bom Retiro, Imbariê, Magé, and Guapimirim. Ana Clara and Bom Retiro are located on the edge of Guanabara Bay, between oil refineries. The incentive for the project in these communities came from resources from environmental fines imposed on these companies. In the south of the state, Ecomoda operated in the municipalities of Angra dos Reis and Itaguaí.

At the studio, Almir França stores materials that he receives from donations; the place works as a laboratory where he and his team experiment with the materials. He explains how the process takes place: before receiving

a material donation, he requests a sample to learn about and assess its possibilities of use. After receiving the donation, it is cleaned and separated in the studio before use. França (2019a) defends the importance of circularity in the chain, demonstrating to his students that it is necessary to think broadly about the fashion chain.

It is worth highlighting the local particularities valued and respected in the development of the project. Despite the intention of multiplying the model of the first project at Mangueira favela, it was replicated in different ways, adapting to the characteristics, the population, the raw material, the partners, and the incentives that varied according to each territory, never losing focus of teaching fashion by valuing environmental practices.

To this end, it is essential, as França (2019a) highlights, to live and know the local reality. According to him, it is necessary to make a local diagnosis that shows, for example, whether there is industry, commerce, fashion, and waste. What is the origin of this waste? What are the local environmental impacts? And above all: what is the expectation of that community?

Almir França's coexistence with these communities was fundamental to the development of the projects. It was necessary to know their habits, values, ways of life, beliefs, kinship relations, and other dimensions of social life. According to França (2019a, free translation), "in each place we discover the potential for creative production. Hence, it is possible to create a network."

"The scraps, the gossips, the memories, and the stories of the women who built the world," as França (2019b) reveals in an Instagram post.

Ecomoda goes beyond the pedagogical area, intertwining and sewing together things, people, and entities encouraged by ecological ethics and the valorization of human diversity. The common thread is waste, whether it originated in the fashion market itself or not. This thread interweaves and sews together institutions, things, and people, stimulating an educational process and socio-environmental development. In this process, waste is capable of promoting the transformation of people.

According to França (2019a, free translation), it is very difficult to assess the impacts caused by the project: "The work is collective, but the struggle and the changes are individual." He points out that the impact is greater at the level of citizenship than financial. A woman becoming a seamstress is not transformative. The transformation becomes clear when this woman decides to return to school to become literate. That is citizenship.

França (2019a) emphasizes that the main cause of the environmental impacts caused by fashion is not due to industrial waste, but rather to post-consumption. Accelerated consumerism, characteristic of the fast fashion production and consumption model, causes the large disposal of ready-made garments by consumers, and this garbage generated by the disposal of clothes becomes the protagonist in socio-environmental pedagogical action and in local development.

CONCLUSION

The search for new alternatives for the production of fashion goods with social engagement, through local production, motivated the development of this article. Local production separated from mass production, in addition to cultural valorization, is capable of promoting social and economic development and also assisting in environment preservation.

To understand Rio de Janeiro's vocation to form groups of seamstresses and artisans who can promote this alternative production of fashion goods, we reflected on the development of urban space and concluded the text with the description of a case study.

The analysis of Rio de Janeiro's urban space and its peculiarities highlighted the importance of the social, cultural, and economic integration of favelas and their residents for the development of the city. Integration will only be possible by the involvement of residents and the valorization of local social productions. From this perspective, creative economy presents itself as a catalyst, favoring development.

Almir França's Ecomoda project exemplified a socio-environmental pedagogical design initiative involving groups with sewing and handicraft activities in Rio de Janeiro's communities. Despite the fact that the first model of the project lasted only one year, Ecomoda continued seeking new partnerships, new incentives, and new places of operation. Thanks to the activism of Almir França, the project continues to teach fashion and environmental awareness and promote citizenship in Rio de Janeiro's favelas and communities.

There is still a long way to go before alternative production models with social engagement, represented in this article by the Ecomoda project, are incorporated into the Brazilian fashion production process. Fashion retail companies seek these initiatives only to dispose of textile waste, and not as potential producers/suppliers. Therefore, this alternative production model still has very little representation in the sector.

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