

Creative district in wool: an experience report bringing together design and crafts

Distrito criativo em lã: relato de experiência aproximando design e artesanato

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposed reflections based on an experience report established in the collaboration between two extension projects: "Weaving Workshop and Design, Identity and Territory," both developed at the Universidade Federal de Santa Maria, with the aim of stimulating the enhancement of the identity of the Santa Maria territory, more specifically the Centro-Gare Creative District. Considering local manufacturing characteristics, the territory's iconographic potential and the market segments to be reached, new sheep's wool artifacts were codesigned to be marketed as identity souvenirs. Graphic promotional materials were also proposed, such as flyers and tags, to reinforce the territorial link between the products. The practical actions followed the stages of action research, while the article, qualitative in nature, is exploratory in terms of its objectives, seeking to promote a deeper understanding of the topic. Finally, by recognizing creativity as a strategic factor for the development of territories, we understand that design and handicrafts play an important role in consolidating and boosting Creative Districts. In this sense, we emphasize the importance of initiatives that promote interaction and co-creation environments between different players in the Creative Economy, especially designers and craftspeople.

Keywords: Design. Handicraft. Sheep wool. Territory. Creative economy.

RESUMO

O presente trabalho propõe reflexões com base no relato de experiência estabelecido na aproximação entre dois projetos de extensão, Ateliê de Tecelagem e Design, Identidade e Território, desenvolvidos na Universidade Federal de Santa Maria, com o objetivo de estimular a valorização identitária do território de Santa Maria (RS), mais especificamente do Distrito Criativo Centro-Gare. Levando-se em consideração as características locais de manufatura, o potencial iconográfico do território e os segmentos de mercado a serem atingidos, foram cocriados artefatos em lã ovina para serem comercializados como suvenires identitários. Também foram propostos materiais gráficos de divulgação, como cartazes e cartões, para reforçar a vinculação territorial dos produtos. As ações práticas seguiram as etapas da pesquisa-ação, enquanto o artigo, qualitativo em sua natureza, é exploratório em termos de objetivos, buscando promover uma compreensão mais profunda do tema. Por fim, ao reconhecer a criatividade como um fator estratégico para o desenvolvimento dos territórios, compreendemos que o design e o artesanato desempenham um papel de destaque na consolidação e dinamização dos distritos criativos. Nesse sentido, enfatiza-se a importância de iniciativas que promovam a interação e ambientes de cocriação entre diferentes atores da economia criativa, especialmente designers e artesãos.

Palavras-chave: Design. Artesanato. Lã ovina. Território. Economia criativa.

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INTRODUCTION

The city of Santa Maria, located in the central region of Rio Grande do Sul, has been developing significant initiatives regarding its cultural heritage, particularly with the formalization of the Centro-Gare Creative District in April 2022. Universidade Federal de Santa Maria (UFSM) has played a crucial role as a partner in this initiative, actively contributing to the promotion of cultural and creative activities in the area. In 2023, through a notice to encourage extension actions within the creative district, there was a collaboration between participants of the Design, Identity, and Territory projects from the Department of Industrial Design, and the Weaving Workshop developed at the Wool Laboratory (*Laboratório de Lã – LabLã*) from the Department of Animal Science. Both projects were provided with resources to design actions and artifacts aimed at promoting the identity and appreciation of the territory.

By reporting on this experience, this article aimed to stimulate reflections on the intersection between design and crafts and the potential of creativity as a strategic factor for development. Through actions that encouraged the active participation of those involved and promoted the appreciation of local heritage, artifacts were co-created to be sold as identity souvenirs of the Centro-Gare Creative District. Graphic identification and publicity materials, such as flyers and labels, were also developed to strengthen the territorial connection of the products.

In addition to producing artifacts, an effort was made to disseminate knowledge about sheep wool, valuing not only the material itself but also the historical, technical, and social aspects inherent to its production. The convergence of different areas of knowledge provided a dynamic exchange of knowledge and practices, establishing a connection between past and present, tradition and innovation. The joint action of the projects contributed to creatively stimulating the appreciation of the cultural identity of Santa Maria and the state's sheep farming industry. This collaboration also sought to encourage entrepreneurship and income generation linked to creative economy. The results highlight the positive impact of interdisciplinary integration on the development of creative and territorial initiatives.

When developing projects that promote the valorization of territorial identities, it is essential not only to compile identity references and incorporate them into products for commercialization, but also to establish a continuous dialogue with local actors. This ensures that the valorization is effective and aligned with the local reality (Krucken, 2009; Mello *et al.*, 2011; Mello; Froehlich, 2022). Dialogue was therefore prioritized as the method of interaction between actors, establishing continuous interaction and collaboration (Freire, 1987). In this context, where a participatory design approach is required, designers act as facilitators, actively involving other members in the process of creating and developing projects.

From a methodological point of view, the practical actions were primarily based on the principles of action research. As highlighted by Benbasat, Goldstein,

and Mead (1987), action research can be seen as a type of case study, differing in that the researcher transcends the role of mere observer to become an active participant. The process of social change not only becomes the focus of investigation but also represents the intentional purpose of the researcher (Thiollent, 1997). This article, characterized by its qualitative nature, adopted an exploratory approach with the aim of fostering a deeper understanding of the topic in question and reflecting on the actions carried out.

The next section of this article provides theoretical contextualization on themes underlying the research, such as territory, crafts, design, and the creative economy. This is followed by a report and reflections on the actions developed in partnership between the different areas and the LabLã artisans. Finally, the article presents final considerations and outlines directions for future work.

THEORETICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION

The notion of development based on industrialization, urbanization, and bureaucratization has been questioned in recent decades, primarily due to its evident difficulty in promoting significant advances in peripheral societies. In the process of globalization, economic logics that privilege homogenizing processes are consolidated (Canclini, 2003).

In pursuit of more suitable alternatives for each territorial scale, the cultural dimension has come to be recognized as an indicator of uniqueness, expanding the possibilities of paths to achieve development (Burity, 2007). This involves the affirmation of identity, distinctive elements, and unique characteristics that differentiate the territory within the context of globalization. This effort begins with the discovery, recognition, and appreciation of local assets, that is, the potentials, vocations, opportunities, comparative and competitive advantages of each territory (Juarez de Paula *apud* Lages; Braga; Morelli, 2004).

As pointed out by Adélia Borges (2003, p. 63), “the more globalization advances, bringing with it deterritorialization, the more [...] we feel the need to belong somewhere, to that specific corner of the world that defines us.” In this context, historical-cultural specificities and typicalities of territories have been mobilized by various actors as a means of differentiation and in pursuit of development (Mello, 2016; Froehlich; Mello, 2021). Territories can therefore be understood as arenas of contention in which actors use diverse material and cultural resources to imprint meanings and interpretations, stake positions, garner support, and produce and legitimize consensuses favorable to themselves (Brandão, 2007).

Identities involve a process of creating meaning and differentiation through mediations. Affirming identities requires the consolidation of boundaries through languages, postures, and discourses (Hall, 2006). As a mediating practice, design contributes to the valorization and dissemination of the distinctive symbolic aspects of territories, affirming and consolidating identities. Design occupies a

central role in the intersection of economy and culture, producing signs and symbols that are exchanged commercially and consumed for the value they acquire in society (Barrera, 2010).

Design, beyond its role in enhancing the apparent quality of the final product, possesses analytical and interpretative capabilities regarding symbolic and cultural aspects. It identifies and renders local qualities recognizable, thereby enabling the activation of territorial resources (Krucken, 2009). This enhances and underscores the role of designers, particularly in emerging economies, broadening their opportunities to promote products and services tied to the territory.

In this context, handicrafts also play a significant role as products resulting from the transformation of raw materials by artisans, predominantly using manual techniques. This practice traditionally spans generations and is closely tied to the territory where it is practiced, making crafts an integral part of the material culture of the social groups that produce them (Froehlich; Mello, 2021). Essentially, handicrafts can be considered a fundamental element of material culture when their production and consumption processes are deeply intertwined with the daily life of the social group, reflecting its customs, beliefs, and values at a particular historical moment.

In contemporary times, efforts to valorize handicrafts are driven by their role in the economic and social integration of a significant portion of the population, as well as by the symbolic values transmitted through artisanal production, which resonate increasingly with consumers (Mello, 2016). Thus, the continued relevance of craftsmanship today can be attributed to the symbolic aspects evoked by this practice. There are numerous studies and initiatives aimed at integrating crafts into territorial development strategies, using them to differentiate products based on local cultural specificities. This approach fosters closer collaboration between artisans and designers, promoting creative partnerships that aim to balance traditional knowledge with the demands of innovation and the contemporary market (Borges, 2012).

In this context, the work carried out for over 20 years by the Laboratory *O Imaginário* at Universidade Federal de Pernambuco stands out, renowned for its trajectory and efforts in valuing Brazilian artisans. Acknowledging the nuanced dynamics of the interaction between design and craftsmanship, the laboratory operates with an ethical framework rooted in respecting differences, fostering environments conducive to the exchange of ideas and knowledge (Andrade; Cavalcanti, 2020).

As emphasized by Leite (2005), in the context of bridging designers and artisans, efforts to promote the value of crafts often encounter a dilemma. On the one hand, these efforts support the survival of artisanal practices in a market saturated with industrial goods. On the other hand, they risk diminishing the symbolic value of craftsmanship for its producers. Therefore, Leite (2005, p. 41) argues that the perspective on craftsmanship should not “be limited solely to products but should

encompass processes that are thoughtfully integrated into their production context and reflect the ways of life of those who create them.”

Therefore, it is important to recognize that the market value of handicrafts holds significance for artisans from an economic standpoint. However, for the integration between design and craftsmanship to truly benefit artisans, it must be grounded in a horizontal and dialogical relationship. This means that academic or professional design knowledge should not dominate over the practical and experiential knowledge of the artisan. As Noronha, Farias, and Portela (2022) argue, in this context, design should be “with and for others,” responsive to community well-being aspirations, aiming to move beyond the functionalism and rationalism often associated with modern design.

Design and crafts, alongside other sectors, form part of creative economy, which, according to Reis (2008), emphasizes the production of uniqueness, the symbolic, and that which is intangible: creativity. The theory of the creative economy emerged in the mid-1970s, influenced by the deindustrialization observed in major North American cities like Los Angeles and New York. It was subsequently adopted in industrialized British countries during the 1990s to stimulate economic growth through the implementation of creative ideas (Santos; Rocha, 2020). In contemporary times, creativity has become an indispensable factor for economic vitality.

In today’s economy, creativity is widespread and continuous: we are constantly reviewing and enhancing every product, process, and conceivable activity, integrating them in new ways. Furthermore, technological and economic creativity is fostered by cultural creativity and interacts with it. This dialogue is evident in the emergence of new fields such as computer graphics, digital music, and animation (Florida, 2011, p. 5).

Creativity holds immense potential for socioeconomic transformation and inclusion. In the context of the global dynamics of the creative economy, so-called creative cities play a pivotal role. They foster networks of cooperation and talent exchange, transforming their environments and promoting a distinctive dynamic for this sector (Landry, 2003 *apud* Costa; Souza-Santos, 2011).

In this context, creative districts are emerging as a solution to revitalize urban areas that have suffered from the relocation of businesses or residents to other parts of the city (Douglass, 2016). Through organic and/or planned processes, these districts are transformed into attractive environments characterized by a concentration of businesses and creative activities (Testoni, 2018). In 2022, the city of Santa Maria implemented its first creative district, named Centro-Gare.

DESIGN AND CRAFTSMANSHIP IN WOOL IN THE CENTRO-GARE CREATIVE DISTRICT: EXPERIENCE REPORT AND REFLECTIONS

In early 2022, Santa Maria established the Centro-Gare Creative District, encompassing a section of the historic center and the city’s old Gare. The district aims to stimulate the area and enhance its cultural heritage by fostering

initiatives linked to creative economy. The UFSM has played a significant role in supporting this initiative, particularly through the promotion of extension projects that contribute to the development of creative economy and the promotion of local identity in the territory (Lisbôa Filho *et al.*, 2023). To this end, UFSM annually releases calls for extension actions aimed at promoting the Centro-Gare Creative District.

The collaboration between the extension projects Design, Identity, and Territory from the Industrial Design Department, and the Weaving Atelier linked to LabLã from the Department of Animal Science, occurred under one of these calls. The objective was to integrate expertise and collaborate on joint initiatives to craft artifacts from sheep wool that promote the appreciation of local identity within Santa Maria, specifically focusing on the Centro-Gare Creative District.

LabLã was established in August 1981 as part of the sheep genetic improvement program in Rio Grande do Sul, focusing on sheep wool analysis. However, with the advent of synthetic fibers in the international market and the subsequent decline in wool prices, sheep herds were increasingly replaced by breeds more suitable for meat production. Consequently, the analyses conducted by LabLã lost relevance over time. By the late 1990s, LabLã shifted its focus to promote and encourage the use of sheep wool in crafts. The laboratory acquired equipment for wool processing, including carding machines, spinning wheels, and looms. In partnership with the National Rural Learning Service, LabLã began organizing courses and training sessions aimed at teaching various handicraft techniques using raw wool to the Santa Maria community.

The acquisition of equipment enabled the space to be utilized by artisans already skilled and interested in weaving. Consequently, in 2022, the Weaving Workshop extension project was launched, aimed at offering Santa Maria's artisan community a space for collaboration, sharing experiences, and enhancing technical skills in manual wool techniques. In 2023, the studio expanded its activities to the territory of the Centro-Gare Creative District.

The Design, Identity, and Territory project, initiated in 2020, aims to enhance the recognition of territorial identities. It focuses on designing and creating artifacts and communications that engage UFSM Industrial Design students with stakeholders in the creative economy sector. Additionally, the project aims to facilitate the integration of products and established processes within the territory, fostering university outreach across various industrial design fields and promoting knowledge exchange among different domains of expertise.

Methodologically, the actions followed the phases of action research proposed by Thiollent (1997):

- Exploratory Phase: diagnosis to identify a problem;
- Main Phase: action planning, considering actions as alternatives to solve the problem;
- Action Phase: execution of actions, selecting a course of action;

- Evaluation Phase: evaluation of the consequences of the action.

The eight actions to value local products, proposed by Krucken (2009), are:

- Recognize: understanding the space where this product will be produced, its history, qualities, lifestyles of the communities, its tangible and intangible heritage, among others;
- Activate: integrating competencies, investing in the development of an integrated vision of all involved actors, conducting research, and advising on legal and financial matters;
- Communicate: informing about the traditional methods of making the product, its history, and origin;
- Protect: strengthening the territory's image by developing a clear and cohesive image through its products;
- Support: valuing craftsmanship and seeking ways and new technologies that assist without detracting from the identity of the product and the territory;
- Promote: raising awareness among producers and policymakers, strengthening public policies aimed at valorizing territorial identities;
- Develop products and services that respect and valorize the territory through knowledge of local potentials;
- Consolidate: creating networks of cooperation between local actors and agents of innovation within the territory.

For Krucken (2009), these eight essential actions outline how design can promote territories, although the author underscores that there is no singular approach. Given the specifics of the reported experience, the actions were implemented in the sequence depicted in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Methodology used.

Exploratory phase: recognize and activate

The valorization of local resources depends on capabilities and competencies that go far beyond the isolated boundaries of various areas of knowledge. It requires integrating competencies, investing in the development of a shared vision among actors from the business, institutional, and governmental sectors (Krucken, 2009, p. 100).

As previously mentioned, the collaboration between participants from the aforementioned projects was facilitated by a promotional notice issued by the UFSM Dean of Extension. This notice aimed to foster actions that would enhance the Centro-Gare Creative District, promoting closer integration of the academic community with the development and revitalization of the territory. Recognizing their shared objectives, both projects were selected, leading to a collaboration that pooled efforts and expertise to support initiatives aimed at maximizing positive impacts within the district.

The initial approach began with a visit by the industrial design team to LabLã, where artisans gather every Tuesday afternoon to create their pieces and exchange experiences. During this visit, the artisans demonstrated their techniques, including felting, needlework, and weaving on the loom. They showcased various artifacts they had previously crafted, emphasizing their connection to local identity, such as paintings, sculptures, and tapestries. In subsequent meetings, artisans instructed the students in felting techniques, explained different methods of dyeing wool, and shared the personal significance of craftsmanship to them. This experience provided the industrial design team with a comprehensive understanding of material possibilities, processes, and the implicit knowledge held by the artisans.

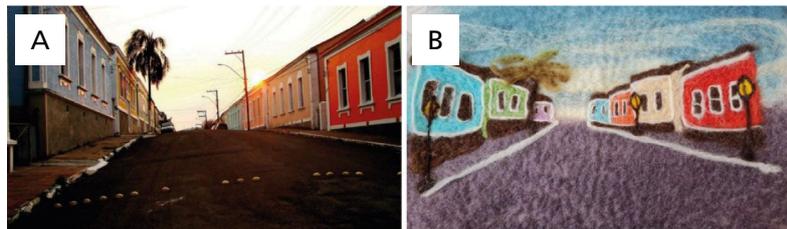
Following this, the industrial design team presented the Design, Identity, and Territory project. They proposed strategies to enhance the communication and promotion of products crafted by the artisans, and discussed plans for co-creating identity artifacts in wool to be marketed as souvenirs of the creative district. This led to a discussion about potential collaborative actions between design and crafts to enrich territories, fostering deeper relationships among all participants involved.

Following this initial approach, which aimed to integrate skills and cultivate a shared vision for the future, attention shifted to identifying the territory that would inspire the creation of products, the geographical area within the Centro-Gare Creative District in the city. To achieve this, a Creative Walk was organized. This event brought together artisans, academics, technicians, and teachers involved in the research. Its purpose was to inspire and document diverse perspectives on the buildings and surroundings that define the territory.

The Creative Walk was guided by an architect affiliated with the Weaving Workshop project, offering detailed observations of the architecture within the district and enriching understanding of the historical significance of these structures. Santa Maria's architectural ensemble is internationally acclaimed as the second-largest continuous Art Deco complex, dating back to the peak of the railway era. This period saw the construction of many impressive buildings along Avenida Rio Branco, connecting the city's commercial hub with the Santa Maria Railway Station.

Throughout the initiative, various characteristics, elements, formal codes, and compositions of the architecture in the district were identified. Iconic buildings such

as the fountain and bandstand at *Praça Saldanha Marinho*, *Casa de Cultura*, *Theatro 13 de Maio*, *Catedral Metropolitana Imaculada Conceição*, and the Vila Belga housing complex were analyzed and photographed. These visual records were subsequently translated onto wool by the artisans at *Ateliê da Tecelagem* (Figure 2). Each artisan brought their unique perspective on the city to their crafts, highlighting in their pieces the aspects of the city and architecture that most resonated with them and, in a way, hold a sentimental memory of their experience in the territory.



Source: (a) Santos (2008) and (b) Mirian Schalemborg (2023).

Figure 2. Landscape of Vila Belga reproduced in wet and needle felting with wool. (A) Photograph of Vila Belga and (B) its representation in wool.

Revisiting the history of our locality and focusing on its details provided moments for reflection and the sharing of meanings and experiences within the territory. This exercise not only enhanced the perception of the Centro-Gare Creative District but also enabled all participants to connect more deeply and meaningfully with the local context.

The awareness cultivated during the Creative Walk inspired artisanal products to manifest visually not only according to the design team's perspective but also based on the interpretations of all participants. Thus, the collaboration among project participants, the exchange of knowledge, and joint actions proved crucial in strengthening the group and fostering a horizontal relationship between designers and artisans.

Moreover, the initial meetings enabled the design team to grasp the actual needs of the artisans, encompassing their expectations, challenges, and the capabilities and constraints of the equipment available at LabLã. This understanding played a pivotal role in shaping future proposals for new artifacts, ensuring they were more accurately tailored to meet the specific requirements of the artisanal process.

Main phase: support and develop

Contact with educational and research institutions and access to funding programs are fundamental in planning innovative solutions. It is important to analyze the economic, technical, and environmental viability of products and production methods, aiming to identify existing technical support, necessary competencies, and the motivations of the producing community for the future (Krucken, 2009, p. 103-104).

Initially, we aimed to enhance the technical aspects of artifact production that were already being undertaken by the Weaving Workshop project. For instance, in the needle felting wool technique, artisans typically use biscuit shapes to define the desired design. This approach allows them to achieve the final thickness of the felted wool more quickly compared to the freeform process without a pre-established contour (Figure 3).



Source: Pufftique (2013).

Figure 3. Needle felting using a cookie cutter as a delimiter.

When creating the identity pieces they had been developing, the artisans lacked molds that referenced the architectural collection present in the creative district, resulting in longer production times for each item. To expedite this process, personalized molds were designed to evoke the houses in Vila Belga and architectural details that could be used in various applications (Figure 4). These shapes were constructed using layers of 3 mm MDF, which were laser-cut and then glued together.



Figure 4. Custom molds referring to the architecture of Vila Belga.

It is worth reflecting on the fact that the reported situation demonstrates that the designer's actions, from a social perspective and respectful of the artisan's work, will not always involve creating a product or making aesthetic decisions. Instead, they may include small interventions that offer tangible benefits to the work already being done by the artisan. In this case, by using an existing technique, new molds were proposed to improve the production process.

Experiments with new mold models also sparked new ideas through conversations between academics and artisans. They considered products with commercialization potential and design proposals that established connections between the city's iconography and the artifacts created.

In this context, the design team suggested that the artisans recreate classic wool games, which, in addition to providing entertainment and interaction, could represent

the identity aspects of the creative district, offering another souvenir option for visitors and local residents. Through a collaborative creative process, alternatives were designed that considered both the possibilities of wool crafting and the architecture observed during the Creative Walk. Tic-tac-toe generated the most interest among participants, as it is a simple game that appeals to different age groups and allows for various representations of elements from the territory (Figure 5).

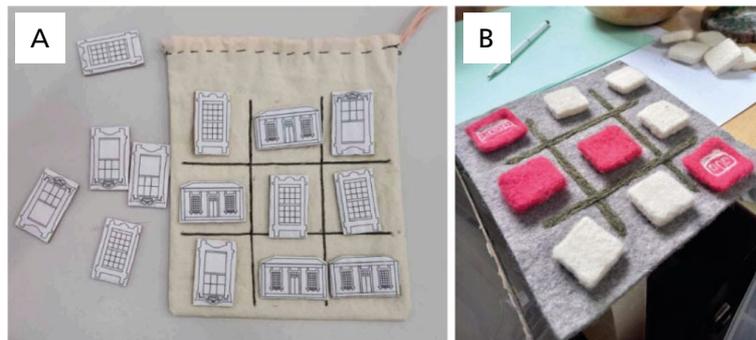


Figure 5. Alternatives for tic-tac-toe as a souvenir from Vila Belga.

To facilitate the creation of tic-tac-toe pieces using the felting technique, MDF molds of various sizes were developed in the shape of the windows found in the houses of Vila Belga (Figure 6). When working with these molds, the artisans explored new possibilities for material application, considering the unique characteristics each mold brought to the same technique. Some artisans used the molds to structure the felting, while others innovatively used them as stencils to stamp on an already felted structure. Inspired by the stencil design, the idea emerged to create a specific mold to reproduce the Santa Maria Railway locomotive, leading to new experiments and possibilities.

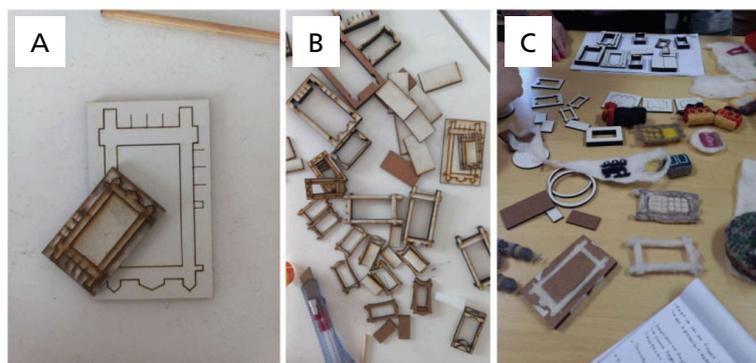


Figure 6. Craft molds representing the windows of Vila Belga.

In this context, the potential of window molds as mini looms was also realized. By slightly increasing the width of the edges, it was possible to create small holes at the base to pass the wool thread produced by the artisans. Tests were conducted to determine the window model that would best fit the loom, as well as to find the

ideal spacing and diameter of the holes in relation to the wool used in the technique. One of the main advantages of the mini loom was that it allowed artisans to express their creativity when crafting the interior of the window frame, resulting in unique and personalized artifacts. Thus, molding the windows in the form of a mini loom enabled the standardization of the artifact sizes while preserving the individuality of each artisan (Figure 7).

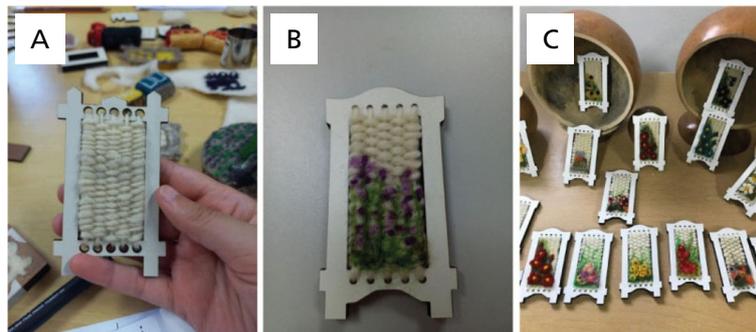


Figure 7. Mini looms crafted using molds of the windows of Vila Belga.

During the interactions, the importance of the active participation of all team members in creating the artifacts became clear. Through debates and experiments, new ideas emerged, and several possibilities were identified for exploration in future stages of the project. Collaboration among participants also led to the discovery of innovations and unexpected applications of materials. This demonstrated that a participatory process, without a pre-configured path set by the designer and based on relationships between peers rather than a predefined product idea, can offer alternatives with significant creative potential.

Action phase: communicate and protect

The local values and qualities present in the products need to be translated and communicated in accessible language to consumers living in different contexts. Therefore, investing in communication can reduce the opacity of the product in the eyes of consumers, making relationships more transparent (Krucken, 2009, p. 101).

Recognizing the importance of visual communication in supporting and promoting territorial artifacts, several graphic materials were developed with visual elements aimed at informing and strengthening the connection between wool artifacts produced by LabLã artisans and the Centro-Gare Creative District. According to Krucker (2009), it is possible to communicate the product's relationship with its origin territory through various tangible and intangible elements such as color, aroma, packaging, and verbal and visual information. Therefore, the chosen color palette uses tones inspired by the buildings of Vila Belga (Figure 8), creating a visual association with the district.



Source: adapted from Ramos (2023).

Figure 8. Vila Belga, Santa Maria (RS) and its color palette.

As for visual elements, illustrations representing some of the city's main architectural landmarks were chosen (Figure 9). This decision was grounded in the recognition that historic buildings integrated into the urban landscape have the power to evoke a sense of belonging among the population.



Figure 9. Illustrations of the tourist spots and architectural landmarks of Santa Maria (RS).

Regarding typography, two typographic families were utilized. The first is Playfair Display, a serif font designed by Claus Eggers Sørensen in 2011 for titles, evoking typographic elements found in some buildings along Avenida Rio Branco. The second is Barlow, a family of grotesque, sans-serif fonts with slight rounding, created by Jeremy Tribby in 2017. Both fonts are available on the Google Fonts platform.

With these elements, posters, cards, and labels were developed to accompany and promote the artisanal products and workshops facilitated by the projects. The promotional cards (Figure 10) were designed to be distributed with the artifacts, aiming to make the identity aspects they represent recognizable to consumers, thereby adding symbolic value to the artisanal work.

Furthermore, to enhance and emphasize the connection between artisanal artifacts and the territory, an identity souvenir stamp was created for participating artisans to use on products that bear a connection to some element of the Centro-Gare Creative District. Graphic materials were also designed for posting on social networks to promote LabLã and the Centro-Gare Creative District. Additionally, a



Figure 10. Examples of the developed promotional flyers.

label was designed to be attached to the back of the miniloom windows, providing textual information about the product's story (Figure 11).



Figure 11. The *Tecendo Santa Maria* label.

As highlighted by Krucken (2009), establishing a clear and cohesive image of the territory enhances its dissemination and dynamization, thereby boosting local tourism. This can attract visitors and consumers, ultimately contributing

to the strengthening of commercial and/or industrial activities within the territory. It is anticipated that the graphic materials developed will assist in solidifying the image of the Centro-Gare Creative District, thereby increasing its visibility and appeal.

Assessment phase: promote and consolidate

The development of networks is essential to competitively integrate the territory, as it can facilitate access to the product for consumers (*i.e.*, market access) and promote connectivity and mastery of new technologies. [...] For networks to succeed, it is necessary to develop mutually beneficial relationships. This way, actors will be motivated to work together, producing value and quality (not just commercializing physical goods) (Krucken, 2009, p. 106).

To promote the appreciation of wool crafts and encourage the incorporation of elements from the Centro-Gare Creative District into the city's artisanal creations, LabLã artisans led a workshop with the support of the industrial design team. The objective was to teach wool craft techniques while emphasizing the potential to establish a distinctive identity in crafts through the integration of local iconographic elements. This workshop was announced during an edition of *Brique da Vila Belga*, an event that gathers numerous exhibitors from Santa Maria's creative economy.

The initiative, which brought together women of different age groups, commenced with a presentation by the industrial design team on the significance of identity crafts, particularly within creative districts, illustrating possibilities with real successful cases. Following this, the participating artisans were introduced to the processes of scouring, washing, drying, carding, and spinning wool. Using the carded wool, they practiced wet felting to create fabric and applied needle felting for finishing. Additionally, the participants learned how to create mini-loom windows (Figure 12), enabling each person to take home their finished artifacts while learning various craft techniques.



Figure 12. Workshop in the creative district on wool.

During the workshop, copies of identity souvenir cards and stamps were distributed among the participants for them to use in promoting their products, thereby linking local crafts with the Centro-Gare Creative District.

The initiative aimed to showcase the potential of using sheep wool in crafts and foster artisanal production connected to cultural and sustainable aspects. The distributed graphic materials were designed to enhance the visibility of artisans within the cultural tourism landscape, encouraging the formation of cooperative networks.

During October 2023, another collaborative effort unfolded at the Santa Summit, an event hosted by the city of Santa Maria to bolster its innovation ecosystem. Spanning two days, the summit featured insights from over 50 speakers across diverse fields, addressing themes such as education, innovation, entrepreneurship, and sustainability. Alongside presentations, the event included a business fair, drawing exhibitors and engaging a rotating audience of over a thousand attendees (Rubin, 2023). Notably, artifacts linked to the Centro-Gare Creative District, crafted throughout 2023 at Weaving Workshop, were showcased to participants during the event (Figure 13).



Figure 13. Exhibition of products at the Santa Summit 2023.

In addition to the exposure and promotion highlighting the potential use of sheep's wool, it was evident that the products' innovative nature resonated strongly with the public's curiosity and interest. The process of turning sheep wool into city postcards imbues significance through its techniques, enhancing value and fostering an emotional bond between consumers and the artifacts. At the exhibition, visitors expressed interest in witnessing representations of other buildings within the area made from wool, which evoke nostalgic memories in some manner.

To promote the year-long initiatives of Weaving Workshop and the Design, Identity, and Territory projects, mini-loom windows were created for distribution to select event attendees. This artifact was selected because it embodies contributions from all participants involved in the project. Inspired by the architecture of Vila Belga and crafted from laser-cut MDF, these windows represent the collaborative effort of the Industrial Design course team. The looms adorned with wool threads and embroidered flowers inside the windows showcase the

artisanal craftsmanship of LabLã, reflecting the weaving techniques developed during the activities. The inclusion of flowers as decorative motifs symbolizes the growth observed in the Centro-Gare Creative District. Thus, the artifact serves as a metaphorical representation of open windows to opportunities, creativity, and imagination.

“The convergence of diverse bodies of knowledge entails the transformation or translation of existing knowledge and the merging of horizons — namely, the collaborative generation of knowledge” (Long; Ploeg, 2011, p. 44). The interdisciplinary collaboration facilitated by the integration of participants from the Weaving Workshop and Design, Identity, and Territory projects has led to the development of a more comprehensive and innovative initiative titled *“Tecendo Santa Maria: Experiência Criativa com o Uso da Lã Ovina.”* This project aims to reinforce the connections established throughout 2023, linking various social actors to actively contribute to the creative ecosystem of the Centro-Gare Creative District. It seeks to enhance the creative economy and promote innovative experiences through the utilization of wool across different cultural facets of the city.

Thus, the project aims to further advance the development and showcase of crafts that reflect the identity facets of local history and cultural heritage, aiming to imbue the work done with wool with added value, sentiment, and affection. Looking ahead, there are plans to extend this creative endeavor to other municipalities, replicating the successes achieved in Santa Maria across different regions.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article proposes reflections based on the outcomes of the collaboration between the Weaving Workshop and the Design, Identity, and Territory extension projects. It focuses on developing identity products aimed at enhancing the value of the Centro-Gare Creative District’s territory and local craftsmanship, exploring the iconographic potential of the region. Through the co-creation of woolen identity artifacts, the aim was to materialize diverse perspectives on the territory, creatively reproducing significant representations of architectural heritage within Santa Maria, specifically within the Centro-Gare Creative District.

The artisans’ convergence of expertise in traditional techniques and their profound material understanding, coupled with a respectful and innovative design approach, led to the development of distinctive and individualized artifacts that narrate stories and embody community identity. By translating the artisans’ concepts into reality, a variety of new possibilities emerged, fostering collaborative construction, enhancing existing techniques, overcoming constraints, and inspiring creativity. Efforts were taken to propose alternatives that streamline processes and set standards without overshadowing the artisans’ narratives and unique perspectives on the territory.

The design profession often emphasizes the designer's role as a problem solver or the individual responsible for conceptualizing and creating products, particularly in industrial and large-scale processes. While this definition is applicable in those contexts, experiences in integrating design and crafts as forms of social production suggest that a dialogical approach, where designers act as facilitators rather than sole creators, is more effective. This approach streamlines practices and knowledge, benefiting both designers and artisans by fostering mutual learning and exchange throughout the creative process. It is crucial to recognize and legitimize manual work as an intellectually enriching process that significantly enhances creativity.

It is believed that the initiatives reported have motivated artisans to explore new formal possibilities and engage in fairs and events connected to creative economy. These platforms provide opportunities for artisans to showcase and sell their crafted products. Thus, the collaboration between projects not only fostered creative appreciation for the cultural identity of Santa Maria and the state's sheep farming but also promoted entrepreneurship and income generation within the creative economy. Moreover, the artisanal pieces offer a distinctive appeal in a globalized market by encouraging consumers to connect with the territory and feel a sense of belonging, aligning with Canclini's (2006) concept of "cultural product," where symbolic values outweigh utilitarian and commercial considerations.

As emphasized by Krucken (2009), establishing networks of cooperation is crucial for promoting the significance of local products within the community and cultivating a collective consciousness tied to the territory's identity aspects. In this context, the value of forming a multidisciplinary team becomes evident, where designers serve as facilitators in the artisans' creative processes. The goal is to continue fostering collaboration between design and craftsmanship, aiming to strengthen cooperation networks among local stakeholders and innovation catalysts within the Centro-Gare Creative District.

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