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## **Cerne Project and Remexe Collection: actions in social design in search of social innovations of systemic character**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article presents the experience of a coordinated action between three institutions - FUMEC University, Lá da Favelinha Cultural Center and SEBRAE / MG - developed from a systemic perspective, with the intention of integrating the community of the villages of Aglomerado da Serra with the neighborhoods in its surroundings, where the FUMEC is located, stimulating a collaborative network of flows of clothing, accessories and shoes used for a process of creative reinvention through the logic of upcycling. This work was based on the concepts of Social Design and awareness of the need for sustainable integration with the natural environment, rethinking the limits of its ability to provide raw materials and absorb the impacts of our society's waste.

Keywords: Social Design. Systemic Design. Sustainability.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This article discusses the co-creative relationship between the university extension program **Cerne: Design, Architecture, Artisanhip and Art**, of the FUMEC University, the Lá da Favelinha association, composed by creative idealizer Kdu dos Anjos and by seamstresses of Aglomerado da Serra (urban periphery of Belo Horizonte), and SEBRAE-MG. This combination of forces has been made due to the proposition of the collection Remexe 2, produced from the action of upcycling in fashion, performed with donated clothes and accessories created with solid waste. The **Cerne** program operates in a logic of integrated extension projects, composing a network of action in function of objectives and beneficiaries in common. In this way, the diagnosis and the systemic vision of the problems to be faced in the beneficiary community/institution is leaded by the **Cerne Design and Systems Project**; the specific actions of Fashion Design products, accessories and furniture for events and retail points are carried out by the **Cerne Products and Services Project**; and the contents and educational materials in sustainability, which result in a printed booklet on the theme, are under the responsibility of the **Cerne Education for Sustainability Project**. The proposal of the Program is that the activities of all the projects that comprise its structure are complementary and joint, so that the results have a broader scope and with prospects of permanence for a longer time in the benefited community. Therefore, the projects that make up the program offer a diversity of thoughts and resources precisely to support an interdisciplinary action in the solutions and challenges of the work. In this logic, the projects do not act in isolation, but in an articulated way in function of common problem-situations, discussed and solved collectively.

Among the main goals of the program, we can highlight: to promote joint and systemic actions, based on the concept of sustainability and interdisciplinary logic, in support of the demands of the beneficiary community; to seek the articulation between partners and supporters that can integrate the mapped systemic network of projects, products and services; to investigate the role of the Brazilian university in the consolidation of Social Design as an area of academic and professional activity, capable of promoting social innovations through systemic thinking and the connection between products and services; to provide Design graduates of the University FUMEC with the experience of integrated practices with related areas, of elaboration of projects in teams and of works of interdisciplinary nature; as a consequence, to promote the formation of Design professionals engaged with the concept of sustainability through the socio-environmental path; to collaborate in response to the contemporary needs of environmental awareness and social return of companies, organizations and institutions; to awaken in partners and beneficiaries a greater awareness of their responsibility for the socio-environmental conditions of their environment; and, finally, to increase the diversity of social sectors that can partner up with the university in actions of a socio-environmental and sustainable character, increasing the dialogue between the university and society.

It is perceived the need to intensify and deepen the ties between areas related to Design in the construction of the project actions, systematizing the interdisciplinarity between the knowledge of all these fields. However, Design remains as the core of the actions that unite all these areas and the starting point to conceptualize and generate shareable social technologies. The **Cerne Program** constitutes itself as a project of social-environmental innovation and integration between creative methodologies and productive techniques, aiming at the social, environmental, cultural and economic benefit of the groups involved and the social counterpart of University, accomplished through the sharing of the knowledge produced in the academia with the community and, in a double way, by an incorporation of the practices and popular knowledge in the discussions and solutions thought in the academic field. Given the urgency of a broad reeducation for sustainable consumption, the challenge in the project described was to understand the expansion of the theoretical field of design towards the social.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This project is based on the systemic thinking applied to Social Design, that is, on a project logic that thinks a productive chain and service delivery, in which projects, products and actions are planned at the same time as the mapping of raw materials sources, input suppliers, users/consumers and

environmentally friendly disposal processes. The concept of Social Design used was developed by Pazmino (2007), who considers that social design implies working in areas where there is no performance of the designer, nor the interest of the industry with solutions that result in improved quality of life, income and social inclusion. Other concepts used are: service design; sustainable design; social and environmental design; social innovation; collaborative design; social business; social technology; participatory immersion; co-creation; systemic design and complexity. The theoretical reference came from the following authors: Carlo Vezzoli, Ezio Manzini, Luiz Lagares Izidio, Carla Cipolla, Bibiana Serpa, Rita Afonso, Paul Singer and Rafael Cardoso. Concepts linked to the SPSS/Sustainable Product Service System logic are fundamental for understanding the conceptual and methodological strategies shared by the group.

In the researches in specialized bibliographies of the area, especially in the annals of the 12th Brazilian Congress of Research and Development in Design, which happened in 2016, we found around 90 results of articles on Social Design, and we highlight the article **Design for social innovation between university and the broader society: the mutual learning process**, (Design para a inovação social entre a universidade e a sociedade em geral: um processo de aprendizagem mútua) by authors Carla Cipolla (UFRJ), Bibiana Serpa and Rita Afonso. This article reinforces the potential of universities to promote innovative actions because of their character as a territory of experimentation and reflection. In the article, the LASIN network/ Latin American Network of Social Innovation is cited as one of the ones dedicated to the topic, with the development of SISU/ Social Innovation Support Units, installed in Latin American universities with the purpose of intensifying the relationship between university and community towards social innovation through extension actions, research, development of methodologies and sharing of positive results in cases carried out by universities connected to the network. The article also cites the international network DESIS/ Design for Social Innovation Network as another important pole of production and dissemination of knowledge, methods and experiences in the connection between Social Design and Social Innovation through the actions of universities. It was also observed a strong presence of the university, mainly through extension programs, in the range of projects identified as typical initiatives in Social Design. It is important to note that a design aimed at minimizing the low quality of life indexes of the most deprived regions is a trend in the second decade of the 21st century, given the vastness of the field that opens up in terms of unexplained demands, so that the design goes beyond its classic and established ambit in relation to the assisted public. In the hypothesis that, for not starting from demands that form from the market and for not involving the most characteristic social actors of the design *modus operandi*, traditionally focused on market trends, and that Social Design become dependent on the thought of social institutions that extrapolate the market, it is to be expected that the university participates so intensely in this process. It is necessary to consider the need to understand that the participation in this so emergent tendency, which is the proposal of social design aimed at urban and rural communities that are formed with much lack of services and products.

Around themes such as social innovation, participatory immersion, co-creation and social technologies, it is observed that the methodologies for entrepreneurship in the field of social design seem to have passed, necessarily, by reflections and projects, if not initiated, almost always adopted and developed by institutions that rely on academic production.

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

Qualitative techniques of systematic bibliographic review and data collection were used, with an exploratory and descriptive character, about the performances in social design carried out by the universities. The qualitative analysis was based on immersion of ethnographic nature and of non-participant character; sensorial and photographic mapping; knowledge of the previous collection, Remex 1, and contemporary consumer philosophy; use of a fashionable sustainable production method, the upcycling.

In addition to the training of beneficiaries, other work fronts were offered, such as short workshops, to make available the social knowledge and technologies generated in the project to the general public; and

the development of concept products, resulting from innovation research and inventiveness of the project students themselves, to serve as a source of inspiration for all the **Cerne** Program's work fronts. In this way, volunteer and scholarship FUMEC University students working on the project had the opportunity to conduct guided research of references and techniques in several areas; to exercise the construction of creative methodologies for training beneficiaries; to work in workshops and training; to design projects and model-products with the technical and conceptual support of the team; to develop the creative autonomy associated with a perception of project reality, contextualizing their professional actions based on the real conditions of the beneficiaries; and to add to their training a humanistic and social view of the profession, enabling their future professional actions to be more committed to collective responsibilities and inclusive solutions.

The workshops related to the Remexe 2 collection started in may 2018, with themes such as “collection concept” and “storytelling technique”, and intensified from a visit with SEBRAE-MG to the association Lá da Favelinha in order to diagnose the problems characteristic of the community. The students photographed important details and interviewed the residents, constituting a critical perspective of that reality. Then, from the Fashion Design's own methodology, the group began the concept generation phase for the new collection of the project. To do so, the research resulting from this diagnostic visit was presented, as well as a brainstorm done in a meeting. Consequently, there were defined the products lines and the color chart. Through a donations campaign, enough clothing parts were received to work in the upcoming workshops with the process of upcycling of clothes, which were then separated following the color palette. The upcycling phase included the following training workshops for the seamstresses associated with Lá da Favelinha: customization, from the dismantling of the cloth pieces to the sewing of new clothes made from the derived components; silkscreen, from the preparation and making of silkscreen-printing matrices to the printing process itself; tie-dye, from the ink preparation, tying and dyeing of parts; hand made embroidery, from the basic stitches to the finishing of the sewing in writing and drawing format on the clothes; and production and finishing of clothing and accessories. At the end of the technical training phase for the seamstresses, the consultancy given by the stylists hired by SEBRAE-MG and the experimental modeling of the Remexe 2 concept pieces began. A photographic essay was also made for the editorial, with the concept pieces already finished. The community's own residents and association organizers modeled for the photoshoot and fashion show. The first fashion show of the Remexe 2 collection was simple, made together with the fashion design project nuclei own fashion shows, in the hall of FUMEC university, in December of 2018. However, it was very intimate, with dance performances and the visit of the families of the involved participants. In summary, the complete methodology took place from the insertion of the Lá da Favelinha brand in the fashion market through the creation of a contact network between the participants and professionals of this market, to the fashion show of the new collection.

#### 4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The results in products and collection for the fashion show and launching directed to the market were pieces of clothing, conceptualized from the scenes and images of the Aglomerado da Serra's community, seen by the design graduate students and lived by the beneficiaries in their daily routines. The lyrics of a rap song created by a community artist, helped to build the name of the collection - **É Curva**, which also represents the curves of the streets, alleys, nature and architecture of this so particular place. The clothes were designed in an upcycling process and also received individualized typographic prints done in silkscreen and hand made embroidery. The accessories were created by the beneficiaries and students of the university, in collective workshops and co-creative processes. All of these products were portrayed in a photographic essay presented in a printed graphic catalog (FIG 1 and 2) and in enlarged posters of each look.



[Figure 1] Frontpage of the printed graphic catalog created by Designer Marja Marques and team, directed by SEBRAE-MG's consultant Rodrigo Cesário, in partnership with students and teachers of FUMEC university.



[Figure 2] Back cover of the printed graphic catalog created by Designer Marja Marques and team, directed by SEBRAE-MG's consultant Rodrigo Cesário, in partnership with students and teachers of FUMEC university.

In addition to product results, the **Cerne** Program as a university extensionist activity has brought several results in knowledge gains, and experiences such as: systemic solutions for each project situation and communities, designed and executed from the specific methodologies proposed and interactions with partner projects; beneficiaries with creative autonomy and qualified to work professionally in a network of partners or to solve problems of their daily life; conceptual and educational products about the training methodology that will be made available to the community through print, exhibitions, internet and presentations organized in public spaces; integrated projects in Graphic Design, Product Design, Fashion Design, Interior Design and Architecture; formation of teams of teachers and university students trained for the extensionist and professional action of interdisciplinary, systemic and socio-environmental character; papers written by students and teachers for the dissemination of methodological process reflections and results; approximation between companies, institutions, society and the university.

## 5. IMPACTS ON SUSTAINABILITY

The **Cerne** Program resulted in positive social and environmental impacts of sustainability since it contributed to the construction of a new logic of fashion production, based on reuse of clothes and the transformation of donated clothing pieces with the objective of local commercialization, fomenting a new cycle of life for the products used and for the generation of income for the Lá da Favelinha association. The clothing pieces produced and made feasible by the program have boosted the original energy spent in its manufacture, resuming a new phase of reuse that extended its useful life. In addition, the process of generating products based on collective creations create a co-responsibility for the results obtained, both in terms of the quality of the clothing pieces and in relation to their commercialization. The social

character of collective responsible management of the processes and the results, fed the relationship between the participants, generating a common awareness among them of authorship, development, finalization and commercialization of the products, strengthening the relationship between social actors, a very important aspect for the success of a collaborative action. The resulting income, reverted to the financing of the association own project actions and its participants, was a fundamental factor for the initiative to have continuity in time, incorporating new ideas and new actions and guaranteeing the economic sustainability of the initiative and allowing other versions of the project with the same partners, or with new participants. So the **Cerne** Program used the concept developed by Manzini, which maintains that

moving towards sustainability is going against conservatism, in other words, preserving and seeking the regeneration of our environmental and social capital means breaking with the dominant tendencies in terms of lifestyle, production and consumption, opening up to new possibilities. (MANZINI, 2008 p.15)

In this sense, the **Cerne** Program at FUMEC University achieved the expected social and environmental objectives, fulfilling its social function in the community, reusing products in new production processes, avoiding premature discarding, collaborative co-creation and the involvement of partners, students and teachers in a continuous manner and committed to processes and results. In addition, the dissemination of the processes and results was recorded in a publication of the **Cerne Education for Sustainability** booklet, which steps up to the place of the academic reflection on the actions and disseminates the experiences lived by the team and partners of the Program, contributing to the generation of an awareness on various aspects of socio-environmental sustainability.

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