https://doi.org/10.22398/2525-2828.092787-103

Sewing hope: projects with sewing and craftsmanship in Rio de Janeiro as a viable path to produce fashion items

Costurando esperança: projetos com costura e artesanato no Rio de Janeiro como um possível caminho para a produção de artigos de moda

Barbara de Oliveira e Cruz[I], Rita Maria Couto[I], Roberta Portas Gonçalves Rodrigues[I]

ABSTRACT

This article intended to reflect on different alternatives to the traditional and mass production model that prevails in the system production of fashion articles. To this end, this involves analyzing and studying two social enterprises engaged in sewing and handicrafts located in Rio de Janeiro: Pipa Social and Rede Asta. Through this analysis, it was intended to understand whether this local and responsible production has a significant representation in the fashion sector and whether designers can undertake a socially responsible posture and represent as an agent capable of improving the problems of the fashion production sector. The dialogical opening of anthropology favored the reflection on the social meanings of design. The theoretical foundation was strengthened by anthropologist authors, serving as a guideline for the analysis of the cases presented.

Keywords: Fashion. Sewing. Craft. Pipa Social. Rede Asta.

RESUMO

O presente artigo busca refletir sobre diferentes alternativas para o modelo de produção tradicional e massificado que prevalece no sistema de produção de artigos de moda. Para isso, parte da análise e do estudo de dois negócios sociais com atividades de costura e artesanato localizados no Rio de Janeiro: a Pipa Social e a Rede Asta. Por meio dessa análise, pretendemos entender se essa produção local e responsável tem representatividade no setor da moda e ainda se o designer *é capaz de assumir uma postura socialmente responsável e representar um agente capaz de melhorar os problemas do setor de produção em moda. A abertura dialógica da antropologia favoreceu a reflexão sobre os sentidos sociais do* design *e a fundamentação teórica foi fortalecida por autores da antropologia, servindo de fio condutor para a análise dos casos apresentados.*

Palavras-chave: *Moda. Costura. Artesanato. Pipa Social. Rede Asta.*

[I]Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro – Rio de Janeiro (RJ), Brazil. E-mails: barbaradeoliveiraecruz@gmail.com; ricouto@puc-rio.br; robertaportas@puc-rio.br
Received on: 08/01/2024. **Accepted on:** 10/02/2024

INTRODUCTION

This article stemmed from the doctoral research conducted by one of the authors. Drawing on extensive experience in the fashion industry, the researcher explored alternatives to the prevailing traditional and mass-production model in the sector. With 25 years of experience in the national fashion market, particularly in Rio de Janeiro, she witnessed significant transformations in clothing production and consumption. These changes were further accelerated by the deterritorialization of production at the end of the last century. Familiar with the challenges within the industry, the researcher sought answers to critical questions, such as why most fashion retail brands in Rio de Janeiro do not engage in local production.

In seeking answers to these questions, the researcher chose to investigate social businesses[1] engaged in craft and sewing activities in Rio de Janeiro, thereby defining the research object. Given the broad scope of this topic, the study focused its analysis on four examples,[2] adopting a multiple-case study approach. However, as the analysis of all four examples could not be accommodated within this article, only two are presented. While all four cases are of similar relevance, the two selected were chosen for their more explicit connection to fashion retail brands.[3]

The research began with an extensive bibliographic survey structured around two main theoretical axes. The first axis focused on analyzing the fashion production sector to identify and understand its key challenges. The second axis explored concepts of social responsibility in design. The decision to examine social businesses involved in sewing and craft activities in Rio de Janeiro emerged from the preliminary theoretical framework of the study. While other, more conventional production models in the sector, such as local factions and clothing factories, could have been considered, the theoretical foundation revealed the existence of groups engaged in local sewing and craft activities. These groups, when collaborating with socially responsible designers, suggested an alternative, socially engaged approach to fashion article production.

The primary objective of this article was to analyze two examples of social businesses engaged in sewing and craft activities in Rio de Janeiro to determine whether this model suggests new production methods with social engagement in the creation of fashion articles.

Although there is a distinction between the definitions of artisans and seamstresses, the research revealed that in these examples of non-mass production, the differences are quite subtle. The work performed by these seamstresses differs significantly from that of sewing machine operators in clothing factories. Despite sharing the title of "seamstresses" and utilizing semi-industrial or even

1 Social enterprises are ventures that use market mechanisms with a focus on minimizing socioeconomic inequalities, combining economic viability with social impact. They can be structured as private companies or nonprofit institutions.

2 The other two businesses analyzed in the research were: *Ecomoda* and *Mulheres do Sul Global*.

3 During the research, a survey was conducted on businesses in the fashion sector with socio-environmental responsibility practices. It was observed that in the social enterprises where sewing and craftsmanship activities were practiced, there was a greater social engagement in production.

industrial equipment, their work closely resembles the manual craftsmanship of artisans. Therefore, the work of these seamstresses is defined as semi-artisanal.

The bibliographic survey conducted as the foundation for the research will not be presented in full in this article, as it would not fit within the scope. Although the survey is comprehensive, the originality of this proposal lies in the presentation and description of the examples. The theoretical framework was primarily informed by interviews conducted by the researcher with key actors representing the cases analyzed. Additionally, works exploring the relationship between anthropology and design, such as those by Ingold (2012; 2015; 2018) and Anastassakis (2010; 2012), served as theoretical guides for the article. These were complemented by important references from the field of design, including Berlim (2021), Contino (2019), and Cippola and Bartholo (2014).

This is applied research driven by the need to generate knowledge for the practical application of its results. It is a social research study in which the problem was addressed qualitatively, with the objectives achieved through descriptive and exploratory methods. The data presented were obtained through the researcher's exploration and interaction with the study's object.

The dialogic approach in anthropology has facilitated reflection on the social meanings of design. Contemporary anthropology is evident in the exploration of emerging worlds, aiming to understand and explain human actions in society through theoretical frameworks. These theories are developed from field research, where the researcher immerses themselves in local populations, gaining insight into their values, habits, ways of life, and other aspects of social life (Anastassakis, 2012).

As this is a case study, the research methodology presented in this article prioritized procedures such as field research. Through this approach, social businesses involved in sewing and crafts in Rio de Janeiro were investigated and analyzed. However, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the research process, requiring a shift to new methods of data collection without in-person fieldwork. Due to the social isolation imposed by the pandemic, certain procedures had to be adjusted. In-person interviews were replaced with online sessions via the Google Meet platform, and participant observations were substituted with systematic research on social media platforms. The limitations imposed by the pandemic affected the development and results of the research, particularly in terms of social interactions with artisans and seamstresses, which were limited.

The article is structured in three parts. The first part provides a brief overview of the issues associated with the mass production model of fashion articles. The second part presents an analysis of two social businesses engaged in sewing and craft activities. The article concludes with considerations and reflections on the cases studied.

PRODUCTION OF FASHION ITEMS: ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES

The hegemonic model of fashion production is an oppressive system, characterized by the predominance of outsourcing practices aimed at securing cheap labor while concealing irresponsible practices, such as poor working conditions and

environmental harm. This informality, embodied by outsourcing, has long been a feature of the sector, which benefits from an informal network of service providers to reduce costs, responsibilities, and risks. The production chain remains labor-intensive, despite advancements in mechanization and technology.

Since the end of the last century, the world has experienced significant transformations, particularly in the methods of producing and consuming goods, driven by technological advances. Globalization and late capitalism, as described by some authors, have had widespread consequences across various domains. In the cultural sphere, there has been a process of massification, with culture being repositioned as a commodity, prioritizing its financial value over its symbolic meaning. In the social sphere, there has been a deterioration of labor conditions and a rise in social inequalities. Jameson (1997) referred to this period as "postmodernism," emphasizing that it marks a systemic shift in capitalism.

On this issue, Giddens (1990, p. 6, our translation) emphasizes: "As different areas of the globe become interconnected, waves of social transformation reach nearly every part of the Earth." The author highlights an identity crisis caused by globalization, which leads to a departure from the classical sociological notion of society as a bounded system. This crisis results from global processes that extend beyond national borders, linking communities and creating new combinations of space and time. Practices such as fashion production and consumption are shaped by broader social structures, influenced by a globalized market driven by those who control the forms and processes of production to accumulate capital.

This oppressive model of fashion production reflects the capitalist system in which society operates, a system that prioritizes profit and economic growth. Many authors argue that fashion is a product of capitalism. In this context, this production model illustrates the stagnation and rigidity of social mobility, often leading to a pessimistic outlook. However, alternative models of fashion production exist, ones that are not tied to the current system.

In the fashion sector, these aspects are clearly demonstrated by the production model known as fast fashion. Fast fashion introduced a new production model that reflected the cultural, political, economic, and social changes of the time. The goal of this model is to accelerate capital turnover by boosting consumption, which leads to lower sales prices and higher profits. This is achieved through the devaluation of production elements, including the exploitation of workers (Contino, 2019).

The concept of fashion is generally associated with novelty and linked to consumption. However, do production and consumption practices necessarily have to be irresponsible? Are there ways to produce and consume in a more conscious and sustainable manner?

The goal was to explore whether it is possible to find an alternative approach to producing fashion articles that is not tied to the prevailing fast fashion model. Additionally, what role could the fashion designer play in this process? Could they serve as a social facilitator, acting as an agent capable of addressing and improving the issues within the sector?

We found that answers to these questions could be uncovered by analyzing social businesses engaged in craft and sewing activities in Rio de Janeiro, with the designer positioned as a facilitating agent in this context.

A new (desired) model of fashion production with social engagement aligns with the principles of the slow fashion movement. According to Berlim (2021), this movement is grounded in the principles of sustainable development and emerges as an alternative to conventional production and consumption practices, offering an ideological shift that breaks away from traditional market structures.

> However, more than a market strategy, the movement presents itself as a set of ideas that aligns with all the reflections on global risks and the anxiety of postmodernity that emerged in the 20th century (Berlim, 2021, p. 133).

Slow fashion proposes solutions that address the human aspects of fashion, including creativity, local production, sharing, environmental and social activism, and the ethical redistribution of financial capital. It revives artisanal techniques while respecting local culture. Products created through this local, artisanal, or semi-artisanal production model, using sewing machines and other equipment, typically incur higher costs and, consequently, higher prices compared to those produced through mass production (Berlim, 2021).

> Thus, the movement attributes to craftsmanship the form of a resistance activity against the hegemonic modes of production, as craftsmanship, in addition to confronting the technologies present in industry, allows for closer control over the conditions of production (Berlim, 2021, p. 145).

The appreciation of local production and culture, articulated through networks, is a key aspect in the current context of globalization, where the creative economy serves as a catalyst for local transformation. Social businesses, such as those investigated in this article, are particularly relevant in this scenario, as they generate a positive impact in various areas, including the economy, society, and citizenship.

Guided by the principle of social responsibility, the approach taken in this research and article demonstrates that the production of fashion articles can be collaborative, responsible, ethical, and, above all, transformative.

A new, suggested (or desired) model for fashion production becomes more apparent when there is a connection between designers (classified here as "socially responsible") and groups of seamstresses and artisans. In such cases, participatory methodologies from the field of design are applied, fostering connections among individuals and promoting collaboration, often through pre-industrial production models. As Anastassakis (2010, p. 39) states, "deepening interdisciplinary dialogue and reflection on what we do and how we do it is not only productive but fundamental." The relationship between people and objects emerges as a key aspect of the interdisciplinarity between anthropology and design, which serves as the central framework of this article.

Anthropology has enriched the field of design by broadening the discussion on its social role and the social responsibility of designers. This dialogue has shaped the teaching and practice of design in Brazil over recent decades and served as the impetus for the researcher to explore this topic in search of answers to her questions and dissatisfaction with the fashion sector.

Cippola and Bartholo (2014), drawing on the principles of Ezio Manzini, view socially responsible design as a form of social innovation and sustainability. They define a socially responsible designer as an individual who engages with their local context, fosters dialogue with the community, and drives changes or transformations within that environment. The designer supports groups in identifying and implementing solutions to address local challenges.

The significance of designers adopting an ethical and moral stance toward society gained prominence in the 1970s through the ideas of authors such as Victor Papanek, Tomás Maldonado, and Gui Bonsiepe. According to Papanek (2014), designing with moral and social responsibility requires a deep understanding of people and the target audience.

SOCIAL BUSINESSES WITH SEWING AND CRAFTS IN RIO DE JANEIRO

The decision was made to analyze social businesses utilizing sewing and craft activities connected to design, based on the belief that these initiatives could pave the way toward a more socially engaged production model for fashion articles. Additionally, Rio de Janeiro, with its unique spatial dynamics, was recognized as a promising setting for the development of such projects. The interdisciplinarity between design and anthropology serves as the guiding framework for the analysis of the cases presented in this article: Pipa Social and Rede Asta.

This interdisciplinarity was explored through the principles of designer Zoy Anastassakis, who emphasizes the significance of anthropology in the field of design. Ingold (2018) supports Anastassakis's (2012) concept of anthropology's dialogic openness, highlighting the discipline's generosity in seeking answers through the actions and narratives of individuals. Anthropology opens the world to researchers, offering not definitive solutions but possible paths forward, with a focus on inclusion.

Another essential characteristic of the interdisciplinarity between anthropology and design, as highlighted by the authors, is the relationship between people and things. According to Ingold (2015):

> It seems that the movement of a human life — perhaps in contrast to the lives of non-human animals — is temporally extended. We are always, so to speak, constitutionally ahead of ourselves. Upstream, simultaneously with the emergence of things, lies imagination, while downstream is our perceptual apprehension of a world that is already established, where things are present to appear (Ingold, 2015, p. 31).

Miller (2013) emphasizes that, in anthropology, the relationship between people and things extends beyond the notion that objects merely represent those who

create them. It equally explores how objects shape and influence people. "This theory also gives shape and form to the idea that objects make people. Before we do things, we ourselves grow and mature in the light of things that have been passed down to us by previous generations" (Miller, 2013, p. 83).

"Is a tree an object? [...] How would we define it? [...] Where does the tree end and the rest of the world begin?" (Ingold, n/p, 2012). The author draws an intriguing distinction between object and thing, asserting that the world consists of things rather than objects. Using the "object" tree as an example, he emphasizes the life that flourishes within and around it, such as moss growing on its branches, birds building nests, and roots penetrating the earth. Ingold (2012) concludes that the tree is not merely an object but an aggregate of vital threads, perceived as a thing.

> The object presents itself to us as a *fait accompli* [...] the thing, in turn, is an "event," or rather, a place where several events intertwine. Observing a thing is not being locked out, but being invited to the gathering (Ingold, n/p, 2012).

According to the author, an object can become a thing, and things are brought to life. He illustrates this idea through an experiment with his students at the University of Aberdeen when they made a kite. "The kite that had been lying lifeless on the table in the room had become a kite-in-the-air. It was no longer an object — if it ever was — but a thing" (Ingold, n/p, 2012).

To think of the kite as an object is to omit the wind — to forget that it is, first and foremost, a kite-in-the-air. The flight of the kite, it seems, is the result of the interaction between a person (the one who flies it) and an object (the kite). However, it can only be explained by imagining that the kite is endowed with an internal animating principle, an agency, that sets it in motion, often against the will of the person flying it (Ingold, 2012).

Pipa Social

The NGO Pipa Social, which was discussed in this article, represents more than the object kite that rested lifeless on the table and goes even further than the thing kite that flies in the open air from the action of an individual flying the object, as in Ingold's experiment. Pipa Social, founded by Helena Rocha in 2012, represents an imaginary object that transforms into a thing when it causes integration between people, institutions and objects.

The name Pipa was chosen by Helena because the object symbolizes the favelas of Rio de Janeiro. The formation of favelas on the city's hills favored the activity of flying kites, a practice that is very common among their residents.

The Social Kite flew over Rio's favelas with the aim of forming, through the collaboration of residents, a collective creative and production center aimed at professional positioning and social inclusion. The goal would be achieved through coexistence between members and other people through the development of collaborative projects.

The researcher and one of the authors of this article interviewed Helena Rocha in August 2019. The interview was conducted where the NGO operated, in an old house in the Botafogo neighborhood, in the South Zone of Rio de Janeiro.

In 2012, when she founded Pipa Social, Helena intended to develop work with residents of the Santa Marta favela and looked for an address within the favela. Helena realized early on that the project would expand to other favelas, as the seamstresses and artisans themselves promoted Pipa's work and brought residents from other communities.

The connection between academia and the market often occurs through volunteering. It is common for design interns to collaborate with NGOs. Pipa Social fosters this integration between academia, the market, and favela residents by forming partnerships for the creation and development of products. In addition to design interns, professionals also contribute through volunteering.

Initially, Pipa's production occurred on two fronts. The first involved the creation and manufacturing of products under the Pipa Social brand, which were sold in multi-brand stores. Pipa Social also had points of sale at the Rio Sul shopping mall and the Light cultural center. The second front focused on production for other brands. Although these brands did not sell Pipa Social products, they sought to create items with a focus on social engagement.

This business model began to encounter challenges in 2018, as Pipa lost several points of sale. During this period, the company made its first export to Portugal, partnering with the heirs of Tarsila do Amaral to produce bags featuring embroidered designs inspired by the artist's paintings.

After this first export, Helena recognized the potential for growth in this direction for the NGO, and they began developing a sample for export. The products were created through collaboration between seamstresses, artisans, and designers. While continuing to produce for other brands, the income generated from this type of business remained below expectations. The clients seeking production at Pipa came in two forms: small brands that prioritized reduced and responsible production and were willing to pay higher prices for this work, and larger clients who produced corporate gifts and valued the concept of social responsibility.

Regarding the connection with fashion retail brands in Rio de Janeiro, Helena explains that they developed and produced 600 bags for Rio Ethical Fashion using scraps donated by Farm, as well as products like toiletry bags made from leather scraps for the footwear brand Soulier, with the scraps supplied by the company itself. This suggests that the connection with fashion retail brands is not particularly significant.

Returning to Ingold's ideas (2012):

> Finally, I will show that the paths or trajectories through which the improvisational practice unfolds are not connections, nor do they describe relationships between one thing and another. They are lines along which things are continuously formed. Therefore, when I speak of a tangle of things, it is in a precise and literal sense: not a network of connections, but a mesh of intertwined lines of growth and movement (Ingold, n/p, 2012).

Pipa Social not only represents connections between things, people, and institutions, but it also continually transforms and reconstitutes itself in an ongoing effort to tie up the loose ends.

The analysis is concluded with the testimony of a seamstress from Pipa Social, taken from Instagram during the period in which the research was conducted:

> [...] I'm already in Pipa, although I'm away with this pandemic, but I've been in Pipa for about seven years [...]. Pipa has given me many things, one of them is where I am now, in this penthouse, which is on my roof, my studio, all my work materials are here, my husband built this little corner for me. [...] when I went there to work, we received a scholarship, and from that scholarship I was able to reduce my spending on materials, and with this reduction, I managed to set up this penthouse with my husband's help [...] we were able to set up my studio in this penthouse where I live, because all of it used to be in my bedroom [...] thanks to Pipa, I have my fresh little corner here [...]. I hope we fly even higher, further ahead, I have faith that this pandemic will pass and we will meet again and continue flying, the kite will not come down, the kite will go up higher and higher [...]. (Testimony from Rosa Maria, NGO Pipa Social, 2020)

Rede Asta

The Asta Network is an open, collaborative system created and developed with the purpose of extending design beyond traditional solutions, exploring new fields such as services and transformative processes. Within this open collaborative model, design applies its expertise in diverse areas, including citizenship, as an example.

Rede Asta was established in 2005, born from the vision of lawyer Alice Freitas. During a trip aimed at exploring innovative business models, Alice identified crafts as an alternative form of production and mapped locations where this approach was prominent. She partnered with Raquel Schettino, a lawyer with extensive corporate market experience, and together they founded Rede Asta.

In November 2019, one of the authors of this article conducted an interview with Angélica Oliveira, an employee of Rede Asta. The interview was held at Asta's headquarters in Rio de Janeiro.

Oliveira (2019) explains that Rede Asta has undergone various business models over time. Currently, the business is divided into two main activities: the market/products area, which focuses on product development, primarily gifts, and the impact/services area, represented by a business school for artisans.

At the start of the interview, Oliveira (2019) makes it evident, through her choice of terms, that the social business has adapted to the corporate market. She provides a detailed account of the various phases Rede Asta has experienced over its 15 years of existence, with each stage described and classified as a distinct business model. Izidio, Lana, and Moraes (2019) caution that social projects often risk replicating mechanisms of domination inherent in market-driven and capital-based processes.

Rede Asta began as a partnership with a recycling cooperative in the Campo Grande neighborhood, located in the West Zone of Rio de Janeiro. Products

developed through this collaboration were sold at a kiosk in Tijuca Shopping Mall, in the North Zone of the city. The kiosk operated for several years, selling handmade items created by artisans and serving as a testing ground to gauge public acceptance of the products. The business functioned as follows: products and collections were initially developed in collaboration with the cooperatives, sold, and tested at the kiosk. The best-selling items were then refined with some modifications and produced in larger quantities for wholesale distribution at events such as the Gift Fair.

This initial phase, marked by retail sales at the kiosk, was referred to as "1.0." The subsequent phase, labeled "2.0," was characterized by the sale of products through a catalog, a retail model widely used in the cosmetics sector. During this phase, Asta registered 70 resellers across the country. This model lasted five years, contributing significantly to Asta's growth and increasing its national recognition. Simultaneously, wholesale sales expanded through the production of corporate gifts, fostering partnerships with various companies.

In the following phase, referred to as "3.0," retail operations were expanded to include two additional points of sale. However, it became evident that retail was increasingly unsustainable, as it failed to generate sufficient financial returns for the associated cooperatives or ensure the self-sustainability of the business. Consequently, the decision was made to close the stores.

At that time, Rede Asta operated under two CNPJs: one for sales-related activities and the other, referred to as "Instituto Asta," for projects and services. For many years, sales constituted Asta's primary activity. However, during the transition from model 3.0 to 4.0, the projects and services offered by Instituto Asta gained prominence and became the organization's main focus. The expertise acquired in producing and marketing corporate gifts using sustainable production models played a crucial role in this shift, while also fostering stronger relationships with companies and clients.

This approach, along with the strengthening of relationships with partner companies, paved the way for Instituto Asta's projects. The first project was launched in 2011 in collaboration with Coca-Cola and involved an entrepreneurial training course for a group of artisans from a riverside community in the Amazon. During this period, Asta began transitioning from the 4.0 model to the 5.0 model.

In model 4.0, classes were delivered through PowerPoint presentations supplemented by printed materials. In model 5.0, content is presented through video lessons on a digital platform, allowing for a wider reach among artisans. Asta has developed an application that can be downloaded onto smartphones, providing access to the complete history of interactions with artisans, including information about the artisans themselves and their locations across the country. The app is accessible to anyone: artisans who can showcase their work and buyers seeking handmade products.

The companies that approach Instituto Asta are large, well-established firms from various sectors, including oil and gas. These companies aim to invest in

sustainability and outsource this initiative through Asta. The products developed in these projects are not directly related to the companies' core activities. The projects typically include entrepreneurship education courses and, at a later stage, involve the creation of a capsule collection that highlights the partnership between a guest designer and the artisans.

By the time of the interview, Instituto Asta had conducted eight courses in partnership with companies from various industries. Oliveira (2019) explains how this process works in practice through a partnership with Porto Sudeste. The company approached Asta seeking sustainable solutions for the disposal of its employees' uniforms. Using the upcycling technique, bags were created as gifts to be given to the company's customers.

> Porto Sudeste, located on Madeira Island in Itaguaí, RJ, is a private port with a sustainable development policy. The company partnered with Rede Asta to execute a project that would benefit artisans in the surrounding area as a form of compensation for its impact on local communities. The main objective of the project is to enhance the entrepreneurship of 10 local artisanal businesses, directly impacting approximately 70 artisans. The methodology employed in this project is divided into four main stages: training in entrepreneurship specifically for artisans/seamstresses through the Artisan Business School; revitalizing the local market; forming a network of artisan leaders; and innovating artisanal products through Design facilitation (Medtsch; Oliveira, 2019, p. 61).

The course lasted ten months, with the first four months dedicated to digital classes. For the remaining six months, the digital classes were supplemented with in-person sessions with a designer. During this period, a capsule collection was developed in collaboration between the artisans and the designer. Finally, an analysis of potential buyers was conducted, starting with the local region.

Oliveira (2019) highlights several partnerships between Rede Asta and fashion retail brands. One such partnership was established through a call for proposals by Instituto Lojas Renner, which led to the development of a capsule collection in collaboration with two communities in Niterói. Renner sponsored the course, while Asta handled the sales of the products. Another partnership with the Rio de Janeiro-based women's clothing brand Dress To involved creating products from scraps donated by the company. These products were used as gifts and for visual merchandising in the stores. Instituto C&A funded a study developed by Asta on family economics and new generations. Additionally, Asta manages scraps donated by the company Farm, receiving the material and distributing it to artisans while overseeing the impacts generated by this process.

The Asta Network positions itself as an open collaborative system that connects things, people, and institutions, fostering diverse possibilities for interaction. It can be understood as a network of connections, described as "a mesh of intertwined lines of growth and movement" (Ingold, 2012, n/p.). This model is constantly evolving, striving to unite and resolve the loose ends.

In the open collaborative system represented by Rede Asta, the focus is on sharing information, promoting important aspects for a more democratic design, through participatory design, valuing a local culture and favoring more conscious consumption.

We conclude with the testimony of a seamstress who participated in the "Máscara Mais Renda" project, carried out by Rede Asta during the period in which the research was conducted, as shared on Instagram:

> Participating in this project was very important to me, not only in preventing the virus but also in terms of our financial survival [...] I had the opportunity to catch up on some bills [...] our team and group were always very united, and it was great to work together [...] (Testimony of Kalilma, Rede Asta, 2020).

Considerations and reflections on Pipa Social and the Asta Network

The social businesses analyzed have different structures: one is a private company, and the other is a non-profit institution. Their commonality lies in the principles of sustainability they defend and practice, aligned with the objectives of sustainable development. However, their actions diverge in several areas. A table has been developed to clearly present the key points where these differences were identified.

It can be concluded that the differences presented in Table 1 primarily stem from the varying levels of maturity between the businesses, which provided valuable insights for reflecting on the two cases analyzed. The maturity level demonstrated by Rede Asta is attributed to its longer duration of existence, being operational for seven years longer than Pipa Social. As observed during the case descriptions, Pipa Social's processes are more empirical in nature, in contrast to the more systematic processes of Rede Asta.

This difference in maturity between the businesses extends to various other aspects, including the activities they carry out. Pipa Social's business model is centered on the manufacture and sale of products. In contrast, as previously mentioned, Rede Asta has sought new solutions "beyond traditional design ones, considering new fields, including services and transformations." This shift has resulted in a more structured business model focused not only on the manufacture and sale of products but also on education and social impact.

Rocha (2019) highlights the disadvantages of producing for small fashion brands, stating that "brands that sought production with social engagement, but in this type of business, the income generation was below what was desired." Similarly, Rede Asta decided to abandon the retail model when it recognized that it was unsustainable.

The shift from retail-based businesses to service-based businesses is a growing market trend, particularly since the global economic crises at the start of this

Table 1. Comparative table between Pipa Social and Rede Asta.

	Pipa Social	Rede Asta[4]
Start Year	2012	2005
Main Incentives	The NGO's funds primarily come from clients, mainly companies that hire the services of seamstresses and artisans. Pipa also seeks funding through incentive laws.	The primary source comes from large companies hiring services from Asta's business school. Asta also seeks resources through incentive laws.
Main Activities	Production of sewn and handcrafted products. Workshops are also offered to the beneficiaries.	The main activity is the entrepreneurship school offered to artisans and seamstresses. Asta focuses on education, not product manufacturing.
Target Audience	Residents of communities in the capital and Baixada Fluminense, mostly women.	Artisans and seamstresses from all over Brazil.
Retail and Product Sales	The NGO primarily sells products in bulk to companies; retail sales also occur through e-commerce or at events like fairs and bazaars. The brand has had a point of sale and sold products in multi-brand stores.	The sales of products made by artisans occur through an app, but it is clear that when a product is purchased or a service is contracted, the funds go directly to the artisans, with Asta only acting as an intermediary for promotion. In previous business models, several forms of commercialization were reported by Angélica Oliveira, such as kiosks, stores, and catalogs.
Operating Locations	The NGO does not operate in specific locations, focusing on communities in the capital and Baixada Fluminense.	The scope of Rede Asta's operations is quite broad, covering all of Brazil; this network of operations is initially shaped by the companies that hire Asta's services, and the network expands to other locations.
Presence of Designers	Although not a designer, Helena mentions the intense participation of designers in the NGO through volunteering, from interns to internationally recognized professionals.	The founders of Rede Asta are not designers, but the presence of designers in projects is highly valued.
Presence of Volunteers	Volunteer presence at Pipa is common, with individuals of various ages, including youth and elderly, working in different areas like design. Pipa Social frequently recruits volunteers on social media.	According to Angélica Oliveira, the only volunteer at Asta is Lu, who works at the Rio de Janeiro office.
Connection with Fashion Companies	Pipa Social, in some cases, assumes the role of a supplier for fashion companies, which, according to Helena, are small-scale companies with ethical purposes; for larger companies, it has only produced promotional items using the brands' own raw materials. The connection also occurs through donations of materials from these companies.	According to Angélica Oliveira, the connection with fashion companies occurred mostly through material donations. Asta has rarely acted as a supplier to these companies, only occasionally making promotional items or gifts. The connection with the sector focuses on empowering artisans, teaching them to value and sell their services.

Continue...

4 In this comparison, we will focus on the latest business model of Rede Asta, as the business has gone through many phases, and it would be difficult to cover all the models in this analysis.

Table 1. Continuation.

	Pipa Social	Rede Asta[4]
Technology and Computerization	There is no significant mention of technology and computerization in the activities, aside from messaging and group chats via WhatsApp.	Technology and computerization play a key role in Asta's processes, with their importance increasing due to the pandemic.

Source: the authors.

century. As social businesses, the cases discussed reflect these market mechanisms, which aim to reduce socioeconomic inequalities.

Another point to highlight in this context is that, in the case of Rede Asta, there is a connection with companies from sectors beyond retail and fashion. These companies operate in areas with greater capital circulation, such as Coca-Cola and Porto Sudeste.

The case study was initially planned to focus solely on Pipa Social. In early 2020, the researcher began participant observations, with only four visits to the NGO, during which she observed the routine and interactions between the seamstresses/artisans, the designer, and the volunteers. However, these observations had to be interrupted due to the delicate moment, and the researcher was no longer able to interact with the project participants. As a result, she decided to expand the scope to a multiple-case study, aiming to gain a deeper understanding of the participants through testimonials on social media. Given these limitations, the field research did not yield in-depth data on the economic and social impacts of the businesses. Nevertheless, through the testimonials collected on Instagram, it became clear that the businesses analyzed contribute to sustainable development and that their impact on the citizenship of their members is evident.

The locations where businesses operate, or their scope, have also been influenced by the different degrees of maturity. While Pipa Social expanded from residents of a single favela to several others, eventually reaching Baixada Fluminense, Rede Asta has a broader reach, with national coverage. This expansion began with the catalog sales system and was further facilitated by technology, particularly through key tools such as the smartphone app.

Regarding the interactions between designers and groups of seamstresses and artisans, two important aspects stand out. At Pipa Social, this interaction occurs through volunteering, with designers working without payment, and the processes are more empirical in nature. In contrast, at Rede Asta, designers are compensated for their work, and the methodologies are more structured and outlined.

It is important to highlight that, in 2023, when the research that led to this article was already concluded, Pipa Social developed the project "*Pipa no ar*." This educational initiative offered both online and in-person classes for the group. The classes were taught by professors from various fields, aiming to

broaden the participants' knowledge in areas such as design, culture, art, entrepreneurship, and citizenship. This project reaffirms the reflections on business maturity discussed in this section.

CONCLUSIONS

The Covid-19 pandemic impacted the research, and it is essential to mention the consequences and strategies employed by Pipa Social and Rede Asta to navigate this period. The pandemic exposed social inequalities globally and heightened awareness of the value of local production, themes central to the research. The significance of artisans' and seamstresses' work, as well as local production models, became evident early in the pandemic. The world was unprepared, with a shortage of basic protective equipment and materials. The production of homemade protective masks played a critical role in helping science save lives and enabling society to navigate that challenging time.

Rede Asta launched the "mask finder" campaign on its social media, allowing customers to locate seamstresses producing masks across Brazil. The organization also participated in two significant projects: the "*Heróis Usam Máscaras*" initiative, supported by Itaú and Santander banks, and the "*Máscara mais renda*" project, backed by Fundação Vale. Both projects encouraged and supported seamstresses and artisans in producing protective masks, thereby facilitating income generation during this challenging period. Pipa Social raised funds to benefit its members through campaigns on social media and Rede Globo's digital platform "for those who donate" and also participated in the "*Heróis usam máscaras*" project.

Returning to the objective of this article: local production models involving crafts and sewing activities point to new ways of producing fashion items with social engagement. From the cases analyzed, we conclude that, despite some connections between these models and fashion retail brands in Rio de Janeiro, they do not represent an alternative production model in fashion with social engagement. Berlim (2021, p. 138) makes an important observation about the difficulty traditional fashion businesses or large companies face in incorporating concepts and practices from what the author calls the "slow fashion movement": "because, basically, products originating from slow fashion do not respond financially as well as those from fast fashion." Slow fashion contrasts with the dominant production and consumption patterns, inspiring what we define as "a broader form of sustainable and ethical fashion." The author highlights that the movement extends beyond alternative production and consumption practices, engaging with the fashion phenomenon in a unique way through a set of values.

According to Berlim (2021), slow fashion is capable of fostering connections between workers, managers, consumers, and designers, with the latter serving as agents of change by contributing to the creation and leadership of

projects. This concept aligns with the idea of the socially responsible designer defined by Cippola and Bartholo (2014) and discussed in this article. While no clear representation of this production model with social engagement was identified within the fashion sector, it became evident that an alternative path exists for designers who wish to distance themselves from the traditional market.

An alternative solution for connecting these social businesses with fashion retail companies, which was not mentioned in the cases and has been adopted by some corporations, is collaborations (collabs). In this model, there is a strategic partnership between two brands aiming to achieve common or even distinct goals. Perhaps the solution does not lie in incorporating these groups/social businesses as traditional suppliers to fashion retail companies, but rather as partners. This approach would allow both brands to coexist, complementing each other without one overshadowing or negating the other.

As the field research was interrupted by the pandemic, the researcher intends to further deepen this study in the future, focusing more closely on the work of these seamstresses and artisans to better understand their true desires.

The relevance of the research discussed in this article lies in the description of the cases. However, no final solutions were found, but rather paths that facilitate inclusion, as demonstrated in the article based on the ideas of Ingold (2018) and Anastassakis (2012). We conclude from the analysis of the cases that, although the production model with social engagement based on groups of artisans and seamstresses is not yet representative in the sector, it points to an alternative and inclusive path to be followed.

There is still a long way to go, and even without definitive and conclusive results, this article aimed to highlight different solutions for managers, designers, and individuals who take on the risk of this endeavor.

We conclude, drawing from Ingold's words (2012, n/p), that: "Life is always open: its impulse is not to reach an end, but to keep moving forward. The thing, however, is not just a thread, but a certain aggregation of threads of life."

REFERENCES

ANASTASSAKIS, Zoy. Design e antropologia: desafios em busca de um diálogo promissor. *In:* 10º Congresso Brasileiro de Pesquisa e Desenvolvimento em Design, São Luís, 2012.

ANASTASSAKIS, Zoy. Relações entre design e antropologia no Brasil: discussões a partir de uma trajetória profissional. **Actas de Diseño**, n. 9 - V Encuentro Latinoamericano de Diseño, 2010.

BERLIM, Lilyan G. Contribuições para a construção do conceito Slow Fashion: um novo olhar sobre a possibilidade da leveza sustentável. **dObra[s] - revista da Associação Brasileira de Estudos de Pesquisas em Moda**, n. 32, p. 130-151, 2021. https://doi.org/10.26563/dobras.i32.1370

CIPPOLA, Carla; BARTHOLO, Roberto. Empathy or inclusion: A dialogical approach to socially responsible design. **International Journal of Design**, v. 8, n. 2, p. 87-100, 2014.

CONTINO, Joana Martins. **Design, ideologia e relações de trabalho:** uma investigação sobre a indústria da moda no capitalismo tardio. 2019. Tese (Doutorado em Design) - Pontifícia Universidade

Católica do Rio de Janeiro, Curso de Pós-graduação em Design, Rio de Janeiro, 2019. Available at: https://www.maxwell.vrac.puc-rio.br/48339/48339.PDF. Access on: Sep. 30, 2023.

GIDDENS, Anthony. **The consequences of modernity**. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990.

INGOLD, Tim. **Anthropology and/as education**. London: Routledge, 2018.

INGOLD, Tim. O Dédalo e o labirinto: caminhar, imaginar e educar a atenção. **Horizontes Antropológicos**, Porto Alegre, ano 21, n. 44, p. 21-36, jul./dez. 2015. https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-71832015000200002

INGOLD, Tim. Trazendo as coisas de volta à vida: emaranhados criativos num mundo de materiais. **Horizontes Antropológicos**, v. 18, n. 37, p. 25-44, 2012. https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-71832012000100002

IZIDIO, Luiz Lagares; LANA, Sebastiana L. B.; MORAES, Dijon de. O ambiente de crise como causa política para o design. **Cuadernos del Centro de Estudios de Diseño y Comunicación**, Buenos Aires, v. 99, p. 1, 2019.

JAMESON, Frederic. **Pós-modernismo:** a lógica cultural do capitalismo tardio. 2. ed. São Paulo: Ática, 1997.

MEDTSCH, Alice de Oliveira; OLIVEIRA, Francisca Angélica de. O design e a educação empreendedora: um estudo de caso sobre a valorização do saber artesanal. **Fórum Fashion Revolution**, 2. ed., p. 60-63, 2019.

MILLER, Daniel. **Trecos, troços e coisas:** estudos antropológicos sobre a cultura material. 1. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2013.

OLIVEIRA, Angélica Francisca de. Entrevista concedida <omitido para revisão cega>. Rio de Janeiro, 5 nov. 2019.

ONG PIPA SOCIAL. **Rosa Maria artesã da Pipa Social**. Rio de Janeiro, 25 nov. 2020. Instagram: @pipasocial. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/tv/CIB0EEppsKC/?igshid=yo2meuf3geba. Access on: Mar. 15, 2021.

PAPANEK, Victor. **Diseñar para el mundo real:** ecología humana y cambio social. 1 ed. Barcelona: Pollen Edicions, 2014.

REDE ASTA. **Nem todo herói usa capa – mas todos usam mácara!** 28 out. 2020. Instagram: @rede_asta. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/CG51xbTJzZ0/?igshid=19av5pkit2ejc. Access on: Mar. 15, 2021.

ROCHA, Helena. Entrevista concedida <omitido para revisão cega>. Rio de Janeiro, 13 ago. 2019.

About the authors

Barbara de Oliveira e Cruz: Ph.D. in Design from Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro.
Rita Maria Couto: Ph.D. in Education from Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro.
Roberta Portas Gonçalves Rodrigues: Ph.D. in Design from Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro.

Conflict of interests: nothing to declare – **Financial support:** Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (*Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior – Brazil* – CAPES) — Funding Code 001.
Authors' contributions: Cruz, B. O.: Conceptualization, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Validation, Writing – Original Draft. Couto, R. M.: Supervision, Writing – Review & Editing. Rodrigues, R. P. G.: Project Administration, Visualization.