

Editorial

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Sustainability and Social Innovation in Arts, Fashion, and Design Education

Although several scholars have studied sustainability in an attempt to conceptualize it truthfully and diligently, its definition remains unclear. Given that sustainability cannot be applied in reality, we must accept the impracticality of the term. Figueiredo *et al.*, (2014) defend this point of view by stating that sustainability has a utopian and, at times, fallacious character. According to the authors, even if we take the Brundtland report (1987)² as our starting point, “[...] there is no way to guarantee that current and future generations will be able to meet their needs” (Figueiredo *et al.*, 2014, p. 12). By agreeing with this view, the organizers of this dossier do not wish to discourage any initiatives aimed at pro-environmental change, but rather to encourage new dialogues on the conceptualization and applicability of the term, especially among students and faculty at Brazilian higher education institutions (HEIs).

In this sense, it can be observed that, until recently, higher education institutions in the country prepared students for the formal job market and neglected the need for training focused on sustainability and social innovation. Seen as unnecessary or irrelevant, these topics were pushed aside by higher education

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² The Brundtland Report (1987) presents the idea that contemporary society must satisfy its needs without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy theirs. This argument has become a widely accepted maxim in sustainable development studies.

courses in different fields for a significant part of their existence. However, the new social arrangements that have emerged in recent decades have exposed complex issues that now require significant curricular changes (Oliveira; Melo; Muylder, 2016). From this scenario emerged “studies on social innovation [that] discuss alternatives for the growth and development of communities and individuals through the emancipation and political participation of civil society in their daily dilemmas [...]” (Oliveira; Correia; Gomez, 2018, p. 391).

Studies on social innovation are based on the idea that, for development to occur, it is urgent to create value in the face of collective interests. To this end, today's individuals must seek innovative solutions to trivial problems that impact their lives and affect their communities. Not without reason, Oliveira, Correia, and Gomez (2018, p. 392) believe that “[...] social innovation refers to the need to involve and include citizens in the process of change [...] in which solutions are developed to meet their own needs [...]”. Similarly, Mulgan (2006, p. 146³) argues that: “social innovation refers to innovative activities and services that are motivated by the goal of satisfying a social need and that are predominantly disseminated through organizations whose main focus is the community [...]”.

In the same vein as Mulgan (2006) and Oliveira, Correia, and Gomez (2018), Manzini (2008, pp. 61–62, emphasis added) argues that “the term *social innovation* refers to changes in the way individuals or communities act to solve their problems or create new opportunities [...]”. In the author's view, these social transformations occur when new behaviors emerge at the base of the social pyramid. According to Oliveira, Correia, and Gomez (2018), in order to be effective, these social transformations must be lasting and have a significant impact on the lives of those involved. Empirically, it can be observed that this concern has been neglected by higher education courses, which, in addition to not investing in the student-institution relationship, also fail to promote actions and projects aimed at student-community

³In the original: *Social innovation refers to innovative activities and services that are motivated by the goal of meeting a social need and that are predominantly diffused through organizations whose primary purpose are social [...]* (Mulgan, 2006, p. 146).

articulation — which, otherwise, could make the challenge of curricularizing university extension less costly.

Within the scope of these outreach activities, it is necessary to highlight the role that Arts, Fashion, and Design can play as instruments of widespread knowledge. Given the comprehensive nature and high capillarity of these fields in contemporary society, knowledge transfer between the academic community and citizens, and vice versa, can occur in a variety of ways. In this process, manual skills, ancestral practices, artistic domains, design considerations, technical qualifications, and technological competencies can be employed to empower the different participating agents. As a result, in addition to pursuing a career, students can obtain social training during their time at university.

However, far from this scenario are HEIs that choose to devalue the social dimension of the educational path. By isolating students from the potential that can emerge from working with communities outside the university, higher education institutions that choose to distance themselves from reality prevent their students from becoming agents of social change. Supported by unjustifiable preciousness, these courses often neglect environmental issues that could add new knowledge to the student's journey and strengthen civic and emancipatory education. In this regard, it should be noted that, due to their relatively recent history, some areas also have shortcomings that directly or indirectly weaken their graduates. Among these gaps, we can mention the absence of scales, indicators, and parameters to measure the effect that academic production and pedagogical approaches have on social innovation and the communities surrounding university spaces. However, some sparks of innovation have emerged to shed light on the issue.

Contrary to higher education institutions that bureaucratize the implementation of sustainability and social innovation courses and deny their necessity in student education, some courses focused on artistic careers have reached new horizons in light of the dynamics of the Creative Economy, Social Entrepreneurship, and Decolonial Education. Within this landscape, the teaching of Arts, Fashion, and Design stands out. When setting aside the specificities of each area, it is clear that the field is fertile ground for debate on sustainability, while also providing opportunities for

the emergence and implementation of actions, projects, activities, and curricular units focused on social innovation. It was based on this premise that the organizers of this dossier proposed bringing together studies and research focused on sustainability and social innovation in the context of teaching Arts, Fashion, and Design.

This dossier was intended to bring together research highlighting tools, practices, actions, and results that indicate how social innovation can be linked to higher education. Furthermore, it was estimated that the collection of selected articles could serve as a record of the present time for initiatives already underway, as well as indicate which metrics could be used by managers, artists, stylists, designers, teachers, and students in dealing with social innovation and sustainability. With this purpose in mind, the scientific community was encouraged to submit papers for the collection. From the manuscripts received, the following texts were extracted for review.

In *Design Movements in the New Anthropocentric Paradigm*, Vanessa Ambrósio, Richard Perassi Luiz de Souza, and Claudelino Martins Dias Júnior explore new theoretical currents that have emerged through design practices interested in combating unsustainability in the field of design. By questioning the political, social, ideological, and market forces that stifle pro-environmental aspirations and social causes related to the professional activities of designers and planners, the authors advocate on behalf of movements that review current solutions and design new scenarios for sustainability. In this context, the authors highlight a series of new trends in Design and their links to sustainability.

In *Eco-friendly Alternatives to Reduce Fast Fashion Consumption: A Quantitative and Descriptive Study*, Viviana Veja and Edwin Solorzano Rosales criticize how *fast fashion* consumption has led fashion students themselves to distance themselves from habits focused on sustainability. Not surprisingly, the study produced by the authors states that, despite a certain awareness of the unsustainability of the textile and clothing industries, the dynamics of conventional supply still prevail. However, there are also new designs on the horizon for fashion brands: products made from recycled materials, redistribution markets, and responsible business models signal ongoing changes that could usher in a new phase in the sector, which has been

under pressure to adopt socio-environmental measures and smart corporate governance metrics.

Notably, this new phase in the textile and clothing industries has been fueled by social movements demanding transparency, traceability, and *fair trade* practices. Examples include the Slow Fashion Movement and Fashion Revolution — the latter discussed by Márcio Soares Lima, Luiz Fernando Gonçalves de Figueiredo, and Raquel Noronha in *Social Innovation and Sustainability with Women in Socially Vulnerable Areas*. In reporting how the Mulheres Mil Program works to ensure the autonomy and quality of life of women in vulnerable situations and its relationship with some social movements, the authors discuss an empowering practice that brought together notions of affection, craftsmanship, identity, and territory. Through the research undertaken, possibilities for social transformation can be glimpsed based on self-reflection, which must be supported by critical views of the environment and the urgent need to recognize the artistic potential of female expressions that, until now, have been marginalized by society.

Another article in this dossier based on an experience report was that of Iana Uliana Perez. Wisely, the author addressed the case of an elective Food Design course taught in a higher education Design program in Brazil (BR). Supported by active methodologies with an emphasis on social innovation and its project dimension, the practice reported presented the views of students and teachers on the food issues facing local communities. The artifacts produced by the participants in the course revealed the students' desire to understand new possibilities for action after completing their formation. As narrated by the author, these students felt encouraged to adopt attitudes committed to socio-environmental principles after taking the course, which was certainly successful in meeting the challenge of enabling future professionals to deal with complex, local, and real problems.

The issue of teaching was also explored by Valdecir Babinski Júnior and Luiz Fernando Gonçalves de Figueiredo in *Textile materiality as a connecting thread between Sustainability and Textile Design in Fashion Education*. In the authors' view, Textile Design courses linked to higher education programs in Fashion can be important pillars for the inclusion of social and environmental issues in higher

education. In particular, the authors emphasized the need to observe work with textile materials and crafts as a starting point for pedagogical practices and curricular activities. Not without reason, the authors argue that the training of the next generation of designers and stylists must be based on a solid commitment to social innovation and sustainability in all its complexity.

Thus, as previously estimated, it is hoped that this collection of texts will illustrate new ways of conceptualizing and applying sustainability and social innovation in the teaching of Arts, Fashion, and Design. Although there are still several barriers to overcome, courses in this field that are willing to integrate practices, activities, content, study topics, and syllabi focused on social causes and environmental actions into their curricula will certainly have less difficulty adapting to the paradigm shifts that are underway in society, industry, the market, and academia. Finally, we hope that reading the selected texts will be beneficial and contribute to the development of students, teachers, researchers, and higher education institutions⁴.

Sincerely,

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⁴ Grammar review: Albertina Felisbino, PhD in Linguistics, UFSC, 2005. Retired professor at Unisul. E-mail lunnaf@uol.com.br

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