Strategic Design for Social Innovation In The Fashion System: The Sustainable Fashion Ecosystem Case

Karine Freire

Abstract This chapter explores a possible answer to the question: what kind of innovation will be required for a truly sustainable change in the fashion value chain? It presents cultural innovation as a path towards a sustainable society. This cultural innovation is based on Edgar Morin proposition of reform of thought, grounded on the worldview of Buen Vivir, conviviality and complex thinking. From this perspective, we explore a strategic design process for cultural innovation and sustainability that underpins the development of the Sustainable Fashion Ecosystem project

Keywords Strategic design · Cultural innovation · Buen vivir · Sustainable fashion ecosystem

1 Introduction

This text was written in the year 2020. It is important to contextualize it in time, as it was a time when the global COVID19 pandemic alerted us about our forms of living in society. It was a period when we were confined to our homes to protect ourselves and give health systems a chance to save as many lives as possible. And in my view, one of the most obvious issues that have emerged is how much social inequality is the biggest pandemic that we need to fight; and in the wake of it, racism, misogyny and all forms of violence and oppression. These are the reasons that lead me to reflect on sustainability in the fashion value chain. What kind of innovation will be required for a truly sustainable change in the fashion value chain? This text explores a possible answer: cultural innovation as a path towards a sustainable society. And

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[1] Buen Vivir or Vivir Bien, "are the Spanish words used in Latin America to describe alternatives to development focused on the good life in a broad sense. The richness of the term is difficult to translate into English. It includes the classical ideas of quality of life, but with the specific idea that well-being is only possible within a community. It embraces the broad notion of well-being and cohabitation with others and Nature" [11].

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the sustainable society presented here is understood from an integral perspective, based on theories of integral ecology, *Buen Vivir*[1] and conviviality [2, 3, 10, 11, 15]. Here, we seek to present concepts and paths capable of leading towards cultural innovation that is really capable of modifying the unsustainable forms of production and consumption today.

One of the first aspects to be questioned is the rationality of modernity. There is the need to look for another possible rationality to produce knowledge and produce fashion: rationality that replaces modern rationality is linked to dominance, destruction and the sovereignty of man over nature. And in this search, we find a possible path in the epistemologies of the south, which draws upon the knowledge of the original Latin American peoples, especially as to their worldview linked to *Buen Vivir* [1, 15]. It is through a new humanism that reconnects us to the core values of human life in connection and balance with other forms of life that we can produce cultural innovation for a sustainable society.

And in this regard, it is necessary to discuss fashion. Fashion, as a cultural expression, is more than a clothing industry. This allows us to search within the culture itself for the elements necessary for its renewal and reframing. And for this, it is essential to discuss the importance of things. I look for inspiration in Manoel de Barros' poem, "On importance", to reflect on importance. The poet asks us if anyone knows for sure how to measure the importance of things, revealing that importance is defined by the point of view of the person evaluating it, depending on subjectivity and values. So, I reinforce my epistemological perspective: there is no way to separate the observer from the way of producing knowledge. And here I present myself as a researcher. I am a Brazilian and I received my education in Rio Grande do Sul and Rio de Janeiro. They are two places with completely different cultures, but both colonized by dominant Eurocentric thinking, with significant influence from Anglo-Saxon rationality. In the last 10 years, the strategic design for social innovation that I practise has undergone a transition from the influence of Anglo-Saxon thinkers to Italian thinkers. And specifically, in the last two years, I have been trying to decolonize my views as a researcher, studying epistemologies of the south as paths towards design.

Along this path, I follow the call of Edgar Morin [11] for reform of thought, seeking in complex thinking a way to change the paradigm of society towards a more sustainable society. In his proposal, for the reform of thought, Morin [11] seeks to reconnect knowledge as a paradigm alternative to disjunction. It is necessary to understand that a living being is only recognized in its relationship with its environment, from which it extracts energy and organization. Complex thinking is the answer to reconnect and at the same time separate human beings from nature and the cosmos, re-establishing the dialogue between humanistic and scientific culture. It is a way of producing knowledge that operates based on four principles: the systemic principle, circular causality, the hologram principle and the dialogical principle. It also allows us to understand man based on his three-fold nature: biology, psychology and social nature. Affected by and affecting nature and society, man can be an agent of cultural change and innovation. It is a way of thinking that enables us to discuss

new ethics, in which responsibility and solidarity emerge as fundamental values in our relationship with each other and with nature.

Complex thinking and its principles have a closeness with the worldview of the original Andean peoples. These are the peoples who have resisted colonization by Western thought for more than 500 years in the Americas and have benefited from what science is capable of producing, without losing sight of the ancestral knowledge that enables them to engage in *Buen Vivir*. The founding aspects of *Buen Vivir* are the vision of the whole, co-existence in a multipolar world, the search for balance, the complementarity of diversity and decolonization [15]. For *Buen Vivir*, the goal of humans is to take care of nature. Society needs to understand itself as a community that has nature and the Whole (Pacha Mama) as its center. In the words of Solon [15]: "recognition and belonging to the group are the keys to *Buen Vivir*, justifying the principle of 'wholeness' as the core of the Andean worldview" (p. 25).

It is based on this worldview that we will revisit the work of the renowned researcher in the field of design, Ezio Manzini, who has been reflecting on the necessary reforms in design culture to make a change towards sustainability since the early 1990s. Manzini (1992) reflects on an ethical basis for design that considers environmental problems, caused by the industrial design itself and that finds a new sensitive horizon for design, capable of generating a wide range of cultural transformations and social practices; design that relates to a value system consistent with the awareness of relativity; and design that seeks in the models developed by ecology the bases for ethics: "in the context of general attitude built on the principles of responsibility and solidarity" [6]. Manzini [6] also highlights that it is the responsibility of design to contribute to the production of a habitable world, in which human beings can express and expand their cultural and spiritual possibilities, more than merely surviving. The author states that the design culture produced by the West needs to change; an idea that is connected to qualities. And quality is associated with complexity. The design needs to develop new models to understand reality without reducing complexity. And as a way forward, Manzini [6] draws on the understanding of doing held by the native peoples of America who believe that the answer is: "to produce and reproduce their cultural world - and therefore artificial world, by seeking to be in tune with the natural environment" [6].

Based on authors who discuss ecology and complexity, Manzini proposes a reconfiguration of doing, not as how to produce, but as how to reproduce, which presupposes: [1] the circularity of material transformation processes; and [2] a new aesthetic that gives value to materials and products that somehow incorporate a trace of their previous existences; this only being possible based on the participation of, care for and attention to all the parties interested in the project. Based on this perspective, Manzini proposes that designers should become a cultural figure in the process of creatively connecting that possible with that expected in visible ways. Design culture must know how to point out paths towards potential possibilities, thereby visualizing aspects of what the world could be like while showing the characteristics that need to be supported for there to be complex ecological balance and culturally attractive and socially acceptable alternatives for the change to occur. In this scenario-building process, there is the need for "social imagination to redesign new systems

of values […] Social imagination emerges from dynamic complexes of socio-cultural innovation in which a plurality of actors play a part" [6].

It is based on the worldview of *Buen Vivir*, conviviality and complex thinking that we will seek to imagine a new society, with a new value system, which does not have the economy at its center, but rather a dynamic balance for living. We need a new society that combines ancestral practices and knowledge with technological advances, whenever they contribute to a balance with nature and strengthen a sense of community. We need a new society that effectively promotes cultural patterns of sustainable consumption, strengthening local communities and ecosystems. We need a new society featuring respect, balance and complementarity between the different parts of the Whole and its bases. As Solon [15] argues, in order to achieve the necessary balance, it is important to depatriarchalize society. Patriarchy, with its forms of oppressing power relations, is one of the main obstacles to the balance between humans and nature [15], that is, to *Buen Vivir*.

In the following sections, we will address the concepts of design for cultural innovation and sustainability that underpin the development of the sustainable fashion ecosystem project. The results will be discussed in light of this knowledge to propose changes in the ways of producing fashion.

2   Buen Vivir: A Sustainable Alternative to Pursue

Buen Vivir is a concept under construction, based on relearning the practices and worldviews of the original peoples from Latin America. It is a philosophical conception and worldview that conceives the relationship between time and space and between man and nature in a different way from the dominant Western worldview. It considers that the universe is in constant evolution based on an indissoluble understanding between time and space. As part of *Buen Vivir*, everything is interconnected and forms a whole: humans, animals, plants and physical and spiritual universe. In this space, the past, present and future live side by side and relate to each other in a dynamic way. Time and space are not linear; they are cyclical. Time passes in a spiral form and the future is intertwined with the past. Every step forward involves going backward; everything is transformed.

The Whole has a spiritual dimension in which the conceptions of the self, of the community and of nature merge and are cyclically linked in space and time. Living considering the Whole implies living with affection, care, self-understanding and empathy towards others. The Whole needs to be favoured, understanding the multiple dimensions and interrelationships of all parts. Learning how to interrelate everything is a challenge. Existence depends on a set of relationships [15].

To engage in *Buen Vivir* it is necessary to value all experiences. Material life is only one aspect of the life cycle. Eating well, drinking well, dancing well, sleeping well, working well, meditating well, thinking well, loving well, listening well, dreaming well, walking well, speaking well, giving and receiving well are important dimensions of life [2]. *Buen Vivir* seeks a balance between human beings, between humans

and nature, between the material and the spiritual, between knowledge and wisdom, between different cultures, and between different identities and realities [15]. It pursues a dynamic balance as opposed to growth. Humans are caregivers, cultivators and facilitators of what Pacha Mama gives them. *Buen Vivir* is the meeting of diversity. It practises multiculturalism. It is to recognize and learn from differences without arrogance or prejudice.

To overcome the systemic crisis in which we live, it is necessary to seek systemic alternatives to the dominant model that complement each other and that project other forms of cultural, economic and social organization. *Buen Vivir* instigates us to decolonize our territories and our being; to free our minds and souls captured by consumerism as a path to well-being. *Buen Vivir* must be a factor that contributes to the empowerment of communities and social organizations, in processes that promote their emancipation and self-determination.

3 Strategic Design as an Agent of Change

By understanding the world according to the epistemology of complexity, we start to think in terms of encounters, interconnections, flows and occurrences. Complex thinking replaces the standard of Cartesian thinking, of linear reasoning and even of systemic thinking, as part of a "post-modern" project, thereby accepting change and uncertainty as essential elements of complex and adaptive systems [12].

From this perspective, strategic design as an area of knowledge changes its process to question the status quo, to discover emerging factors, indicators of change to the environment, and to develop strategies in support of reorganizing the system, in such a way that it adapts and continues to exist. Designers contribute to the rearrangement of the significance of systems in such a way that they maintain their identity and persist, that is, "design as sense maker". As Manzini [8] asserts: "[design] collaborates actively and proactively in social construction of meaning; and therefore, also, of quality, values and beauty". We understand strategic design as a design process that is contaminated by the paradigm of complexity to develop, adapt and evolve organizational strategies, which will allow organizations to adapt to changes in the context, thereby sustaining themselves in the long term [9, 18]. The capacity of design to promote dialogue and collective construction is at the core of this process. In this way, strategic design can be understood as a process of social learning that creates apparatus capable of fostering changes in the culture of organizations and society. It is a process that generates knowledge and that internalizes the strategies of adaptation and even evolution [4].

From this perspective, strategic design is an approach that takes a step towards the study of strategies intended to guide design action and, above all, organizational action towards innovation and sustainability. In this regard, the ability to read and interpret signals emitted by the ecosystem, coupled with planning based on scenarios, is at the heart of design processes, since it makes it possible to consider what is regular, evident and possible, but also unpredictable, a chance, a deviation and a

mistake. Understood in this way, strategic design makes it possible to give shape to the form, function, value and meaning of overall proposals for actions that give shape to societies and organizations run by people. In this way, it transcends the supply of unique products or services, and considers as a systemic whole the values of social groups, the structures of organizations, the differences in socio-cultural contexts, the potential of technologies and networks, the desired meaningful effects and the communication of processes and results [4].

Strategic design has the scope of thinking and doing committed to life: engaging in the development of projects for social and cultural innovation whose meaning is the harmonious interconnection between different ecosystems; identifying potentialities, weaknesses, opportunities or threats, mapping the context and trends; designing scenarios; and lastly by developing artefacts, services, experiences and culture, with the structuring purpose of allowing organized collectives to move forward with their plans to bring more quality to their life and its contexts. As a consequence, we propose that strategic design is a process for creating strategies that generate value for the different actors of a creative ecosystem. Design can contribute towards the creation of socio-technical apparatus, which, based on the constant creative reconstitution of existing technologies, results in the production of new meanings.

The design process is a creative process capable of encouraging the development of relations between the different actors of the ecosystem of innovation. The objective is to support the collective construction of necessary knowledge, through strategic dialogues, with actors and groups holding different roles. Here, strategic dialogues are understood as ways of thinking and action explained through the construction of possible future scenarios, in which it becomes possible to evaluate the different paths for the construction of the solutions [17]. By way of this collective knowledge construction process, it is possible to generate new ideas to foster the targeted systemic changes. It is a process based on transdisciplinarity and, for this reason, one needs to nurture interpersonal relations, prizing to the maximum the diversity of human qualities [5]. It is a nonlinear process, open to interactions with the environment of which it is part, considering the circular nature of the actions and retroactions. It is a process that accepts and aims to deal with uncertainty, randomness, unforeseeability and contradictions. For this reason, it is open to constant exchanges of information with the environment (in this case, the network of interpreters), through dialogical cooperation. This seeks learning through the comprehension of contradictions and differences.

As it turns out, research on design activity focuses on the creative processes allowing designers to critically anticipate future developments in society in order to be capable of creating a device able to affect it from the perspective of the qualification of life contexts. The ways in which designers perceive and experience the world, through their aesthetic and poetic sensitivity or scientific and operational expertise, lead to a specific form of designing. Designers undertake a qualitative and interpretative reading of realities and seek to identify the elements that will be the basis of solutions taking into account aesthetic, cultural and social values besides economic value.

This study considers strategic design as an agent for change for the entire socio-technical system when operating based on social innovation. Manzini [8] presents

a definition for design for social innovation that places expert design as an agent that can be triggered to sustain and guide the processes of social change towards sustainability. In the author's opinion, social innovation is a creative recombination of existing resources for the development of new ways of thinking and doing capable of generating systemic discontinuities in the dominant models. They produce solutions based on new social forms and new economic models.

Manzini [8] points out that strategic design skills enable those involved in the problems to seek multiple perspectives and points of view and to reformulate the issues based on this critical thinking. In addition, strategic design activities can form design coalitions (a project network orientated towards a shared vision and results), through the identification of an appropriate group of partners and the co-creation of common values and converging interests.

Furthermore, the author adds that design specialists collaborate to create an environment favourable to coalitions, that is, to (social, economic and technological) ecosystems, in which the potentials of diffuse design can arise. Design experts must use their design culture (and their characteristic critical constructivism) as a driver to deal with turbulence in the environment in projects aimed at sustainability. In these projects, design experts and diffuse designers establish a social dialogue interacting in different ways (from collaboration to conflict) and at different times (asynchronously and synchronously), with creative and proactive activities. These processes are referred to as co-design.

Manzini [8] calls on design schools to be involved in design research activities, promoting socio-technical experiments, empowering individual communities, institutions and companies towards invention and encouraging the improvement of new ways of being and doing things.

The case discussed in the following section is an answer to this call; based on an exploration of design as activism, in which design activities offer solutions to problems in a provocative way, thereby bringing different views to dominant models. It is a search for results to promote cultural innovation, in which new values and behaviours emerge, thereby breaking with the dominant patterns: Really significant changes are supported by the value of collaboration and improving the quality of life. A theory that underlies this change is *Buen Vivir*.

4 The Case: Sustainable Fashion Ecosystem

Is it possible to trigger an ecosystem? If an ecosystem takes shape in the relationships and practices that are established, how can we trigger the relationships? These questions concerned us at the beginning of this project. We had a clear view that collaboration was a possible way to strengthen local micro-entrepreneurs, who chose to embark on sustainable fashion businesses as an alternative to the dominant system.

In 2016, we identified signs of change in Rio Grande do Sul linked to sustainable production in the fashion industry; more specifically, based on a small set of activist brands that sought in their proposals to promote a culture of sustainability,

by producing devices from waste textiles and by valuing the workforce. Some of them had some peculiar characteristics: they had an organizational model identified as a social business and were members of collaborative houses. We began to propose a series of collaborative encounters, led by design processes to imagine ways of enhancing these fashion initiatives, which, through their discourses, advocated sustainability in production processes. After a series of workshops with these initiatives it was determined that it was necessary to give visibility to the initiatives and use the existing collaborative houses in Porto Alegre as dissemination hubs. 2016 was a difficult year for Brazilian democracy and the group eventually broke up, with some collaborative houses closing their spaces. At the same time, we realized that the message of sustainable fashion was growing in Brazil and brands from Rio Grande do Sul were recognized nationally because of the sustainability of their proposals. Some collectives had emerged to stimulate knowledge exchange and increase the visibility of these sustainable brands (coletivo 828 and coletivo viés).

In our study of some of these initiatives, we understood that for strategic design to contribute to the development of a culture of sustainability through the designing of business models in the fashion industry, designers should pay attention to the ecosystem relationships that are established and to the potential environmental impact that the business causes. In addition, designers should pay attention to the political side of their design work and should consider what they fight for and the effects of meaning for sustainable cultural transformation, both in terms of direct delivery to users (product and accompanying elements) as well as the different forms of the business organization.

Another relevant factor in the context is that the State of Rio Grande do Sul was looking for a way to reduce the deficit in the balance of trade for the fashion sector. Our state has had manufacturers along every step of the fashion value chain, but with the opening of markets, globalization and tax incentives from other Brazilian states, some manufacturers have closed and others have transferred their manufacturing plants to other locations. In 2016, we imported a lot of clothes from other Brazilian states and from other countries. The Federation of Industries and unions for the clothing, textiles and trade industries came together to seek solutions in order to boost local business. Together with the Secretariat for Economic Development for the State of Rio Grande do Sul, they called on Universities and other social actors (SEBRAE, SENAC) to think of a way to give visibility to products from Rio Grande do Sul. They tried to bring back a fashion event that had already existed (RS Moda) as a way of giving visibility to products manufactured in the state and stimulating a boost to local businesses. The hypothesis was that local products did not have visibility and that other states promoted fairs so that retailers could learn about products. They attempted a "business as usual" solution that served small and medium-sized manufacturers, within the same dominant system.

As a stimulus for the discussion on paths forward for the state, we proposed an alternative vision, in which sustainability is the vision to stimulate trade in local products. The high labour costs complained about by employers' unions could be re-signified as the value of being socially sustainable. And from an environmental point of view, the least that could be thought about is a reduction in the carbon footprint

related to logistics costs. There was already a large retail store in the state that has included sustainability in its mission and that has already worked with its network of suppliers to reduce the environmental impact on its production processes. The proposal presented to the group was to co-create a space for social learning about sustainability in fashion, in order to change from a vision of fashion value chain to a value network; a value network with values including ethical and sustainable fashion, fair trade, transparency and the enhancement of local production and small businesses. The proposal was inspired by the innovation design model [14] in order to give rise to an ecosystem providing multidimensional (economic, cultural, environmental and social) value at different levels (users, organizations, ecosystems and society). The intention was to form a design coalition [8], in which members share a vision of what to do and how to do it and decide to do it together. This design coalition, set up by the network of interpreters of the sustainable fashion design discourse, could trigger a collaborative organization that could experiment with other ways of producing fashion: A space encouraging openness towards the possible, the imagination, the courage to risk making mistakes and learning from mistakes and a vision for entrepreneurship based on the empowerment of women. This was a proposal to discontinue traditional ways of doing business and ended up not being accepted by the group that was part of the government meetings.

Understanding that collaboration and social learning are foundational aspects of the design processes that seek the creation of social and technical devices to transform the world, we sought inspiration from organizations that have re-invented themselves to promote social well-being and the transformation of the ecosystem in which they operate to give rise to a creative ecosystem for sustainable fashion in Rio Grande do Sul.

For this, it was necessary to have clear drivers [16] and to experiment in a social innovation laboratory on possible organizational models to stimulate the transition towards a culture of sustainability in the state's fashion industry.

Over the course of six months, we identified different organizations and people related to the culture of fashion sustainability in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy and invited them on a design trajectory to create scenarios and visions of a sustainable innovation laboratory capable of experimenting on a model to stimulate sustainable fashion in Rio Grande do Sul.

Considering that the idea was promising, we sought to connect different actors in society to develop a proposal based on the provocative vision of a social space for learning, collaboration and empowerment of women entrepreneurs. Thus, a strategic design process was initiated, with the various actors who shared this vision, to imagine possible scenarios and paths to implement this idea. Three workshops were held from September to November 2017, with different guests connected to the fashion value chain and sustainability to think about scenarios and visions in order to put the proposal into effect: it was necessary to think about ways of operating, governance and work rules, to disseminate the culture of fashion sustainability and to encourage growth in local production, fair trade and conscious consumption.

Fig. 1 Codesign sessions

In these workshops, we had different groups, with about 50 men and women from different social classes, working in different spaces of the fashion value chain: manufacturing, retail, micro-entrepreneurs, production cooperatives, teaching, creative collectives and researchers (Fig. 1). This diversity of views had the aim of developing visions for future scenarios based on the proposals by Manzini [7]: to bring the future to the present. This means understanding what needs to be done in the present in order to anticipate a possible and appreciable tomorrow; bring forward in the present a way to discontinue the current system of unsustainable production and consumption. Manzini [7] sees in the "activity of strategic design - whose objective is to create new business ideas: a mix of products and services situated in the social and spatial context"—a path towards this discontinuity. For the author, the effects of strategic design processes need to be seen as entrepreneurial initiatives with results in which everyone wins: the producer, the user and the environment.

Based on this methodological premise, we generated two scenarios: sustainable concatenation and *EntreLAÇOS*. The first scenario has a vision of a physical and collaborative environment integrating the different links in the value chain, with governance based on strategic design. Innovation was a necessary premise for the relations between the actors in public–private partnerships, with governance through strategic design; a space thinking about sustainability from an economic, social and environmental point of view, which would operate in a FABLAB format, combining the waste of manufacturing with the possibilities of professional training, entrepreneurship and cooperativism. The second scenario had the vision of being a space for "fashion metamorphosis to change the world": a space for social learning to develop human and social capital through the dynamics of exchanges of abundant knowledge between residents and partners; a space linking a human, transparent and sustainable network, empowering people who pass through it and making feasible initiatives that would not exist on their own. One of the premises was to strengthen small brands, seeking to popularize the products of creative sustainable

brands through ecosystem co-creation, thereby establishing a place where success is measured by the number of lives impacted, people empowered and re-integrated into productive life.

Considering the possibilities of discontinuities in the current ways of interpreting sustainability, beyond the triple bottom line, the second scenario was chosen to be carried forward and to strive ahead as a project proposal based on the potential to develop a new understanding of wealth and well-being, through new forms of organization, founded on collaboration.

A group of strategic designers worked on developing a proposal based on this project vision. It established the following principles of the new organizational model to be created: collaboration, openness, experimentation, social learning, a relationship with universities, companies, civil society and the government, cultural and social innovation as the base, and expansion conceived through dissemination strategies.

We set a vision for creating an experimental, collaborative space capable of popularizing sustainable products of brands with creative designs, through ecosystem co-creation. For this, all the actors would need to understand what contribution they would make to the ecosystem through their resources and capabilities and the relationships established in collaborative design encounters. The ecosystem would create social and technical devices capable of transforming fashion based on three main focal points: production, creation and communication.

Based on these design principles, a third workshop was held to co-create a manifesto expressing the values of the space, capable of connecting all the agents necessary for systemic discontinuity. As a result, the following values were established: relationships of mutual trust, true interpersonal relationships, the strengthening of people, the promotion of diversity, the reduction of environmental impact, co-creation and co-production. The co-created manifesto can be seen in Fig. 2. The manifesto was interpreted by local artists and, based on the illustrations created, cards were produced to be distributed in lectures presented at sustainability events, combining online and offline strategies. The strategy of making a card with an illustration was conceived to prevent the material from going straight to the trash. The manifesto contained a challenge, which encouraged people to share their ways of changing fashion on social media, using a hashtag. This strategy was conceived as a way to evaluate the educational effects of the lectures. The #modamudamundo [#fashion-changestheworld] hashtag was created for two purposes: to decentralize the issuance of the message and to evaluate the dissemination of the ecosystem values. As such, any participant in the ecosystem could send messages representing the collective. The emphasis in these actions was activism in design, in order to spawn openness for questioning so as to spread the culture of sustainability.

After months of activist activities, in the monthly monitoring and co-creation meetings, the group decided to create a profile on the Instagram and Facebook social networks, to put in an appearance on the networks, even if the posting was centralized by one person. It was decided that a university researcher, who had received a scholarship to support the ecosystem, would be responsible for updating the profile. The group would continue to collaborate in determining the guidelines for posting,

Fig. 2 Sustainable fashion ecosystem's manifesto

in contributions inserted in the digital collaboration tools used by the group (Slack and WhatsApp). After two months of creating the Instagram account, we already had 1000 organic followers.

The second device was the setup of the laboratory in a physical space, in the quarto distrito (fourth district) of Porto Alegre, in the collaborative space named Vila Flores, using funds from recurring collective fund-raising and exchanges based on the abundant resources we had to offer: knowledge and action in sustainable fashion (Fig. 3).

At the same time, as activist activities for the dissemination of sustainability culture took place, the group found that it is important to have a physical space in order to be able to enhance exchanges. We chose a space in the city that was consistent with the established principles and values and, through the collaboration of the different participants, the ecosystem was physically set up at a collaborative cultural space called Vila Flores. The costs for setup and maintenance of the physical space were shared among the participants through donations and exchanges. For the maintenance of the space, a recurring financing strategy and the offering of services with reduced costs for supporters were devised. The collaboration and financial support of people who believed in the cause were important to understand whether the path should be followed. The absence of a leader or single financial supporter was an important driver for the space to be open to experimentation through the horizontal collaboration of all participants. In previous studies [13], we identified that the centralization of an investor made the continuity of the collaborative space unfeasible. The physical space intention was to serve as the basic structure for the development of sustainable fashion projects. The main objectives of the space include: (1) creating modelling

Fig. 3 First configuration of laboratory's phyical space

and sewing courses to qualify the workforce of low-income women; (2) developing projects related to sustainable fashion with the surrounding community, (3) being open to local sustainable fashion brands; (4) supporting the creation of new brands; (5) establishing a partnership with Banco de Tecidos [Fabric Bank], as a way to encourage the re-circulation of materials in good condition for use. As a result, the expectation was to give rise to female empowerment, income generation, valuing of the surrounding community, valuing and promotion of local businesses and raising of awareness for sustainability culture.

The sustainable fashion ecosystem proposes a self-managed system with the objective of sharing actions, knowledge and practices of (small, medium or large-sized) fashion businesses, which, specifically because of its aggregative nature and dialogue, takes all the actors involved to another practical level—that of creation: of mutual, on-going and changing collaboration, which is adapted to the time and space of each project and each actor. Ecosystem exchanges can lead to new opportunities for each participant of the ecosystem in order to have sufficient means (and to receive assistance from other actors) to evolve, technically and creatively, through new opportunities that give rise to a new ecological mentality, the development of work methodologies and the application of more effective procedural methods that also include co-design practices and concepts.

Over this period, we have collaborated with different initiatives to spread the culture of sustainability through fashion: Vila Flores, Lojas Renner Institute, Fashion Revolution Movement, Virada Sustentável, Colóquio de Moda em Porto Alegre (Fashion Colloquium in Porto Alegre), Business Professional Women of Porto Alegre and the Biennial of Contemporary Textile Art. Each case of collaboration was a project co-created and led by one of the ecosystem actors (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4 Fashion classes for people in situation of social vulnerability

Throughout 2018, there were lectures, training courses on modelling for a seamstress cooperative, collaborations with Vila Flores Association in exchange for a discount on space, workshops on sewing and product development using waste textile, and workshops on photography, communication online and product exhibition at fairs. We reached an audience of over 600 people at events promoted by different organizations. In the courses, we trained 20 women who live in vulnerable situations. We supported the creation of a female entrepreneur's business, with assistance in the development of visual identity and business design. We reused textile waste from a clothing manufacturer for product development, which was retailed in order to help maintain the space (Fig. 5). We publicized partner brands, with products displayed in the physical space for visitors who circulated at Vila Flores during events. We experimented with different arrangements of the physical space, in order to favour the development of activities. The whole process was developed collaboratively, with different levels of intensity of participation by those involved.

The project for putting in place a sustainable fashion ecosystem is now two years in the making. Throughout this period, we have enhanced local brands by organizing the M.A.R. fair (fashion; art, revolution), by holding courses and lectures that are free or involve a conscientious contribution, by empowering women, and by creating a sewing group that is re-inventing waste into textile initiatives connected to the ecosystem.

Fig. 5 Product developed in collaboration to support the lab space

5 Final Remarks

The project shows us that strategic design processes can trigger design coalitions and stimulate the formation of a collaborative organization capable of promoting new values towards sustainability. The open and dynamic co-design processes enabled the development of the manifesto that represented the value shared by the participants of the design coalition. The manifesto's dissemination strategies enabled other actors to join the collaborative organization (sustainable fashion ecosystem). A collaborative organization needs to be open and characterized by the freedom to connect to (and disconnect from) the life project that guides the collective's actions. This openness and freedom led to several participants passing through the ecosystem during the first year, leaving their contributions to the scenario, vision and manifesto and taking with them learning from the collective construction experience. 2018 was a particularly difficult year for Brazil. Several initiatives ceased to exist and some participants reduced their collaboration. We understand that collaboration in times of economic crisis diminishes because people turn to activities that ensure their survival. On the other hand, we also understand that in political and environmental crises, collaboration strengthens once again into activism. People who are really connected to the

organization's purpose, as expressed by the manifesto, joined in various activities to fight against threats to the desired way of life.

The results of the first year show that, in the words of one participant, "collaboration is a utopia". However, it is a utopia that deserves to be pursued. Collaboration means "giving up on individualities to create a system of bonds with other individuals who share the same dream" [8]. The sense of collectivity can be an intrinsic value of the individual or worked on along the process, which is a cultural innovation for this society marked by individualism. Collaboration among different people requires an openness to the other's point of view, an understanding of the co-dependency relationship that is established for actions to take place and a sense of responsibility so that the ideas generated by the group come to life. In this process, openness to the possible and the possibilities of experimentation caused the collaborative organization to change every month, in order to learn the best format to follow. This way of operating through dialogic strategies thereby testing the possibilities, learning from the responses of the environment resulting from the action and giving rise to new movements based on these learnings was very positive.

We understand that collaboration requires negotiation with others about when and how to do something together, requires openness and goodwill and is based on relational values of empathy, trust and friendship. The projects that were implemented and yielded good results were developed by a group of people who had this set of values and this pre-disposition. With collaboration as the foundation, we were able to experiment with ways of living closer to *Buen Vivir*, in which most of the projects were developed by a group of women who sought, through sustainable fashion, ways to break with the patriarchal system of oppression of bodies and the objectification of women.

So far, we understand that taking action through projects is what connects people and moves them towards action; and that a possible model for action might be a continuous design process, capable of identifying the signs of socio-cultural change and raising provocative questions capable of giving rise to reflection and action in society, through mutant projects, connected to local and global movements to pierce the bubbles created by the algorithms that surround our lives.

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