

Creative Communities and Enabling Systems: Social Innovation in a low-income context.

The case of a low-income community in southern Brazil

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Abstract: Spontaneously, people come together for mutual interests and start processes in the pursuit and implementation of solutions that facilitate access or create resources to improve their living conditions. Consequently, they share knowledge, skills and attitudes to bring adequate responses to the faced situations. This collective and collaborative manner known as Creative Community promotes changes, creating what is new and valuable to its context, enabling systems for Social Innovation.

Creative communities were identified in contexts of rapid change and consolidated industrial economy, with an advanced position in the knowledge-based economy. Through the recombination of existing resources and without expecting radical changes in economic, political or infrastructural systems, they employ creativity and bring innovative daily solutions. Creativity and problem solving are part of human nature, so everyone is able to take the capabilities of design and its strategic look, to organize and make the contextual data understandable in a perceptual and visual way toward a sustainable future.

Brazil is experiencing a historic moment with millions of people rising out of poverty. However, there is still one third of vulnerable Brazilians occupying the base of the social pyramid despite the economic advances. The Brazilian context presents two different and challenging realities: an emerging market with its needs and desires to be met and a developing country that still faces adverse situations, both occurring in a more dynamic and complex world.

The decision was to investigate a micro universe of low income and focus on the case of a handicraft group consisting of women from the south of Porto Alegre, which had just come together in a joint venture. An ethnographic-inspired qualitative research was applied, considering participant observation, in-depth interviews, meetings and a workshop following Strategic Design's guidelines. It was found out that the existence or the characteristics of creative communities were dormant and the methods applied enabled and encouraged creative initiatives of the group. This paper describes the steps taken into awakening creativity in the group and shows how the concepts of creative communities and enabling systems go through different aspects of those developed contexts and how they need to rescue trust, dignity and self-esteem of those involved.

Keywords: *Strategic Design; Innovation; Creative Communities; Enabling Systems; Low Income.*

1.Introduction

Through innovation, an organization creates something new and valuable, bringing competitive advantage to the context in which it operates. In a world where the population reaches almost seven billion people, and the

majority of it is still in conditions of poverty, innovation must meet social needs. A wide range of possibilities open up for adding value and bringing better living conditions to the low-income population.

Innovation can introduce something that is new to this social context and should find new processes, new ways of establishing relationships and accessing the information and resources needed for the development and well-being of the low-income population. Thus, social innovation is the result of a process that involves knowledge and creativity in finding solutions to the faced social problems and accommodating interests focused on the well-being or development of economic enterprises with social focus [14].

In a world increasingly globalized and dynamic, it is difficult to draw a profile of the poor population: along with the world in constant transformation, their features are also ever changing. However, some groups are more vulnerable and more likely to be poor, such as children, the elderly, women and ethnic minorities due to disadvantages or discrimination they face [11]. However, one should not underestimate them and treat them as ignorant beings or mere passive recipients of government aid, but understand their importance and influence as agents of an economic, political and social system [20].

In Brazil, it is estimated that one third of the population still occupies the base of the social pyramid¹, despite the economic advances and the articulation of various government programs introduced in recent decades and that aim at promoting the development of the poorest through inclusion and social rise. According to a study conducted recently by the World Bank², government programs had a small role in raising the income of those who came out of poverty: the income obtained from own work is the main factor for them to leave extreme poverty.

According to DaMatta [6], Brazilian people value personal relationships of affectivity and collaboration, have a social life permeated with multiple realities and use inventive strategies to deal with crisis situations. Even though they have traditional moral values, there is an inexhaustible creative capacity that helps them form their social identity. Brazilians relate to routines and extraordinary situations through these features, dealing with partners and economic changes that have taken place in Brazil and that made it a more dynamic and complex country.

Within the perspective of protagonism associated with collaboration features and creativity, initiatives begin to emerge; in which people assume or are encouraged to take on the role of drivers of change when taking charge of problem analysis, searching and implementing solutions that promote transformation. In the case of low income communities, the Brazilian Government aims at creating new opportunities for local economic development by expanding the market for micro and small businesses, stimulating the creation of co-ops and developments, and supporting individual entrepreneurs through micro-credit policies and the popular and solidary economy.

The Brazilian context of diversity and complexity went through a rapid socioeconomic transformation in recent years, bringing up opportunities and vulnerabilities, which involve a significant number of actors and various elements, which would provide the characteristics of creative communities. Creative communities are not just those where art and culture are the means of social transformation, but those that creatively, collaboratively and collectively, bring innovative solutions to the problems of everyday life without waiting for changes and actions from the government. Given this scenario, Strategic Design, which is a set of social and collaborative processes, can promote dialogue and open paths to innovation and social transformation. Some of the goals of Design for

¹ According to Fundação Getúlio Vargas (Getúlio Vargas Foundation) and Ministério do Desenvolvimento Social e Combate à Fome (Ministry of Social Development and Fight Against Hunger).

² Azevedo, J. P., Inchauste, G., Olivieri, S., Saavedra, J. and Winkler, H. *When Job Earnings Are behind Poverty Reduction*. Poverty reduction and economic management (prem) network . NOVEMBER 2012 • Number 97.
<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTPREMNET/Resources/EP97.pdf>

Social Innovation is to promote the role and the empowerment of those involved, to stimulate networking and build systemic solutions that collaborate with this process by designing enabling systems.

Realizing this is an opportunity to contribute to Design as an agent of social impact, in which low-income communities still demand quality of life and innovation, it seemed appropriate to study the combination of Design and low income, adding knowledge to the notions of Creative Communities and Enabling Systems in the intended field. We investigated a community that featured low Human Development Index, focusing on a group of women living in the southern part of Porto Alegre, as they gathered to promote a joint solidarity economy³ venture connected to crafts. During 6 months, we accompanied their routine; sought the understanding of the context and of the factors that contributed to their business ideas; discussed whether the characteristics of Creative Communities existed or were dormant; and studied which systems could encourage creative initiatives. It was possible to then compare theoretical aspects and check how the concepts of Creative Communities and Enabling Systems go through different steps of those developed and in which contexts they were first observed.

2. It is necessary to innovate

The term *innovation* refers to seeking competitive advantages and defending strategic positions [2], not as a way of predicting the future, but of shaping it [12]. It derives from the Latin *innovatus*, which is a noun from the verb *inovare* meaning *renew, change, do something new* – even though sometimes *innovation* ends up being associated to *invention*. [2]. An invention is only part of a larger process of innovation, whose goal is to develop the practical use of a conceived idea. Thus, innovation is driven by the ability to establish relations [2], detect opportunities and take advantage of them; consisting of not only opening new markets, but also new ways to serve established and mature markets, either through manufactured goods and property, plant and equipment as well as by intangibles spheres such as services and experiences.

Innovation is about creating new possibilities through the combination of explicit, coded, accessible, portable, and tacit knowledge acquired by experience [2]. Currently this knowledge is not restricted to the borders of organizations and line up with the principle of open innovation as there is a stream of knowledge when the resources cross the boundaries of the Organization [5]. While going through deep social changes in the dissemination of knowledge and on the division of labour towards innovation, organizations acknowledge that the most valuable knowledge for innovation lies outside its borders. Therefore, innovative ways to access such knowledge must be available [7].

To characterize a process or a result as an innovation, it is necessary that it meets the criteria of novelty and improvement [18]. Said innovation does not have to be unique, but it should be considered something new by the user in the context of application; should be more effective or more efficient than the existing alternatives; and the processes or results should be more sustainable in economic, environmental and social senses [18]. The conceptual debate of sustainable innovation is recent and has grown sharply, especially in the light of global policies for sustainable development. However, through the analysis of the interrelationships between

³ Solidarity economy is the set of economic activities regarding production, distribution, consumption, savings and credit, organized in the form of self-management. It includes a variety of economic and social practices organized in the form of cooperatives, associations, clubs, self-managed enterprises, cooperation networking, among other, that carry out activities of production of goods, provision of services, solidarity finance, trade, fair trade and consumption. It has been showing itself as an innovative alternative to regular employment and income generation and is considered a response in favor of social inclusion. Source: Ministry of Labor and Employment.

sustainability and innovation, it is observed that there is a vast field for theoretical development evidence in the last 30 years of studies systematically exploring essential empirical concepts and theories on innovation. [2, 13].

Along with cultural changes and the growing concern with sustainability in recent times, innovation is not restricted only to the context of enterprises, physical artifacts or technology: it becomes part of the social context. Thackara [19] argues that from social practices it is possible to produce sustainable solutions. Instead of combining efforts and knowledge with economic and marketing purposes, there is an offset of observing the day-to-day life of people and their issues, when surveying opportunities that bring appropriate solutions to their needs and which cause benefits to society.

In 2003, in the first edition of the Stanford Social Innovation Review journal, the term *social innovation* has been defined as the process of inventing, ensuring the support and deployment of new solutions to social problems and needs. However, to give greater accuracy and understanding, recently the term was redefined as a new solution that is more effective, efficient and sustainable than existing solutions to a social problem and whose values created primarily benefited society as a whole [18].

On the other hand, Manzini [14] explains that the term *social innovation* refers to the way individuals and communities act to solve their problems or create new opportunities, with the assumption that social innovation arises from the base of social processes. Even if there is no technical or formal preparation, those involved in the problems detect opportunities and collaboratively develop solutions to their problems. Therefore, the company develops and produces social innovations as new practices, organizations, rituals, techniques, habits and representations through a collective and collaborative social networking [12]. Thus, social innovations can be considered as social processes of innovation or innovations with a social purpose that create value for society.

To Mulgan et al [17], despite the change of discourse and the intensification of economic and social problems that demand more patent for social innovations, this field is still underdeveloped. The authors describe the evolution of social innovations considering a series of steps such as the generation of ideas, prototyping and piloting projects, and increasing learning; and came to the conclusion that in some sectors essential phases are missing or are improperly supported [17].

Strategic Design can collaborate in this sense by promoting and guiding social innovation processes in a systemic and strategic way. It can add to social innovation by identifying cases, in setting standards, building visions and scenarios, promoting ideas, designing and developing favorable contexts for social innovation.

3. Strategic Design for Social innovation

On one side there is *innovation*, which has its meaning extended – before, it was closely associated with technology and that now it encompasses the concept of social innovation. On the other hand, design finds itself in this transition from form and function to broader systems and processes, extending its goal of innovations in the organizational field to social innovations. Both phenomena, with their collective and participatory processes, meet and have important contributions: Strategic Design adds to the systemic vision; and design for social innovations and social innovations contribute to the participation of the Strategic Design in the social area.

Strategic Design is characterized by an open system with a set of features concerning the understanding of the context of the project, building and defining possible future scenarios and making them visible [20]. It is open and articulates with the system by being open and including different viewpoints, organizing various models of

interpretation. It concerns different disciplinary perspectives and skills in the search for information, knowledge and learning by promoting a dialogue between the many actors involved in the system [20].

Innovation through Strategic Design considers two distinct processes: one traditionally called *design* that refers to traditional product development processes, and a previous process called *metadesign* that is seen as the ability of planning the design process [3]. In order to deal with the current changes and complexity, Strategic Design, through its disciplinary capacity, decomposes said complexity. That way, metadesign acts as a knowledge platform that considers materials and references, tangible and intangible, subjective and objective [8]; based on analyses and reflections before the design phase, by strategic data gatherings of the context. This is a critical and reflexive primary view of the project itself from a scenario of the productive, technological, market, materials, environmental, socio-cultural and aesthetic-formal factors.

Every design parts from a problem - and the problems of real-world practice are not well delineated structures [21]. In fact, they tend to be chaotic and indeterminate structures [21]. Consequently, for the result or the solution to be positive, it is necessary to correct the problem's definition or completely redefine it. Understanding the problem requires effort and its solution requires considerable thought and skills, assuming a multitude of solutions that represent the open character of the design process. Design is then able to provide Strategic Design processes for complex situations through a series of systematic actions aimed at competitive and innovative results.

When we talk about Design, we refer to a social and creative activity which seeks to establish and solve problems collaboratively and strategically. But creativity and problem solving are part of human nature, so everyone is able to design by being taught about the capabilities of design and its strategic look, by being able to organize and to make the contextual data visually understandable, as a path to a sustainable future. We live in a society in which the capabilities of design are for diffused needs. All design [14] networks and form designers must be present, rethinking their role and how they operate [14]. Therefore, Design professionals need to rethink their roles: they will be no longer required to come up with solutions, but to provide scenarios, platforms and strategies to empower and engage creative communities.

4. Creative Communities

Social innovation occurs through changes or reconfiguration of social practices [14] as individuals or communities act to solve their problems or create new opportunities [14]. The group of people involved in these practices is called *creative communities* and they recombine what already exists without waiting for general changes from systems - economic, political or infrastructural. We consider the ability to rearrange existing elements in new and meaningful combinations to be one of the possible definitions of *creativity*. Accordingly, creative communities are people who, in a collaborative way, invent, improve and manage innovative solutions to new ways of life [14]. Although the *creative communities* manifest themselves especially in contexts of rapid change, in which a knowledge-based economy is more developed, they are also found in emerging economies, which are contexts that are quickly changing [14].

Even if the meaning and motivations differ between markets of more mature or emerging economies, Manzini [14] points out that Creative Communities have some common behavioral characteristics: a pragmatic vision of reality, a positive attitude, an intrinsically entrepreneur spirit, courage and a high level of connectivity. In addition, the ideas in which the creative communities are based on are collaborative and promote of social value [4].

If the structure of networked organizations presents itself as an advantage for the development of innovative designs [9], the fact that Creative Communities are part of a network with strong social and emotional connections would be a way of promoting social innovation, since it promotes socialization through formal and informal links among members [9]. There would be a better mobility of knowledge, creation of value [9] and strengthening of the social issue that may be translated into new forms of community and collaborative services [14].

5. Enabling systems

Enabling platforms are defined by EMUDE [10] as a system of technologies, infrastructure, legal structure, governance and political views that are needed to create an environment that facilitates the development of Creative Communities toward social and environmental sustainability [10]. Thus, an enabling solution would be a system of tangible and intangible elements, such as products and services added to communication procedures in a specific context that seeks to create a favorable environment and support a Creative Community in order to obtain a certain result, making it more accessible, effective and replicable [10,14]. Manzini [14] shows that some creative Communities' initiatives are encouraged through the observation of similar experiences or by being handed instruments or procedure to be followed in the initial phase and in the management of the initiative.

In a world where we see more and more people, we would need systems, platforms and services that allow them to interact in a more effective and enjoyable way. The designers' challenge would be to develop enabling tools and platforms that are at the same time functional and suitable to specific contexts [19].

The proposal then is to enable context or people, stimulating, developing and regenerating abilities and competences of those involved in the process in order to contribute to the attainment of the results expected, encouraging them to participate and employ their own capabilities in this process [14]. To Manzini [14], this seems to effectively help creative communities to be born, as well as facilitate their existence and support interventions or enabling solutions could be designed in different scales, involving different groups of actors.

6. Research features

Poverty is not a recent phenomenon already studied by many areas, specially by social sciences and five billion poor people are still around in world that is more complex and dynamic every day, and it requires strategic answers to daily problems. About 60 million Brazilians compound the bottom of the social pyramid in a greatly complex scenario that has got many actors, elements and situations; but it also allows the participation of many points of view that might open a wide range of areas, possibilities and innovation ideas.

The solutions might even come from the actors who are part of said context, even though that requires some sort of support and intervention from outside actors. As it is a complex phenomenon in a complex context, approaching problems in a systemic way through different perspectives might assemble innovative solutions or new sets that can make a difference in the context's reality [19]. Strategic Design could be a part of that change, by promoting and guiding social innovation systems in a systemic and strategic way, identifying cases, establishing patterns, building visions and scenarios – all through spreading ideas, conceiving and developing contexts that allow innovation.

Motivated by knowledge building for the poorest and by how such people seek solutions and face challenges, we have decided to investigate, through Strategic Design's techniques, a low-income micro-universe in the city of

Porto Alegre, identified through the Human Development Index (HDI)⁴. For choosing the community, it would not be possible to just consider expenditure or income as a way of development; nor lack of quality of life. Although Porto Alegre has one of the highest HDI in Brazil, the city shows major social inequality revealing indexes comparable to the most and least developed countries. Through the HDI analysis, the most populated and iconic neighborhoods of the city was selected: the Restinga area. Our research did not have any institutional support or sponsorship, which required great effort and had us face many challenges.

The access to the studied context required contact with local institutions, NGOs, and people who worked in the neighborhood or had some kind of contact that could allow our entrance there. Due to historical issues and to the way the area was occupied by its residents, with accounts of many situations in which they were deceived, there is a great amount of distrust to those who try to approach them. It demanded significant time, but promoted familiarity with the dynamics of the area and with the residents, generating trust. As we needed to deeply comprehend this low-income community, an ethnographic approach could enable understanding of the actors in their natural context, that could reveal their reality and characteristics in order to gather data for our research. It also helps perceiving new possibilities, aiding the development of clearer perceptions and the view of sociocultural processes. In this step, relationships were observed as well as their meeting places, how communication occurred, how knowledge was shared, which were the most used means of communication, how the local institutions were run, what the available resources were, their businesses and perceptions of innovation.

We focused on a group founded by artisan women residents in Restinga that decided to start a joint venture based on solidarity economy. Our research adopted a qualitative approach and relied on observation, in-depth interviews, focus group⁵, participation in the group's meetings and a workshop – all guided by Strategic Design. During the meetings, we were able to observe their interest in starting the venture and analyze behavior, integration and communication among the members and how they aligned with the idea of solidarity economy.

The group was accompanied for a period of 6 months and noticed that the characteristics of a creative community were latent. Therefore, we started to seek which systems could enable and promote creative initiatives. After the exploratory phase – observation and interviews -, whose objective was to gather useful information to direct the bases for the project [3] -, a workshop was held. The crafts group was an active part of it, along with students from the Master's in Strategic Design course and people from different fields, such as Architecture, Gastronomy and Modern Languages who provided heterogeneity that stimulate sharing and idea exchange through creativity, promoting a process of proposals, discussions and other perspectives for the presented problem. It was an informal meeting where the participants felt comfortable while leaving their routines and regular context. The dynamics applied contemplated tools such as brainstorming sessions, polarity graph building and data gathering regarding the actors' needs according to the chosen scenario. These steps aimed at stimulating co-creation, creativity and a systemic view of the issues.

The data collected during our contextual learning, interviews and workshop was compared with the literature used to conceptualize creative communities and enabling systems. In said context – a group based in a low-income

⁴ The HDI considers life expectancy at birth, literacy, school background, attainment, enrollment, and income measured by per capita GDB, in dollars according to purchasing power parity, which eliminates differences in living costs among the analyzed countries. HDI has limitations and does not represent happiness nor indicates the best place to reside in. It is, though, a global reference and a key index for the Millennium Development Goals.

⁵ We performed fifteen non-structured, individual, informal conversations; eight semi-structured in-depth interviews with agents from the neighborhood's institutions and NGOs; focus-group semi-structured interviews with five members of the solidarity economy group (firstly they would be conducted individually, but the group suggested a different approach).

community, such concepts follow different processes from the ones used in the firstly observed developed areas. The results are presented in the following chapter.

7.Results

Through the contextual research, it was found out that in the 60s, with the removal of slums from the central regions of Porto Alegre in a plan of modernization of the city. It was proposed that the families would be temporarily taken to the site until their previous lands were regulated and organized. However, this did not occur and several issues based on the temporary terms emerged. At the new place, there was no planning or infrastructure to meet the families that kept on arriving. Achievements such as street lighting, public transport, water and sewerage, schools and health care only happened when the residents got organized and took action over the course of 40 years of occupation. The current population is of about 160 000 inhabitants and is likely to increase due to the government's housing programs – the place is expected to receive more 75 000 new inhabitants. Its cultural roots are diverse, but fragile, and do not collaborate to the creation of a strong identity, nor improves the image outsiders have of the place. The neighborhood is considered one of the three most violent areas of the city, where children and teenagers are more vulnerable to this problem. There is a number of chronic diseases caused by sedentarism, obesity and oral problems that culminate more than 50% of population over 20 years old, and high rates of alcoholism among men. Low education compromises the qualification of the residents and decreases their chances of employability and income generation⁶. On the other hand, the area is assisted by social policies and the offer of products and services that end up reinforcing dependency while little changing their situation – such actions do not stimulate entrepreneurial or innovative practices.

Our study does not concern Restinga as a whole, but a low-income group who resides in the area. It was noticed, though, that the context influences their behavior. The observed context demonstrates a social complexity similar to other low income communities, with their problems and their very similar dynamics, however some features stand out: mistrust is a strong feature among the residents. It might be explained by their past, when they were deceived with promises of an improving life when transferred to the neighborhood. Even though it was difficult to gain trust as it was something that demanded time and sensitivity, afterwards the residents felt comfortable and free to talk.

This touches one of the main aspects of the creative communities. According to Manzini [14], collaborative organizations are based on collaborative relationships and mutual trust, in which products and services are born of interpersonal relationships between the actors involved [14]. As noted by one participant, the poor have always helped one another and solidarity has always been a condition to social relations. Another important issue is that the group was established from interest for an amount of money that would be made available by the government for the setup of a joint venture. Many of the investors did not know one another and, from this moment, should take on commitments and responsibilities in order to set up their business.

The craft group was formed not by the initiative of the participants, but supported by a NGO that aimed to put together a project consisting of solidarity economy that brought improvements to their conditions of income generation and violence decrease. The craft was motivated primarily by an amount of money that would be made available by the government, but the money would only be released if a business model were designed. The

⁶ Context learning was done through in-depth interviews, group discussion and second hand information analysis (thesis, dissertations, papers and researches from governmental and non-governmental entities).

procedures followed a method, but did not consider principles for the future, ideas from different business models, transdisciplinary looks nor development of policies and innovative solutions that make the business sustainable and competitive in the long term. However, despite the model not being oriented towards innovation, the institution promoted two major impacts in the community: a discussion on solidarity economy and the introduction of a concept of assistance in which participants were to be responsible for the results of the project rather than mere recipients of benefits. The group was supposed to follow a method for implantation provided by the NGO that did not consider strategic views nor stimulated thinking towards different business models, transdisciplinarity or the development of innovative conditions and solutions that could make the venture become more competitive and sustainable in the long term. Even though the NGO's proposed model was not innovative, it promoted two important shifts in the community: group meetings, where they debated on the topic of solidarity economic; and the introduction of the concept of *social welfare*, in which they would be responsible for their own results and not mere receivers of the benefits.

Given these conditions of intervention from top to bottom, with the guidance from NGOs to the production of crafts and handiwork, this could not be classified as a creative community. According to the literature, a creative community is characterized by people who come together spontaneously and collaboratively, creating, improving and managing innovative solutions for new modes of life [15], often rearranging existing elements in new and meaningful combinations. There was also a doubt, because the examples presented for creative and collaborative communities were based on studies conducted in countries of consolidated industrial economy, which had already reached a *plateau* in the most advanced knowledge economy - quite differently from the context that surrounds the case studied in this paper. However, looking at the examples studied by CCSL [4] in Brazil, it is clear that the concept of creative communities researched in Europe is different in emerging countries. In Brazil, India and China, the cases sometimes have to do with the improvement of the living conditions of poor people from rural areas or slums, and in some cases its inception is influenced by discourse from top to bottom, as noted in the example that was part of this study. In this way even though your meaning and motivations are different from those found in Europe, the ideas which they are based on are the same, having in common the ideas of collaboration, entrepreneurship and promotion of social value [1].

Although it was motivated by the investment proposal and encouraged to be undertaken by an external organization, some points facilitated the formation of a creative community in the area: the NGO encourages self-management and leadership of those involved from the moment that the craft group met, and has as its basic principles unity and collaboration. Participants, then, began to get mobilized, organized and started to create new things for their context. When stimulated by the logic of Strategic Design - as noted during the workshop - they thought of new possibilities and new ways of doing their work from the resources available and through a collaborative attitude. Therefore, they have great potential to become a creative community.

When observing and investigating the crafts, we have identified characteristics and attitudes that gave the group potential to become a creative community. However, it would still be necessary to generate an inspiring context and promote ideas, actions and creative ventures. Strategic Design's methods and its tools were used during the research process stimulated creative capacity and extended the group's views on possibilities for solutions to their problems.

Manzini [14] also mentions that, for a creative community to develop, need direct action of the participants is needed, along with their ability and willingness to act. It was observed in a period in which the craft group began

to suspect money would not be released for the project. As were already gathering and mobilizing for building the project, the group remained united and sought for possibilities based on the uncertainty of funding. The participants said they had strength and willingness to act, but they raised a series of issues and obstacles. These elements show intangible and emotional aspects that the groups experiences, such as low self-esteem and the search for dignity⁷. Despite the features presented by the group that indicated its potential to turn into a creative community, there were two weaknesses in the community that are important aspects related to the process of innovation: *knowledge* and *sustainability*.

In an environment of low education backgrounds, in which there are few stimuli in the search for information, few interactions as well as low self-esteem, there is a need for stimulating research, raising generation of and knowledge management. These aspects are indispensable for the group as a way to develop and be trained within an increasingly competitive society. Tacit knowledge becomes collective and more explicit knowledge practices are developed. Therefore, it is important to promote integration, interaction, connection to act together, sharing and socialization of information in this process; facilitating internal and external networks.

Based on the studied in this work, so that low income to acquire knowledge, face-to-face form would be preferable because of its cognitive process. It is important to mobilize the people to participate in the process, but you must also consider the resistance of some people approaching the community and there is no cost of participants of the group. Bauman [1] points through Geoff Dench thought that the obligation to share the benefits among its members, regardless of talent or importance could be characterized as a philosophy for the weak, that is, the Union would reveal the inability to each member individually overcome by its own means. And that this would lead to all those who could flee the community relations. In this case *innovate* would be promoting the engagement of the group, showing that the Union is characterized as a force and a way to deal with their individual desires and aspirations.

In a context where we see little ecological awareness, inadequate disposal of materials, the use of two to three cell phones per person, the community vision as consumers and a significant increase in population, the aspect of sustainability needs to be considered more broadly, in the social, economic and environmental dimensions. Encourage the preservation of the environment; the use of discarded materials by industry and the community are proposed in the scenarios built by the group. By encouraging sharing, loan and exchange instead of shopping, collaboration takes place and generates lower cost for the group's ventures. The act of designing, producing, consuming and discarding should be an act of citizenship that all of the actors involved can contribute - and considering the proportion of the community, any action of sustainability might have a big impact.

The artisans are more focused on products, services and only a few artisans have notion of the meaning of their crafts: how to use them, who their customers are, where to sell. Through the brainstorm session, we realized there was a debate and each word placed on the board were followed by an explanation. When grouped, some words such as *do things*, *new applications of techniques*, *make things different from what already exists on the market*, *quality*, *differentiation* and *do different things* translated the need of them to become more competitive and innovative, and that they needed *references*, *stimuli*, *to develop creativity*, and *knowledge* for that to happen. They believed that a designer would be able to help them in this task, but by associating the words *shape* and *design*

⁷ A brainstorming session was held, focusing on the business they were stimulated to set up. The group was requested to think about their resources (or lack of), what they could exchange and what they could learn in order for their venture to get settled. They then reflected on each of the aspects.

aesthetics limited the designer's contribution to how their products looked. The contribution that Strategic Design, as design culture, can offer to the value chain [3] is much higher. The group managed to appreciate this through the workshop performed and of the tools used showed them that collective processes are richer and the involvement of actors connected directly to the problem brought other perspectives and broadened the discussion. With the adopted process, guided by Strategic Design, the group did not think of the problems as much, but focused on the solutions and which actions they could take.

8.Final considerations

The answers for social problems are not found in the industrial paradigm, but in the configuration of new social practices based in a collective and collaborative way through social innovation processes or innovations that create value to society. Social innovation is a phenomenon that aims at improving contexts and promotes social inclusion, even though these expressions are still considered to be small scale experiments and the adopted analysis focuses on social interactions instead of valuing idea generation, development and management processes. The theories in the Design field are established in developed countries and usually manage different actors than the ones in emerging countries, let alone low-income communities. In the studied context, a few aspects should be taken into consideration, such as the identification and stimulation of the creative practices.

Based on our group, a clear understanding of the group context and their influence was fundamental, as well as the application of a qualitative approach that was able to hear and observe, without any judgment or prejudice that could compromise knowledge building towards complexity deconstruction. In an environment where there is valorization of welfare programs, Strategic Design's logic might be a way of stimulating ideas, enhance creativity, encourage participation and leadership in processes of entrepreneurship at low-income communities. Strategic Design might be good for governmental organizations and NGOs as it is an enabling platform that rescues confidence, dignity and self-esteem. The ideas and the process were led by the participants themselves, who started to see solutions instead of just problems. Instead of thinking about violence or poverty, they noticed they should grow stronger and start building connections in order to generate knowledge and promote innovation.

Challenges related to the approach were faced, especially when considering language and the tools used. Such considerations still need to be discussed and researched about. If we, on one hand, have research tradition in the United States and in Europe, we have also a low-income group that such international methods might not include. Even though the participating group was not illiterate, even if we consider its low educational background, they had a hard time understanding certain concepts, whether they were concrete or abstract, tangible or intangible. They had difficulty in comprehending some ideas, abstract and talk about them – making the room quite silent a few times due to the language used or them now knowing how to express themselves.

The elaboration of researches with similar groups would be useful to develop tools that facilitate communication, that promote coding and decoding of information, that stimulate reflection, thought and imagination, that understand the aspects involved in the cognitive process, that value their ideas and generate new ones, that activate creativity and that make the groups active participants and leaders of the process.

While comparing the theories of Creative Communities and Enabling Systems, used as basic literature for our research, we have noticed different characteristics from those presented by the authors: the way the group got together and issues such as mistrust and low self-esteem could compromise the development of creative communities. It took a while, but it was necessary to establish trust so we could involve the participants in the co-

creation process since they were the knowledge holders. Based on this study, we can consider Design's role as an agent for social transformation. Due to the complexity of the group and the dimension of the problems involved in any low-income community, it is necessary that Design keeps on being present in a continuous, systemic and collaborative way in order to aggregate and build knowledge for new methods and approaches.

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