

## *Design as a Facilitator to Changing Mindsets for Craftmanship Enterprises' Resilience*

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### **Abstract**

Craftmanship is currently promoted as a foremost cultural manifestation, as they represent the heritage, diversity, and creative potential of a society. It also favors the generation of jobs, being characterized as an economic activity and not static, which must adapt to contemporary times and respond to the market and consumer needs. There are glaring gaps in awareness and information among artisans in this field, and design can contribute to mediating these two discontinuous realities. This article presents a case study that analyzes the possibilities of an approximation between design and craftmanship that promotes collaborative processes in a knowledge-sharing scenario to create sustainable products and services. The design thinking approach was used in three workshops involving a group of thirty-nine artisans and three designers, where reflection exercises about artisanal product values, brand building, and business management were carried out. Each participant was encouraged to reflect and collaborate with their peers. The designers took on the role of facilitators for change and innovation, working with artisans to build a new mindset about their craft practice as a business. The focus on changing the mindset of those involved intends to favor the autonomy and resilience of the enterprises by proposing lasting and not ephemeral positive changes, as seen in the current state of the art. This study allowed us to infer that innovation through design happens when the results achieved present new models of individual and collective behavior, influence business models, and establish financial results for those involved.

Keywords: Craftmanship, Strategic Design, Design Thinking, Resilience

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## 1. Introduction

Handicraft is a manual, authorial production with symbolic values and cultural identity. Despite maintaining the use of traditional techniques, it is reconfigured over time. According to Canclini, handicraft is not a static activity, a set of fixed and immutable repertoires. Instead, it results from a collective experience of how people connect with each other, with artifacts and the social and cultural context to which they belong. Craft products are currently being restructured as contemporary social, cultural, and economic processes (Canclini, 2013, pp. 215-238).

In addition to its importance as a cultural heritage, handicrafts provide financial returns and generate jobs with a small investment (Cuéllar, 1997). At the same time, it is a means of subsistence and a factor in the balance of the labor market; it is traditionally an essential complement to the rural economy and works as an informal system for training the workforce and promoting tourism (Pereira, 1979).

According to the World Commission on Culture and Development Report of UNESCO (Cuéllar, 1997), crafts represent about a quarter of micro-enterprises in the developing world. In Brazil, manual work is an income option growing gradually and accounts for 2.8% of the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It is an activity that employs around 8.5 million people and earns R\$ 28 billion per year (MINC/IBGE, 2006).

Artisanal practices are an asset of great importance for nations. Cultural, social and economic values are related in their materiality. However, with the advent of industrialization and the growth of mass production, handicrafts lose their value as consumer goods. The demand for handcrafted products on the market over time has drastically reduced, and handicrafts are no longer a profitable activity, discouraging current and future workers.

However, the escalation of industrialized products' consumption and the current lifestyle of most social groups brought the planet to a difficult moment of crisis. Actual models are no longer compatible with the available natural resources, which are no longer sufficient to guarantee the sustainability of life on the planet. Fundamental issues concerning the balance of natural and cultural systems and the quality of life are highlighted. New forms of organization and lifestyle will be increasingly necessary (Manzini, 2008).

The events of recent history show that change is already underway. We are transitioning from a system based on manufacturing material goods to another directly related to information and knowledge. In this scenario, Manzini (Manzini, 2015) observes a new path in the awakening of a culture that unites the local with the global and the emergence of resilient infrastructures capable of transforming the work organization as they bring production closer to consumption, the 'distributed systems', which appeared and spread in different innovation waves.

In this new scenario, the valuation of local production, resilient systems, creative communities, and small-scale production stand out as alternatives for a viable future, bringing a new opportunity for crafts' protagonism.

## **2. Approaches between Design and Craftsmanship**

The UNESCO strategy for crafts aims to preserve and strengthen handicrafts in promoting approximation and dialogue between crafts and design. It presents the designer as an interface between tradition and modernity, helping to adapt artisanal production to the needs of life, and bringing handicrafts as a predominantly rural activity to the increasingly urban, if not global, market (Trust, S.A., & UNESCO, 2005).

In Brazil, measures of approximation between design and craftsmanship have increased since the 1980s, consistently generating income or bringing visibility to craft products, generating more or less lasting results without changing the sector's status quo significantly. The agents are usually governmental or educational institutions, and the predominant focus is developing products and transmitting knowledge. Despite the highly positive results, they are usually ephemeral and often disappear at the end of the action (Borges, 2012).

## **3. Strategic Design**

From the beginning of its existence, when it was conceived as the art of shaping products for mass production, the design was firmly embedded in consumer culture (Margolin, 2002). Up to the present, it is still cited by many authors as part of the problem faced with the environmental crisis (Manzini, 2008; Papanek, 2005).

Over time, it is possible to identify significant changes in how design relates to the market and society. Progress has been made that ranges from industrial design to communication design and which today makes room for service design and the strategic approach.

Several authors discuss the new possible paths. Manzini (2015) highlights designers as drivers for social innovation and sustainability. Krucken (2008) highlights the design challenges and opportunities, reinforcing the need to rethink project culture and practice and its intervention in society. Cardoso (2012) recognizes design as a field of knowledge in evolution, which focuses its importance precisely on its “capacity to build bridges and forge relationships in a world increasingly torn apart by the specialization and fragmentation of knowledge”.

The design came to be perceived for its ability to create, in addition to products, new meanings, services, business models, or experiences that meet people's needs (Brown, 2009; Meroni, 2008). This systemic approach, related to the product system and not just the industrial product, is known as strategic design.

The strategic design process is also characterized by being intensely participatory, requiring stakeholders' systematic involvement, and allowing the interference of various specialties, techniques, technologies, and knowledge. The strategic approach to design is to take advantage of these activated relationships (Meroni 2008).

The set of key design capabilities for strategic actions are: (1) the ability to see, understood as the ability to read contexts and systems-oriented; (2) the ability to predict, understood as the ability to anticipate future criticism and (3) the ability to show, understood as the ability to visualize future scenarios (Zurlo, 2010). Besides helping visualize possible future scenarios, the strategic design uses this ability to organize and make context data compatible with understandable options, giving meaning to new forms of organization.

Based on this context, the following case study presents a methodological proposal for bringing design and crafts together based on the strategic approach of design, which uses the principles of collaboration and design thinking. This proposal was designed to aim to reach permanent and not ephemeral changes, focusing on empowering artisans to manage their businesses in a resilient way.

#### **4. Case Study – Craft Design Rio Project**

The case study presented here describes the context of the Craft Design Rio project, an initiative of the SEBRAE Reference Center for Brazilian Crafts – CRAB (<https://crab.sebrae.com.br/>), developed in partnership with the Centro of Innovation, Design, and Research of the Instituto Europeo di Design in Brazil - CRIED (<https://cried.com.br/>). The project was carried out between January and June 2017, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, with the participation of 59 artisans, artists, and designers from Rio de Janeiro, pre-selected by SEBRAE - Brazilian Service of Support to Micro and Small Companies. Companies.

CRAB is a Brazilian institution created to work on the repositioning and qualification of national handicrafts. Its mission is to expand the commercialization of pieces produced by Brazilian artisans. It works, among other fronts, in developing business training actions for artisans and improving the production chain and qualification of artisanal activity.

In 2017, CRAB approached CRIED, intending to develop a project to strengthen local handicrafts. Based on demand, a customized proposal was developed, based on processes of co-creation of values, committed to results focused on the local context.

The Craft Design Rio project was an initiative that brought together a set of Strategic Design concepts, methods, and tools aimed at recognizing, encouraging, and identifying new value opportunities for contemporary craft production in the state of Rio de Janeiro. Its general objective was to reinforce the exclusive combination of creative knowledge, techniques, and technologies already practiced in the state.

It consisted of training and consultancy workshops in design-oriented innovation processes, translated exclusively into the context of regional artisanal production. The workshop aims to strengthen the collective knowledge bases and favor constructing a new way of thinking about artisanal practice, focusing on the intrinsic values of the product, the territory, and the authors.

The expected results at the end of the program were:

- Provide the participants with Strategic Design and Innovation training, aiming for the collaborative construction of a new mindset;
- Improved competitiveness of the regional products against national and international competitors;
- Improvement in the development processes of new products and new market opportunities using design thinking in its strategic approach;
- Systemic improvement of handcrafted products' design processes, production arrangement, brand management, and marketing of micro and small crafted based business in Rio de Janeiro;

The process was organized into three phases: (1) Diagnosis and Planning, (2) Workshops, and (3) Results (Figure 1).

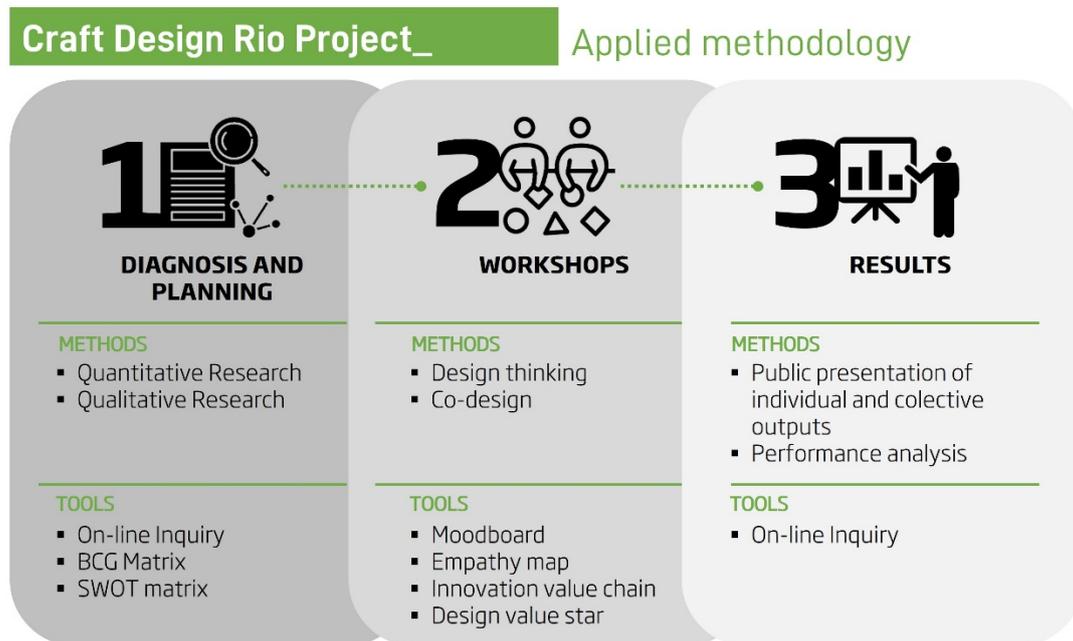


Figure 1 – Craft Design Rio Project's phases (Source: the author)

#### 4.1. Phase 01 – Diagnosis and planning

The first phase of the activities involved carrying out a diagnosis of the productive and creative potential of artisans in the state of Rio de Janeiro. This initial research aimed to outline the state of the art of local artisanal production, covering the following aspects: Issues related to organizational structure, Product and manufacturing process, Raw material, Management, Market positioning, and issues related to the perception of the business itself.

The following results were expected from this research:

- Identification of territorial competencies and contextualization of artisanal knowledge;
- Analysis of the handcrafted production systems know-how;
- Identification of cultural bases for competitive growth in local, regional, national, or international markets suited to each producer profile;
- SWOT analysis on the productive and creative design potential of artisans and micro-entrepreneurs in Rio de Janeiro;
- Strategic mapping of opportunities: market scenarios, innovation, and sustainability

The methods to collect information were quantitative and qualitative research, applied through an online survey from 09/Feb/2017 to 15/Mar/2017. The participating target audience was defined by the partner institution SEBRAE, consisting of 59 professionals registered in its database as craft professionals. Professionals were invited and expressed interest in participating in the initiative.

After collecting information, an analysis of the results followed. As it is a large and diverse sample – in terms of demographic profile and professional performance – it was decided to organize three smaller groups to enable collaborative activities to be carried out with greater

individual use. Two classification criteria from the Term of Reference –SEBRAE System’s Performance in handicrafts (Mascène & Tedeschi, 2010) were used to define the groups and order particular demands.

The first, 'Handicrafts categories', refers to the production process, its origin, use, and destination, and suggests the organization of handicraft production in the following categories: Handwork, Indigenous handicrafts, Traditional handicrafts, Cultural reference handicrafts, and Conceptual handicrafts. The second criterion, ‘Product types’, refers to the type of use and proposes classification into six areas: Adornments and accessories, Decorative, Educational, Playful, Religious, and Utilitarian.

These two criteria were used to identify similarities that enabled the organization of three working groups with similar interests, furthering a synergic and creative environment for the workshops.

#### 4.1.1. Inquire

Fifty-nine artisans responded to the survey. From this sample, the majority (62.7%) are legally qualified as 'MEI' (individual micro-entrepreneur) and have only one person working (59.3%). The predominant gender is female (86%), and most companies are located in the Metropolitan region (46%). The craft practice is the only income source for 58% of respondents. The other 42% have another source of income.

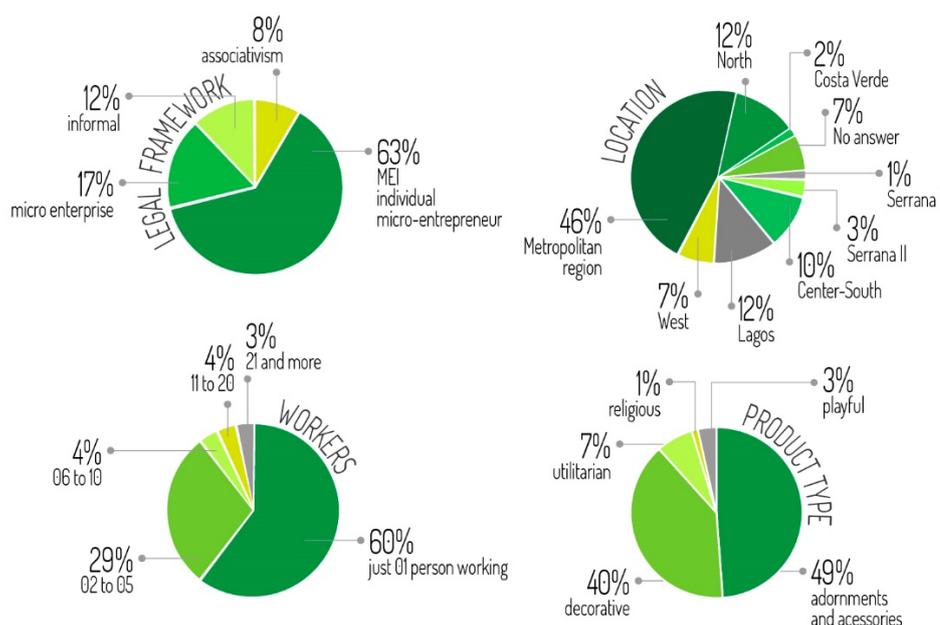


Figure 2 - Inquire results (Source: the Author)

As for the type of product produced, the majority (49%) produces Adornments and accessories, and 40% decorative products. The other categories appear less represented: Utilitarians 7%, Religious 1%, and Playful 3%.

#### 4.1.2. New category – Crafted design

Different characteristics were found in some organizations during the analysis of products to categorize them according to the SEBRAE criteria previously presented. It became challenging to consider the five suggested categories, especially regarding the motivation of the creative process.

In most craft organizations, the creative process starts with a manual skill, where the creator explores their capabilities and materials and arrives at a range of products from this technique. The products maintain the predominance of manual processes (as these are the central basis of their creation) and aesthetically communicate the 'handmade' appearance.

In other cases, it can be seen that the creative process starts from a concept or a target audience's need. Then concerns arise with the material, technique, and manufacturing processes to design a range of products that meets the initial concepts. This second way of developing products is very close to the design's creative process, sometimes involving manufacturing processes, molds, and tools. The product often departs from the 'handmade aesthetics', despite being predominantly handmade.

Therefore, a new classification was created to identify these differences and organize these groups in a particular category:

*Crafted Design* – Objects produced from a deliberate project to affirm a lifestyle or cultural affinity. The creative process starts from a concept and explores techniques, materials, and typologies to express it. It has originality, often demonstrating the predominance of a specific artisanal technique or material. It demands to manufacture using molds or tools or involving people who know only part of the process. Usually, the person in charge has creative professional training, and the products may not express the aesthetics of the 'handmade' product.

The groups were organized considering this new category (Figure 3):

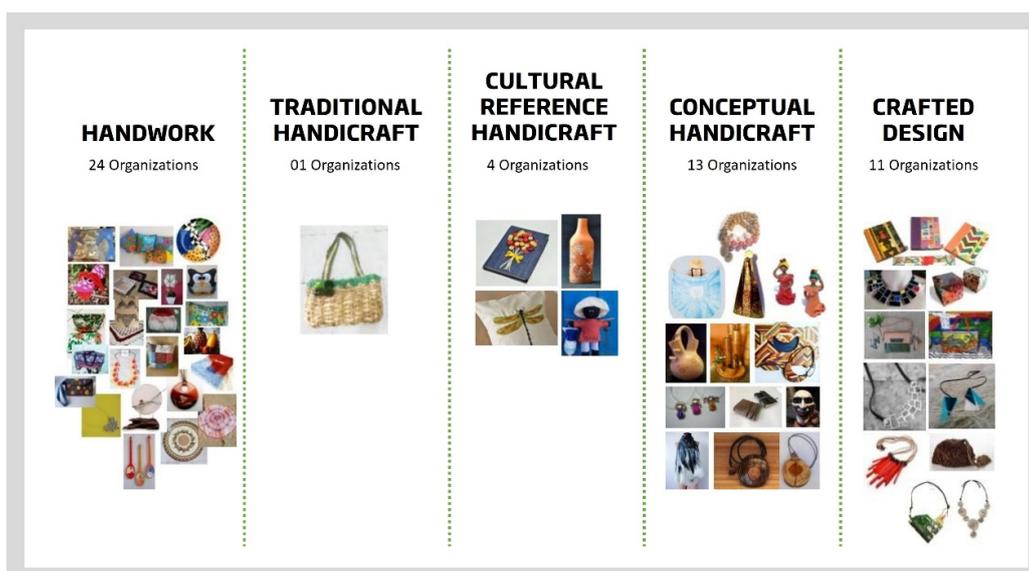


Figure 3 - Classification of productive artisanal organizations according to "Handicraft categories" (Source: the Author)

### 4.1.3. SWOT Matrix

SWOT Analysis is a tool to assess an organization's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. It seeks to understand how the organization behaves concerning competitors, analyzing factors inside and outside the organization to determine whether the defined business objectives are achievable or not (Kumar, 2012).

This tool was applied to identify how artisans understand their business and the existence or not of a strategic vision. In preparing the matrix (Figure 4), respondents were asked to cite at least three items for each question about their business: Strengths (that you already have), Improvements (that need to be done), Opportunities (that you have not yet explored), Threats (which can hamper your performance).

- *Strengths:* Responses focused on product qualities (quality, finishing, exclusivity, originality, design) were cited 99 times. Then business qualities with 37 citations (service, machinery, marketing, organization, punctuality) and many cite personal qualities as strengths, cited 36 times (creativity, skills, good taste, 'belief in my work', 'love for what I do').
- *Improvements:* It was possible to identify four predominant subjects in 155 responses: 'Business' – 67 citations (regarding infrastructure, branding, equipment, planning, increase in production), 'Sales' - 50 (sales increase, marketing, online sales, fairs and events, export), 'Product' - 30 (new materials and processes, design, packaging, finishing, innovation), and 'Personnel' - 08 (qualification, professionalization, time management).
- *Opportunities:* 111 responses were collected, and the predominant subjects were: 'Sales' (cited 68 times), 'Products and production' (17), 'Strategy' (12), and 'Marketing' (8).
- *Threats:* The subjects were diverse. In general, artisans cite weaknesses in their own business as threats, indicating a lack of vision about the external factors influence as a determinant for the good performance of the business. Some patterns can be highlighted: Raw material (cited 10 times), Competition (08), crisis (07), Logistics (04), and Outsourced suppliers (04). Subjects related to weaknesses of the business itself: Management problems (05), Low productivity of artisanal work (04), lack of capital for investment (07), lack of dedication (02), and health problems, since usually the artisan is solely responsible for administration and production (03).



Figure 4 - SWOT Matrix (Source: the Author)

As a diagnosis conclusion, it is possible to outline the group's profile as highly diverse. Different business structures were identified, always determined by the profile and repertoire of the craftsman responsible and the type of artisanal practice on which they are supported.

In general, it is possible to notice that artisans feel comfortable in matters related to their product and work, citing as strengths internal factors related to their craftsmanship and the product, and as weaknesses external factors related to business management and the marketplace. The idea of artisanal practice as a business is still tenuous for the interviewees, and the most significant challenges faced are related to business management and sales.

#### 4.1.4. Competitiveness Matrix

The competitiveness matrix (Best, 2010) was used to evaluate two criteria for building a brand positioning. The horizontal axis evaluates how the creative process is built, whether based on the mastery of a technique or if it starts from a conceptual intention of transmitting a symbolic, historical or cultural meaning. On the vertical axis is the identification of the manufacturing process, evaluating the predominance of manual and industrial processes (Figure 5).

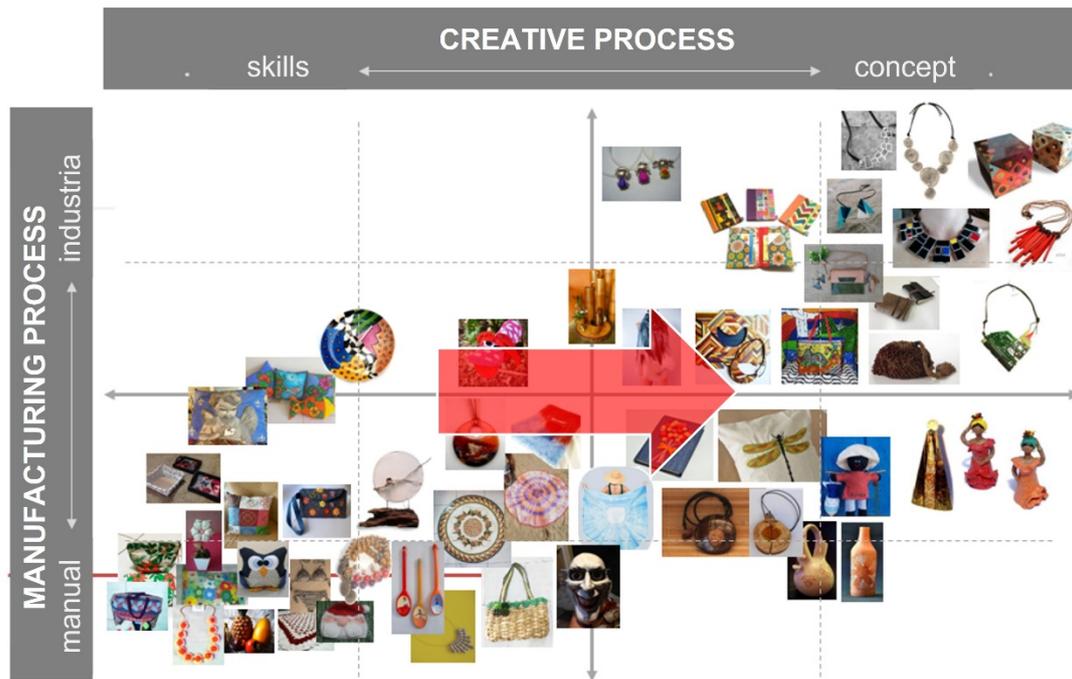


Figure 5 - The competitiveness matrix. The red arrow represents the project goals: leading participants to a more conceptual creative process (Source: the Author)

By analyzing the visual result of the matrix, it is possible to understand the brand positioning of the organizations and how and with whom it dialogues in the market.

On the horizontal axis, the more to the right the brand indicates that the creative process is based on concepts. The organization shows a coherent narrative through its product line, which reinforces its identity, leading it to precise positioning in the market. On the other hand, when the creative process is anchored in the aspects of reproduction of a craft technique, and there is no straightforward conceptual narrative, the more weakened the identity (sometimes non-existent), leading to a handicap in market positioning.

After the diagnosis, it was possible to identify a complex scenario resulting from the diversity of the sample. There were different products, artisanal technics, and markets. The workshop's strategy would be to bring this diversity closer and create a friendly sharing environment so that participants could learn from each other.

The participants were organized into three groups to establish a common ground. The setting up of the working groups took into account affinities in their practices: affinity for product typology (accessories, jewelry, and bio-jewelry), technique, and raw materials (Fabric, Patchwork, and creative sewing), and product's type of use and application (Decorative and utilitarian objects).

#### 4.2. Phase 02 - Workshops

After carrying out the diagnosis that allowed the initial understanding of local production, and the organization of groups gathered by the affinity of techniques, products, and materials, phase two followed the realization of the training, integration, and inspiring workshops.

Specific approaches and content were developed, alternating moments of reflection on subjects such as Craftsmanship, Creativity, Innovation, Design, and Branding, and moments of practical exercises, exchanging ideas and ideation. The themes have been selected due to their potential collaboration for developing a new mindset about the craft practice, leading the participants in moments of intense reflection about their challenges.

The ideation phase was challenging since each artisan had his business as an object of reflection. In this diverse scenario, where there is no single answer, the way out was to apply a non-linear method that would enable participants to deal with the complexity and understand the potential for transforming contexts.

In project environments with no linear or pre-defined methodological steps and scenarios that cannot be predicted, design thinking tools are a powerful resource that helps identify the most appropriate solutions for each process step. It is a fast-paced, iterative process that can be applied to even the most confusing business challenges, and it is a strategic activity that identifies clear opportunities for action (Brown, 2009; Ingle, 2013)

Figure 6 presents some strategic design tools to lead the participatory analyses and discussions.

- *Moodboard*: collages used in design to graphically portray a concept, allowing the elaboration of a consistent visual horizon that works as a frame for the project (Bürdek, 2010).
- *Analysis of the innovation value chain*: Identify stakeholders, weaknesses, and strengths of the value chain at all stages of the artisanal product's development, production, and commercialization.
- *Design Value Star*: Analysis of the value attributes of the artisanal product (Krucken, 2009).
- *Empathy Map*: Deepen knowledge about the target audience, developing a better understanding of the environment, behaviors, concerns, and aspirations (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2011).
- *Personas*: Outline the target audience's profile, in addition to sociodemographic characteristics (Miaskiewicz & Kozar, 2011).

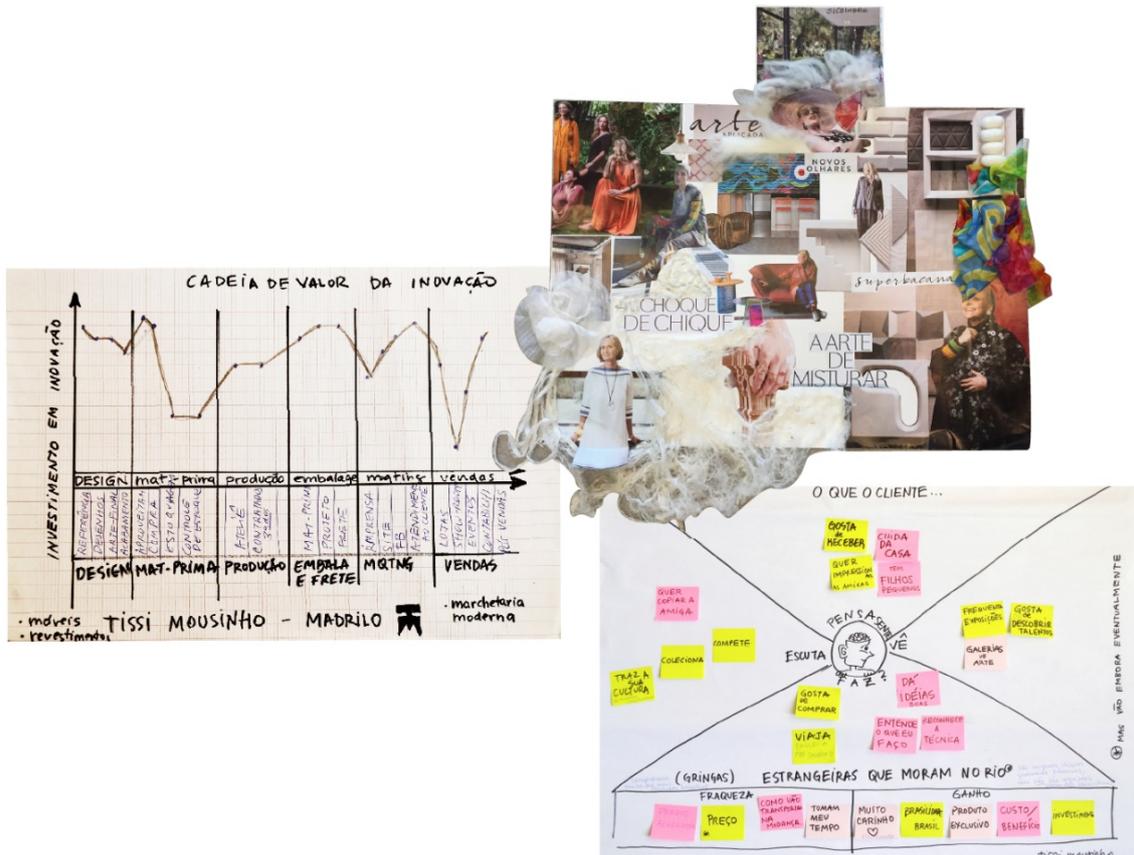


Figure 6 - Some of the strategic design tools applied in the workshop  
(Source: provided by the authors)

All activities were carried out collaboratively, with participants divided into small groups as they performed each exercise and shared the results with the whole group (*Error! Reference source not found.*). At the same time, facilitators pointed out relevant topics and sparked discussion. The group proved extremely participatory, transforming the moments of sharing results into a rich knowledge exchange. The artisans were able to learn from each other by identifying common problems and contributing to their strengths.

The role of the facilitators in this context was to conduct the discussion topics systematically and objectively, contribute to the formation of strategic thinking and promote an environment of synergy.

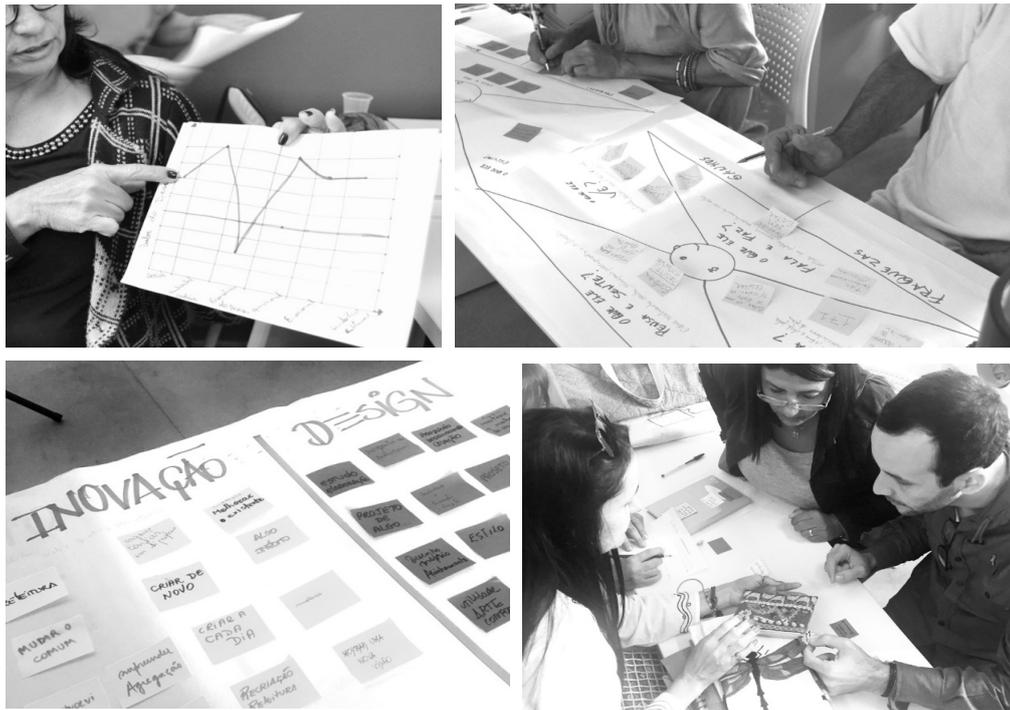


Figure 7 - Images of the collaborative activities carried out in the workshops  
(Source: the Author).

#### 4.3. Phase 03 – Results

After the workshops, the final challenge was launched: each participant had to present, within a month, a transforming proposal for their craft-based business. The proposal should directly result from the reflections carried out during the work week. No formats or defined tasks were stipulated since the impact of the content discussed could affect each business in different ways.

Participants were asked to identify, among the exercises performed, subjects that stood out as great opportunities for innovation in their business and to present a proposal based on a new way of thinking. The objective of this final exercise with a broad scope was for each professional to look for possible qualitative leaps in different areas of their work based on the reflections carried out in the workshop.

The final meeting took place within a month as a temporary exhibition open to the public. Each participant received 1m<sup>2</sup> to expose their proposal, and the guests walked around the space enjoying the explanations. Thirty-six participants were present, and the exhibition lasted six hours.

The results were diverse and in different business contexts: product mix diversification to reach a new audience or market niche, new social media strategy to reinforce branding, quality improvements on product components and finishing, brand redesign, new packaging, new raw materials, partnerships between artisans for new products, designing new products with symbolic and cultural values, implementation of collaborative work in the artisanal organization and finally, what most represents the strong assimilation of the value of collaboration by the participants was the proposal to create a collective of artisans.

The ‘Qoletivo Qraft – Qoletivo Regional de Artesanato e Formação de Talentos’ was proposed by one of the participants and had the initial engagement of 20 participants, who committed to participate in the enterprise on the day of the closing event.

The collective work allowed the artisans to organize a collaborative store in ‘Fabrica Behring’, a well-known open space for creatives in Rio de Janeiro where artists, artisans, and designers have their ateliers open to visitation and product sales. The group also participated in the IED Fashion Sunsets exhibition, held at the IED São Paulo headquarters in July/2017. Since then, the group has remained united, despite changes in members and location. Some artisans left the group, others started to join, and up to the date of writing of this paper (July/2022), it remains functional under the new name of ‘Espaço Colabora Nobrega’ (<https://www.instagram.com/colaboranobrega/>).

## **5. Impact evaluation**

Regarding the impact assessment, despite the diverse nature of the results and the difficulty of a quantitative assessment, it is possible to identify three predominant movements in the final proposals:

The *collaborative movement* is reflected in several of the results presented, such as new products developed through partnerships between artisans, implementation of collaborative work in organizations, and the foundation of an artisans’ collective. For this movement, the importance of the initial careful group organization to provide a collaborative environment where members could find affinities and develop empathy was fundamental.

The *empowering movement* can be highlighted in the artisan's change of mindset about what design is and how the application of its concepts can benefit their work, not just in designing products but in managing their business. Through the results, we can notice the artisans identifying their weaknesses and creating new strategies, such as redesigning a brand or branding, creating new packaging, and designing new products with local values inspiration or specific customer needs. This shift in perception indicates that they can probably do it autonomously in the future.

Furthermore, the *innovation movement* is identified in all the proposals. The combination of innovation processes with tacit knowledge and the focus on meeting user expectations made it possible to generate tangible and intangible values, which translated into different strategic results for each participant.

## **6. Conclusion**

In general, it is possible to perceive in all participants a great passion for their work, a tendency towards individual work, a great disposition for the creative process and manual work, and great difficulties in business management, strategic positioning, and sales.

According to the diagnosis carried out for the project, the handicraft in Rio de Janeiro is diverse in terms of technique, cultural repertoire, and stages of development. A new form of craft practice was identified in the group of participants, not foreseen in the SEBRAE Terms of Reference, which indicates the emergence of a craft practice based on a creative process very similar to the design process, which starts from a concept or the need to a target audience.

The complexity in this diversity, added to the marginal positioning reserved for craft work in today's society, configures the demand for differentiating methodologies and innovation and design tools, stimulating the search for a new positioning and new social, environmental, and economic results for craftsmanship practices.

In this way, the "Craft Design Rio" project, organized by SEBRAE and IED – Istituto Europeo di Design, presents itself as an initiative aligned with current demands. It seeks to promote the culture of innovation to improve the process of adding value to the artisanal business, boosting quality and competitiveness facing new market parameters, using strategic design tools and methodologies.

The high productivity and high degree of tangible innovation manifested in the final results and the intangible gains identified in increasing the understanding of the business and identifying existing challenges prove the great potential of actions that brings together strategic design and craftsmanship.

The methodology designed for the Craft Design Rio Project can be characterized as a "Transforming Mapping" as it allows to collect of information about the local artisanal production and the creative potential in the region, provide contact between professionals and networks articulation, and create a new way of thinking.

At the same time, it works as a training program and research tool that can be the basis for developing new development actions, featuring a vital pillar to be considered in a sectoral development program for Brazilian handicrafts.

For future actions, it is possible to outline actions based on three pillars with a focus on *Preserving*, *Developing*, and *Displaying* Brazilian handicrafts, seeking to contribute to the expansion of work opportunities, strengthening and autonomy of groups and organizations, and implementing innovative models and processes in the sector.

This set of developments could consolidate results and generate a continuous cycle of sectoral innovation. It could be applied and reapplied according to the identification of local demands, thus fostering the development of the sector as a whole, guaranteeing actions for the preservation, development, and dissemination of handicrafts as an alternative for economic development and cultural valorization.

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