

## Fundamental Research Paper

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# WHY REFASHION? FASHION, POETICS AND HYBRIDIZATION OF CREATIVE METHODS FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE.

*Porquê Refashion? Moda, Poética e Hibridização de Métodos Criativos para um Futuro Sustentável.*

## ABSTRACT

Although in the last 10 years collaborative design and design for sustainability processes have been increasingly used, there is still a great lack of knowledge and precision in the development of precise collaborative methodologies and holistic applications of sustainable hybrid techniques that favor the development of co-creative and generative circular processes. The paradox of fast fashion and the pursuit of modernity, coupled with the need to care for the earth's resources in a sustainable manner that includes social, economic and environmental impacts, is a difficult dilemma to solve. Some studies have proposed exploring upcycling circular design processes; however, their methodological limitations and the absence of a clear and oriented design thinking process restrict them to seek the inspiration from textile waste in an artisanal perspective. These development processes are often imprecise in their methodology and accidental in their creation process, which generates little credibility, communicative security and didactic replication in the classroom. In addition, the lack of precision and fine-tuning brings them closer to artisanal technical methods, lacking rigorous narrative logic and holistic design thinking. This research explored the design for sustainability processes, focusing on finding collaborative methodologies of rigorous design thinking that would help students explore and strengthen their individual and group identities by applying sustainable hybridization techniques throughout the design process. The focus was on how we educate designers for a sustainable and collaborative future. We built a collaborative methodological conceptual model of sustainable approach that was tested in different projects over different academic years. The results demonstrate that the implementation of collaborative methodologies with sustainable approaches in the application of specific eco-design techniques and the construction of a group identity based on research, assignment analysis, and the use of

## RESUMO

Embora, nos últimos 10 anos, os processos de design colaborativo e design para a sustentabilidade tenham sido cada vez mais utilizados, ainda há uma grande falta de conhecimento e precisão no desenvolvimento de metodologias colaborativas precisas e aplicações holísticas de técnicas híbridas sustentáveis que favoreçam o desenvolvimento de processos circulares co-criativos e generativos. O paradoxo da *Fast Fashion* e a busca pela modernidade, juntamente com a necessidade de cuidar dos recursos da Terra de maneira sustentável, que inclui impactos sociais, econômicos e ambientais, é um dilema difícil de resolver. Alguns estudos propõem a exploração de processos de design circular de *upcycling*, mas as suas limitações metodológicas e a falta de um processo claro de pensamento orientado para o design, condiciona-os a buscar inspiração nos resíduos têxteis encontrados, trabalhando sob uma perspectiva artesanal. Esses processos de desenvolvimento geralmente são imprecisos na sua metodologia e accidentais no seu processo de criação, o que gera pouca credibilidade, segurança na comunicação e replicabilidade didática em sala de aula. Além disso, a falta de precisão e aperfeiçoamento aproxima-os de métodos técnicos artesanais, sem uma lógica narrativa rigorosa e sem um pensamento holístico de design. Esta pesquisa explorou os processos de design para a sustentabilidade, com foco em encontrar metodologias colaborativas sustentáveis de pensamento de design rigoroso que ajudem os alunos a explorar e fortalecer suas identidades individuais e coletivas, aplicando técnicas híbridas sustentáveis ao longo de todo o processo de design. O foco está em como educamos os *designers* para um futuro sustentável e colaborativo. Assim construímos um modelo metodológico conceitual colaborativo de abordagem sustentável, que foi testado em diferentes projetos ao longo de vários anos acadêmicos. Os resultados demonstram que a implementação de metodologias colaborativas com abordagens sustentáveis na aplicação de técnicas específicas de ecodesign e na



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creative techniques and tools that generate reflective learning contribute to the collaborative methodologies and to the effective implementation of this methodology in the teachings of fashion design with a circular approach.

construção de uma identidade de grupo baseada em pesquisa, análise de tarefas e uso de técnicas e ferramentas criativas que geram aprendizagem reflexiva contribuem para as metodologias colaborativas e para a implementação efetiva desta metodologia no ensino do design de moda com abordagem circular.

## KEYWORDS

Co-Creative Fashion; Sustainable Fashion; Fashion Co-Design; Methodology of Fashion, Collaborative Apparel Design.

## PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Palavras-chave: Moda Co-Criativa; Moda Sustentável; Co-Design de Moda; Metodologia de Moda; Design Colaborativo de Vestuário.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

For more than 40 years, numerous theories and models have been developed with the aim of improving the complex resolution process, mainly in the first generative phases of design faced by companies, designers and design school students. This stage is of special interest since in any design project creative exploration is essential for the successful search for coherent and innovative solutions in projects; and therefore, the success and rigor of the approaches and the application and implementation of creative techniques and tools that motivate and encourage reflective learning and its consequent achievement is one of the greatest challenges for the designer.

Numerous researches (e.g., Cassidy, 2011; LaBat and Sokloswski, 1999; Cross, 2004; Popovic, 2004; Difffenbacher, 2013, DeLong, Casto, Min and Gonku-Berk, 2016; Han, Chan, Venkatraman, Apeagyei, Cassidy & Tyler, 2016) have pointed out the importance of a good start at the generative moment and the exploration of coherent and rigorous creative ideas that favor the resolute, creative and innovative development of the project, these being key aspects in the evolutionary development because they affect the quality in the successive phases of development and the quality and success of the final results.

Most of the after mentioned researchers have supported the need to employ a wide range of creative techniques and tools that enhance generative design thinking from the earliest pre-design phases, these being “FUZZY FRONT END (FFE)” (e.g., Khoen, Ajamian, Burkart, Clamen, Davidson, D'Amoe, Elkins, Herald, Incorvia, Jhonson, Karol, Seibert, Slajkov and Wagner, 2001). Such researchers argue, as did the proponent of the thought Robert Jungk in 1979, that involving users in the processes of research and/or creative exploration through the practice of research with collaborative work approaches is one of the greatest challenges of design. Jungk himself led to the emergence of a current called User-Centered Design (UCD) that has spread and evolved with new approaches until today (e.g., Liem and Sanders, 2011; Sanders and Stappers, 2008; Pardo-Cuenca, 2021). Such a current comprises a collaborative and participatory approach based on co-design that starts in the initial phases of the creative exploration process also called pre-design phases. A creative thrust formulated on the bases of new innovation strategies in co-design, which gave rise, more than 10 years ago, to the definition of new roles for the designer and new attitudes in the consumer (Sander & Stappers, 2008; Lee, 2008).

As Pardo-Cuenca (2021) point out, this new paradigm has also been exerting great influence in the educational field, which has produced enormous transformations in the last 10 years by changing teaching and learning methodologies that have been progressively included in the curricula and specific programs of design schools around the world. Such transformations present throughout the entire methodological process, in its different phases

of pre and post design development, have focused on research, reflection and joint analysis through the formation of collaborative design communities.

It is relevant to highlight how in most of the literature consulted on communities of co-creation of value, participatory design, co-design, craftivism, design for social innovation, etc., very clear limits are established in:

- Enterprise practices of the present and future of online business, where the importance of the user and their early interactivity in the development phases is essential (e.g., Nixon and Blakley, 2012; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Piller, Shubert, Koch., & Mösllein, 2005).
- Social innovation practices (e.g, Manzini, 2015; Pardo-Cuenca, 2021).
- Collaborative practices focused on sustainability and craftivism in fashion (Fletcher and Gross, 2012; von Bush, 2018).

However, there are very few studies that take these collaborative processes to pedagogical and didactic approaches in the training of fashion students within and outside the sustainability field.

This research explored the design for sustainability process, focusing on the search for sustainable collaborative methodologies of rigorous design thinking. A collaborative methodological conceptual model of sustainable approach was built and tested in different fashion projects, with sustainable approaches, over different years.

## 2. COLLABORATIVE APPAREL DESIGN METHODOLOGY IN FASHION DESIGN

In the previous research we explored different tools to implement collaborative co-design processes in undergraduate and graduate fashion education (e.g, Pardo- Cuenca, 2021). One of the first experiences was to explore and formulate a methodological proposal using the focus group technique, the second step was the implementation of the proposal in several workshops with various samples of students and the third step was the evaluation of the findings in the different workshops. The development of this study was based on a literature review (e.g., Lee, 2008; Sanders and Stappers, 2008) and collaborative mass customization processes with collaborative approach (e.g, Piller, Shubert, Koch, Mösllein, 2005). The first research was conducted at the IUAV in Italy to compare the results with those obtained from another sample at a fashion design university in Spain.

In both studies, we wanted to confirm that the application of a collaborative approach methodology of co-design, from the early stages of the research process enhances reflective learning, creativity, involvement and motivation of students and therefore our proposal worked. The results analyzed through the rigorous application of various instruments, ad hoc questionnaires, participatory observation, think aloud and Cohen's Kappa test, which measured the inter-judge agreements after the observation of the samples demonstrated the success of the proposal that served to subsequently implement the postgraduate studies in the Official Master's Degree in Fashion Co-Design and Sustainability of the EASD of Valencia.

The conclusions sustained high levels of motivation, reflection, discussion, coherence, and creativity in the answers found by the participants during the application of the collaborative approach methodology against the one applied with the individualistic and standardized approach. In fact, individualistic approaches have been traditionally developed throughout the industry and by designers of the 20th and 21st century and subsequently inherited and implemented in a linear fashion in the curricula of most fashion design schools. Such standardized approaches as well as their explorative limitations in the creative phases have been investigated and discussed in the texts of e.g., DeLong, Casto, Min, & Gonku-Berk, 2016; Han, Chan, Venkatraman, Apeagyei, Cassidy & Tyler, 2016.

### 3. COLLABORATIVE APPAREL DESIGN METHODOLOGY VS TRADITIONAL PROCESS IN FASHION TEACHING

According to DeLong, based on the need deduced from the study of other researchers (e.g., Cross, 2004; Popovic, 2004) and on his research based on bibliographic data extracted from different reliable secondary sources on the creative methods used by renowned designers of the 20th and 21st century, he conceptualized three main categories or methodological phases: two-dimensional exploration, three-dimensional exploration and thematic exploration.

According to DeLong, each designer employs a different and unique method of creative expression, although after his research he maintains that depending on the ability and personality of each designer, the three phases theorized by LaBat and Sokolowski (1999) (definition and research of the problem, creative exploration and implementation, interpreted by DeLong *et al.*, (2017) as Creation, Ideation and Execution phase) can occur simultaneously, and he also maintains that these phases can follow a linear or random course depending on the designer's needs and the conclusions of his study. Based on this and paraphrasing Diffenbacher (2013), DeLong considers it important that designers, regardless of the method or sequence they adopt throughout their design process, establish more creative rigor in their connections and reflections especially in the early phases of the exploration process.

The objective of DeLong's research was to examine the differences between the modes of operating in a sustainable approach design process, employing upcycling techniques for garment creation versus a traditional process. To do so, she started from the hypothesis that there could be significant differences between the standardized design models postulated by LaBat and Sokolowski (1999) Cross (2004), Popovic (2004) and McKelvey and Munlsow (2012) concerning the three working methods concluded from her bibliographic research on the creative processes of prestigious designers of the 20th and 21st century that presented different ways of approaching the project and its phases of two-dimensional - three-dimensional and thematic exploration. De Long argues that although it is necessary to establish rigor, coherence and connection in the early stages of the creative exploration process, the working methods proposed by the authors cited, influenced by the way of working of the mass industry in general and not specific to fashion; and the influence and implication of these in the implementation of design methodologies of most fashion schools, should be reviewed and updated when proposing a project approach with upcycling techniques. She argues that in her research with different groups of students the typical process of research, ideation and creation as a starting point do not follow the same rhythm when facing a project based on upcycling techniques because it presents many material limitations (fabric, quantity, shape, color, etc. that must be taken into account before the realization of sketches and exploration of ideas etc.).

While both DeLong (2017) and Han, S. L. C., *et al.* (2016) consider in their research that the design processes in the project of a traditional and standardized collection against the processes or methodologies developed in an applied methodology for the development of a sustainable collection are different in their design approaches, both in the generative development and exploration of ideas (DeLong, 2017) as well as in the manufacturing, promotion and marketing process, we argue that the differences in the generative phase and creative exploration as well as in the previous phases of research, analysis and subsequent construction can apply similar procedures to traditional linear processes if appropriate creative techniques and tools are applied and a collaborative work focused on co-design.

### 4. METHOD

A conceptual model was built for the implementation of a project methodology in fashion education with a sustainable approach, which was implemented through different design projects in different areas over different academic years.

#### **4.1 Implementation of a co-design approach methodology for the development of a sustainable collection with social impact.**

An example of this can be found in a previous research we conducted in collaboration with the “NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION (NGO)” Called SETEM and the Clean Clothes campaign in the Master of Fashion Co Design and Sustainability of the “ESCUELA SUPERIOR DE ARTE Y DISEÑO (EASD)” of Valencia (Spain). In this project, we worked with a design community composed of a diverse sample that included 30 co-designers participants (artisans, designers, women at risk of exclusion and educators) who were divided into groups of 5 people each. Within each team, participants adopted different roles and actions, interacting and exchanging knowledge.

Different data instruments were used to measure the levels of awareness and sustainable positive impact of the workshop participants. The qualitative methodological approach was approached from the practice of participatory design in offline communities, where several design for sustainability techniques were implemented (i.e., hacking, decoding, and second-hand clothing collection) all based on criteria of optimization and quality improvement of garments. During this workshop, the participants were not inspired by their creative process on the waste once received, but worked on a previous reflective learning process (in pre-design-generative phase) in which different approaches were applied that sought to solve problems of optimization of garments from the analysis and reflection of some standard garments brought by each participant. From the analysis of these garments, different solutions were proposed to solve the design problem with other textile wastes (Pardo-Cuenca, 2021).

#### **4.2 Implementation of a co-design approach methodology for the development of a sustainable collection for commercialization.**

In another previous research, conducted with a small group of 6 students of the Master of Co-Design and Sustainability and in collaboration with the (NGO) called CARITAS and its brand Koopera, we proposed the design and development of a sustainable fashion collection applying the collaborative model developed by the researchers of this article. In this case the approach was also worked by applying design techniques for sustainability, specifically the upcycling technique.

Once again, and in contrast to the theories presented by DeLong (2017) and Han, S. L. C., *et. al.* (2016), the generative process of ideas in the pre-design phase was satisfactorily resolved without considering garments (textile waste) as elements of inspiration and design development. In this case, once again, a rigorous research and analysis of the area was conducted, specifically in the Ruzafa neighborhood of Valencia, through a creative technique that we call territory mapping.

The commission from Koopera proposed the creation of two collections, one more exclusive (handmade and not reproducible) and the other one that could be replicated, both collections would serve as a claim for the opening of the new Koopera store in the mentioned neighborhood. In both the first and second commissions, the research on the territory was focused on the aforementioned technique; however, the conclusions were different for each line. The first did not require replication, so the students could be freer in their manufacturing processes, even applying modeling techniques on the mannequin; however, in the second they had to be much more careful and solve the ideas more practically and resolutely, since this collection not only had to be replicated but the manufacturing of this would be carried out by a workshop of women at risk of social exclusion, so the construction and explanation of each step had to be very clear and simple.

Throughout the generative process of ideas, they clearly identified the two lines encoded in shapes, textures, silhouettes, colors, materials, etc., which were collected through the cartographic study of the area that helped them to extract key words to build a moodboard where they visualized concepts and images that could be solved through applied experimentation of small samples that would be used later for the development of sketches. In

addition, they built a narrative based on an imaginary character that personified the brand in the place where the store was located.

Once the cartography of the territory and the narrative of the character had been constructed, the sketching process was followed by the selection of garments (textile waste) that had to obey a general criteria: universal fashion garments, shirts, blazers, jeans, suits, jackets and wool sweaters of different knits and colors. This condition marked by the researcher at the beginning of the brief, was thought precisely so that the selected material could be found again later (although in different colors and sizes) and thus facilitate its reproducibility. This study was based on the hypothesis that the upcycling process does not have to obey a process of inspiration based on the randomness of the garments found or received, but that it is possible given the amount of globalized (universalized) garments that exist today to work with standard garment typologies to maintain specific criteria that facilitate the identification of identifiable aesthetic and functional aspects that potentially guarantee the replicability of the garments in the design of upcycling collections with a specific and defined identity.

Finally, to facilitate the process of assembly and construction of the garments, the participating students considered three sizes in their patterns and selected the garments necessary for the realization of these three sizes that each student had to make. One size was constructed by them and the following sizes were prepared in kits (cut and with assembly instructions). This design process in the technical-creative phase made it easier for the women (at risk of social exclusion), in the workshops to understand how to make garments.

## 5. METHODOLOGY

### 5.1 Co-design and Sustainability: a conceptual model for projecting the fashion of the future

Our research focused on developing from a constructivist approach a methodological conceptual model that involves social, cultural, environmental, and educational phenomena of the new design paradigm and its application in the teaching of fashion design, specifically in the development of collaborative projects with diverse approaches.

The constructivist approach allowed us to create the model shown in figure 1 below.

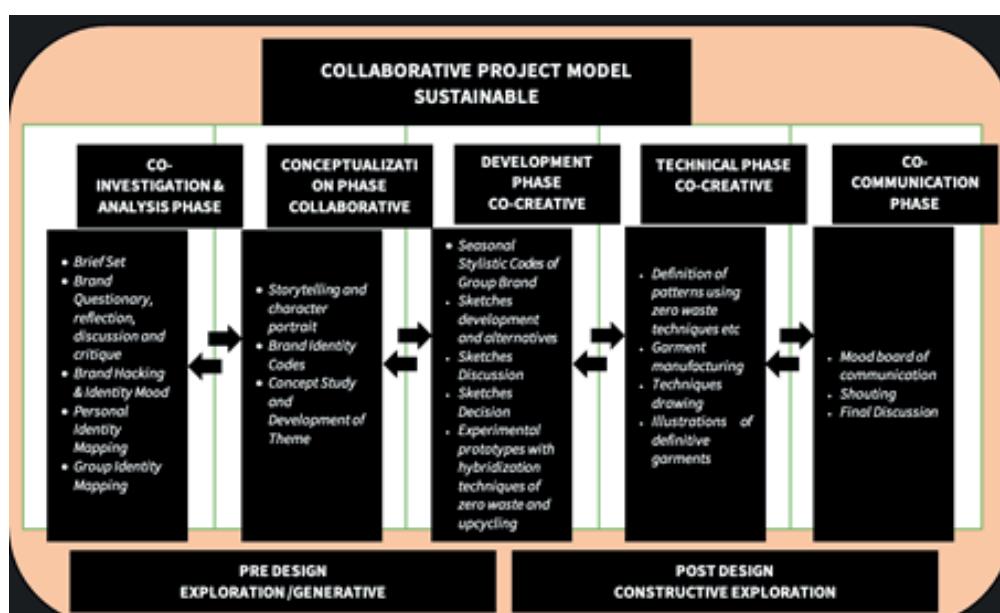


Fig. 1

Our Model of Collaborative Project Sustainable

Based on this model, we can differentiate five steps in the methodological development process of a collection based on the following phases: Co-research and analysis, Collaborative conceptualization, Co-creative development, Co-Creative technical phase, and Co-communication phase. All of them worked through the specific application of collaborative work techniques and tools designed by the researcher of this work. Inside figure 1 we have listed the different techniques and instruments applied in each phase taking into account a methodology implemented for the development of a collection with a Spanish sustainable denim company called Capitan Denim. The techniques and instruments applied have always been developed with the company in an active way and have been worked collaboratively and in a reflexive and exploratory way since the first phase. The development of personal narratives and the hybridization of these in the search and development of co-identities and stylistic codes of identification were key aspects throughout the initial process (phase 1 and phase 2). The creative findings and the satisfaction and motivation of the students in the application and development of this and previous projects have demonstrated the validity of the model.

After the completion of this project, the students were surveyed. The results showed that by applying this collaborative work model, all of them were enriched by the group, felt more motivated, and had enhanced their creativity. When asked about the advantages and opportunities, they argued that they felt more confident and reached solutions that they would not have reached individually. In addition, they all shared that sharing reflections, knowledge, and skills greatly enriched the overall approach and solutions of the project. The participants as a whole felt that working with collaborative approaches to sustainable collection design offers great benefits, also in the technical development and execution phases of the work, as applying zero waste techniques in garment development opens up perspectives by addressing problems and solutions in a co-creative way. In addition, they consider that the overall learning introduced them to a holistic, sustainable, and democratic open-source non-competitive working model, which helped to strengthen the group and to establish connections and synergies highly valued for the future of their design approaches. They all agreed that in their future projects and work approaches they would apply a collaborative model integrating most of the tools and techniques implemented in this work. Finally, we present the following collaborative approaches deduced from the proposed model and its different implications: Inclusive collaborative model with strong social impact, Open interdisciplinary collaborative model, Mixed collaborative model. Such approaches are future implementation proposals that outline lines of research from different fields outside and inside design education.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Based on the premise that the concept of sustainability not only implies transparency in production and consumption; but also, open participation and implementation of work methods that are developed in rich design spaces of criticism, exchange and reflection where joint social skills, identity, symbolic expression, empathy, attachment and narrative from human behaviors and social relationships with others are enabled and improved (e.g., Fletcher, 2012; Chapman, 2009, von Bush, 2018), the collaborative model of sustainable co-design proposed in our study is presented as a working method in which the question of authorship are constructed from the connection with the design group and the proposed brief for the project.

The definition and construction of the group's co-identity is possible through the application of co-creative techniques that facilitate the exchange of identities among equals through reflection and reflective processes applied from the first generative phases of design. The role of the designer is not limited to the figure of the author, but to the facilitation, development, and construction of a collaborative, integral and holistic project (e.g., Sanders & Stappers, 2008; Fletcher, 2012; Busch, 2018; Pardo-Cuenca, 2021).

The achievement is the co-creation of values, which are stimulated within a rich cultural framework of reflections, criticism, actions and joint practices, energizing experiential learning and the search for better solutions. During this process, decision security is raised, blockages and uncertainties, typical of standardized creative processes, are eliminated; and finally, more creative, free, democratic, sustainable and innovative solutions are achieved (e.g., Cassidy, 2011; Neary, 2003).

We argue that the traditional methodologies of individualistic, linear and hierarchical approach where the figure of the author prevails as responsible and leader of a joint development process are not present in the future line of fashion nor in the new paradigms and approaches of the market, teaching, social and sustainable education of the present and the future.

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