

## **Sustainability and Fashion in Undergraduate Teaching**

### *Sustentabilidade e Moda no Ensino de Graduação*

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#### **Abstract**

The article presents the teaching method used in the discipline Fashion and Sustainability, part of the Fashion undergraduate course at UDESC. The method relates to research, teaching and extension studies, aiming to emphasize on the student's active participation. Based on the theoretical principles evidenced by research and extension activities, there was an approximation between students and local enterprises with more sustainable production and consumption purposes in fashion. The Zero Waste week, promoted at the end of October, provided the contact between students and professionals who gave workshops and lectures on sustainable alternatives to fashion. At the end of the discipline, the students raised problems and proposed solutions to the undergraduate fashion course and presented projects for services, products and consumption forms with reduction of socio-environmental impacts. It is believed that the used method, articulating theory and practice, with the active participation of the students, promotes an adequate preparation for the performance in the fashion market.

**Keywords:** Sustainability; Fashion; Education;

#### **Resumo**

*O artigo apresenta o método de ensino empregado na disciplina Sustentabilidade e Moda, do Curso de Graduação em Moda da UDESC, método que relaciona pesquisa, ensino e extensão, com o objetivo de obter uma participação sempre mais ativa por parte dos alunos. A partir dos princípios teóricos evidenciados pela pesquisa e das atividades de extensão, houve uma aproximação entre alunos e empreendimentos locais com propósito de produção e consumo mais sustentáveis na moda. A semana Lixo Zero, promovida no final de outubro, proporcionou o contato entre os alunos e profissionais que ministraram oficinas e palestras a respeito de alternativas mais sustentáveis para a moda. No final da disciplina, os alunos levantaram problemas e propuseram soluções para o Curso de Graduação em Moda, e ainda apresentaram projetos para serviços, produtos e formas de consumo com redução de impactos socioambientais. Acredita-se que método*

*utilizado, articulando teoria e prática, com a participação ativa dos alunos, promove uma preparação mais adequada para a atuação no mercado da moda.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Sustentabilidade; Moda; Educação;*

## **1. Introduction**

Education is the way to a more sustainable society. The school, from elementary school, must present the student the importance of preserving the environment, which is nothing more than the house he inhabits on this planet. The knowledge and awareness on a more harmonious relationship with nature, develop in the student the perception that environmental degradation causes the degradation of the quality of life of humans and other living beings.

Institutions of education, from pre-school to postdoctoral level, play a key role in shaping citizens so that they know how to use knowledge and technology to create a system where they can have a quality of life without destroying the planet on which they live.

Teaching, research, and extension need to be articulated in the teaching and learning process of sustainability in the context of fashion in educational institutions. In this way, students understand the theory in practical applications and actively participate in real projects to improve social and environmental problems where they live.

There are 28 courses focused on fashion in Santa Catarina's State (BRAZIL, 2017), between bachelors and technical courses. But only 4 courses offer subjects related to sustainability. In the UDESC Fashion course, the Sustainability and Fashion discipline provides knowledge about the conceptual fundamentals of sustainability in fashion, working theory and practice, articulating research, teaching, and extension. From the research and extension, students are presented with cases of local enterprises that aim to produce and consume more sustainable fashion. Among them, the work done with women inmates highlights the social role of fashion.

A foundation for a more ethical and sustainable fashion must have an engagement with socio-environmental responsibility, the generation of fair income and the preservation of the local culture. Fashion is a reflection of its time. Sustainability is the paradigm of the 21st century. When teaching in Fashion courses it is an obligation to train professionals with knowledge about fashion in the context of sustainability.

## **2. Fashion**

The idea of fashion goes far beyond clothing, although this is the most common conception. According to Sant'anna (2005, p. 107), "Fashion, (...) is what is underground to this act [of dressing], as an agent that drives, qualifies, selects and resigns the action of opinion".

Therefore, the costumes are the objects that allow the fashion to express itself. The costume "operates on the stage of the imaginary and is integral to culture" (CAMPOS, 2013, p.45). Through it, we cover and adorn our bodies and signify our subjectivity, constructing representations of our self.

Fashion is an expression and personal reflection. It is a way of thinking the world, translated in the image. It is a way of thinking and conceiving the social world: a web that constitutes society. Dressing up in modern society is dressing up in senses. It is a choice and a daily position in society and culture.

Therefore, it is in the act of dressing that one understands a time, a society and their respective values and ideal behaviors since it is the fashion itself that constitutes the society to which it belongs.

### **3. Sustainability**

Since mankind has mastered scientific knowledge, he has been able to exercise great power over nature, which has given the possibility of modifying the laws and the natural order in which the environment maintains itself.

With the mastery of productive techniques, the man found himself in the need of extracting from the environment raw material frequently, so quickly that it does not give it's time to recover. Very quickly, this cycle of uncontrolled extraction and production is an evidence of climate change, garbage excess, and poor working conditions, for example, and it has brought the need to think of sustainability.

The concept of environmental sustainability was created in the early 1970s at the United Nations Conference about the Environment, to suggest that it was possible to achieve economic growth and industrialization without destroying the planet. The proposed model for sustainable development was an attempt to harmonize human development with the limits of nature. (SCHULTE, 2011).

Since then, several authors have been studying and writing on the subject, allowing this new thinking to develop and influence political and economic systems. Currently, the concept foresees the concern with the environment and advocates a growth that balances the extraction of natural resources with the fulfillment of human needs. However, the environment is only among three other aspects that make up the process of sustainable development. They are: social, economic and cultural. For a product to be sustainable, therefore, it is imperative that it contemplates the four aspects above and have the least negative impact on them.

The social aspect involves the entire society and the effort spent by the worker, as well as the laws regulating the service. In addition to the fair wage, it is important to consider a work environment that favors the accomplishment of the activities and does not generate physical and psychological harm to the worker. Also, a sustainable production process should take into account general aspects such as education, violence, and leisure, as well as cultural aspects, which must be respected and supported by businesses wherever they produce them. One way to ensure that culture is maintained is to invest and stimulate local

crafts, which interfere little in the environment and favor the economic development of the region.

Regarding the economic aspects, a frightening fact explains the need for concern for the economy in sustainable development. According to the Oxfam report, a British NGO that develops programs to reduce inequalities, only eight men have the same wealth as 3.6 million people, who are among the poorest half of the world. The economic pillar encompasses the production, distribution, and consumption of goods produced and establishes that they must be realized in a conscious way, valuing the other three aspects. Companies, in their processes, must promote economic development through the generation of jobs and wealth, distributing it in a way that all are contemplated.

The concern with sustainability has been present in fashion since the 1960s (BERLIM, 2012) when the first reflections on the environmental impact caused by the textile industry appeared in Brazil and in the world.

Change has become the tradition of modern society. Consequently, the speed on which the new presents itself, in the fashion industry mainly, made the cycle of production to be simultaneous to the discard, both in extraordinarily great volumes.

In order to maintain this format, several sectors are mobilized to produce and distribute parts that represent a considerable share of world trade, manufacturing production and employment, especially in poor countries where production is cheaper (RECH, 2008).

The consequences are a surplus of products that impose itself on physical stores and e-commerce, without their real value being questioned, involving, besides the price paid by the consumer, the costs generated to the environment and human lives, both in the pre-production and post-production. Faced with the possibility of acquiring the new, and with it, the performance of a sometimes unreal subjectivity, there is a contempt for the pieces that stayed in the wardrobe or that, as a consequence, end up being discarded and often go to waste.

#### **4. Sustainability in Fashion**

By the end of the 1970s, Brazil faced a strong crisis that caused a large number of unemployed, rising inflation as well as foreign debt.

At a time when major changes were taking place in the economy, signaling the need for urgent measures in the face of the crisis, the textile and clothing sector decided to create the first technical courses in Brazil and ten years later collaborated to create the first higher education courses (PIRES, 2002, p.2).

Until then, the fashion professionals in Brazil were self-taught or graduated in European schools. The first fashion undergraduate course, in Fashion Design, appeared in 1988 at Santa Marcelina College, in São Paulo, one of the most prestigious among the 68 fashion baccalaureate courses accredited by MEC. (BRASIL, 2017).

The growth in the number of courses aimed at fashion in Brazil was due to the acceleration of the economy, with the objective of training professionals able to work in

the growing industry. According to Pires (2002), the state of Minas Gerais, for example, went from 200 clothing companies in the 1970s to 4,000 in 10 years.

What made the segment organize itself and create the Mineiro Fashion Group and the extension course of Fashion Styling & Modeling at the Minas Gerais Federal University (...) becoming at the time one of the most important centers of creation, production and diffusion of fashion clothing in the country (PIRES, 2002, p.2).

According to MEC's website (BRAZIL, 2017), Brazil currently has 129 technological courses focused on fashion, 68 undergraduate courses above mentioned, as well as the academic master's degree in Textiles and Fashion (USP) and the professional master's degree in Clothing Design and Fashion at Santa Catarina State University (UDESC).

Fashion designers will move from work in the supply chain to work at the "center" of change (FLETCHER; GROSE, 2011). The new role of the designer is as a facilitator, developing strategies to transform the industry and the fashion business. If the designer is located in the change center, it will start in his graduation. Therefore, it is notable the importance of teaching sustainability in graduation, so that designers with knowledge in the area can be trained and aware of their role in the sustainable production chain.

According to the e-mec website, the state of Santa Catarina has, in activity, 28 courses focused on fashion, counting baccalaureate and technological courses. Of these, only 4 offer disciplines related to sustainability.

The curriculum of the 51 face-to-face courses and of the 4 distance courses offered by UDESC were verified, of these 55 courses, only 9 offered disciplines related to sustainability, a total of 12 compulsory and 10 electives, totaling 22 disciplines, of which 13 are offered by the course which has an emphasis on sustainable animal production. It should be noted that the artificial production of animals has a greater socio-environmental impact than the fashion, transportation, and civil construction areas, all added together (Cowspiracy, 2014). The most recent discipline is Sustainability and Fashion, offered by the Bachelor degree in Fashion, and the method used is the study object of this article.

## **5. Sustainability and Fashion at UDESC**

Of the disciplines that approach sustainability, in the four fashion courses mentioned above, three are related to the productive process of fashion, such as Sustainable Processes, Sustainable Development and Design for Sustainability. Only one focus on the relations between the Fashion system itself and sustainability, which is offered by the Bachelor of Fashion at UDESC.

The discipline syllabus relates: "Concepts and dimensions of sustainability. Agenda 21. The fashion system in the context of sustainability. Fashion product life cycle. Eco-fashion, slow fashion and ethical fashion. Organic materials, reused and recycled. Reverse logistic. Sustainable Fashion Collection Design Project".

In the discipline the concepts of sustainability in the context of fashion are worked out, with practical examples developed at the institution itself, such as the Ecomoda Extension Program projects and the researches "Socioenvironmental responsibility: textile waste as a raw material for new products and income generation" (2015 to 2017) and "Observatory

and creation of the textile waste management model: sustainability and solidary economy in fashion" (2017 to 2019). In addition, enterprises with the purpose of more sustainable development, service, production, and consumption of fashion are presented.

In order to emphasize the active participation of the students, a teaching method was used in the subject that articulates the theory (with study of books and articles discussed in seminars) to the practice, with presentation of local enterprises that promote the production and consumption more sustainable in the area of fashion, and the effective participation of students with the proposition of new projects to solve problems generated by the fashion system.

After the theoretical study, related to the themes of the research projects, the extension projects of the UDESC's Ecomoda Program were presented. One of the most relevant extension projects that aroused the interest of the students was the Interlacing Lives project with culture, ecofashion and solidarity economy, carried out with the inmates of the Florianópolis Women's Prison.

The project, with the support of the CCEPC - Community Council of Penal Execution of the Capital - has the objective of contributing to income generation and the re-socialization of women who are deprived of their liberty in the Florianópolis Women's Prison. In the course offered for the inmates are presented: cooperativism, entrepreneurship, and the solidary economy as a proposal for training and work, through courses and workshops with crochet techniques, embroidery, patchwork for application in clothing accessories, decoration, and toys. The project has an emphasis on the reuse and recycling of glass (fusing), fabric (sewing) and other discarded materials. In addition, the demand for viable cultural activities within the prison space (music, theater, parade) will be identified. In the course of the project the works will be exhibited at events and the products developed will be marketed in the Emporium of Solidarity Economy Store, in the Public Market of Florianópolis, to generate funds to continue courses according to the demand of the inmates, seeking to promote economic, social, environmental and cultural sustainability.

During the first phase of the course, from August to December 2017, image 1, the inmates had classes in handcrafted techniques such as crochet, embroidery, patchwork and manual sewing, using reusable textile materials to make clothing and decoration products. In addition to the courses, there was a presentation of music and Renaissance dance with professors Mario Orlando and Valéria Bittar, students of UDESC music course and musician Beto Vaccari, voice/guitar.



**Figure 1: Craft work being done by inmate. Source: Prepared by the authors.**

The project carried out by the UDESC Extension Program Ecomoda also counts on the partnership of the social department of NGO GIOS - Integrated Social Works Group - the Trama Ética, which from 2018 will provide a room next to the institution, in the center of Florianópolis, with free courses for the inmates graduated from the Florianópolis Women's Prison.

The students who work as interns for UDESC Ecomoda participate in the activities developed with the inmates. Some students develop collections with the participation of the inmates in the execution and finishing of the pieces with embroidery, crochet and other techniques of the local culture. In one of the cases presented, the brand Terezza Handmade, the owner Jamilly Machado, graduated from UDESC Fashion course, reported her experience on working with the inmates.

The students' experience with the presentation of real cases that show expectations, difficulties, challenges, and achievements, giving students a more concrete perspective of a more ethical and sustainable fashion. The cases presented are developed locally, so the students have access to get to know them better and in some cases, they can participate as volunteers or even work together with enterprises or projects.

An example presented and that had the participation of the students is the Collective wardrobe. The artist Carina Zagonel, who created the project, created a space on the street to share clothes, shoes and other objects, which provides the practice of a simple idea of giving and receiving instead of discarding. The closets are placed in public spaces, in points of greater circulation of people, with the agreement of the local residents. The first

Collective wardrobe was placed in 2015 in the Vargem Pequena neighborhood, in Florianópolis, in the north of Santa Catarina Island, where the idealizer lives.

In two years twelve Collective Wardrobes were installed in Florianópolis, among them one at CEART / UDESC, with the proposal of being a collaborative space with the participation of students, teachers, and employees. In the space, organized with the collaboration of the students of the discipline, books, workbooks, fabric pieces and other materials that are left over from the disciplines are also shared. In image 2 the day of the board inauguration of the Collaborative Space was registered, with the participation of the project's creator Carina Zagonel, the discipline's teacher Neide Schulte and the speaker Rodrigo Müller of Moda Doc. Latin America.



**Figure 2: Collaborative space. Ceart Collective Wardrobe - UDESC. Source: Instagram @armariocoletivofloripa.**

The proposal is to leave things in a good condition that can still be used. It is a place to acquire things without buying them; an opportunity to get things saved for years that are no longer used. According to Carina Zagonel, the idea is an invitation to share, after all, to put an unused object at the disposal of all, is an incredible demonstration of love and care for the planet and all the lives contained in it.



Another important case was the presentation of the director of the first documentary film about sustainable fashion and crafts of Latin America, Rodrigo Müller. It is a film about the awakening of conscience, about the horizontalization of the world and the opportunity that Latin America has to rediscover itself and value its identity. The film's basic premise is to spread and promote existing and real solutions to the fashion industry problems and to guide possible paths for innovative companies that work towards sustainability (based on the four pillars: social, cultural, environmental and economic). It also aims to value local crafts and enable reflection to make fashion consumers aware and responsible for their choices.

The director, Rodrigo Müller, states that:

It is urgent to carry out education and awareness-raising work for the general public and develop the notion of conscious consumption. The consumer must get out of the media influence and start giving himself the right to question, research, choose and ask. It is he who, in a way, has the true power. It has the power of "demand" and the market seeks to respond to "demand". However, this is a cycle that feeds back to the moment when it is the market that provides information on consumption without independence. "Mass keeps the brand, the brand keeps the media and the media controls the mass." George Orwell. MODA.DOC LATIN AMERICA aims to change the perception of fashion consumers. However, the proposal is not just to think about how it is in the present, but to consider what it will be in the future. (MÜLLER, 2017)

The Zero Waste Week UDESC, promoted in the last week of October 2017, brought students closer to professionals who gave workshops and lectures presenting more sustainable alternatives to fashion. The most sought workshop was natural dyeing and eco-print, taught by designers Nara Guichon and Roberta Kremer,

In the last unit of the discipline, the students, in teams, identified problems related to the fashion undergraduate course and offered solutions. One of the problems raised was that of the fabric pieces generated in the sewing workshop, which are discarded. The team proposed the reuse of the pieces in workshops with the community and the inmates of the Florianópolis Women's Prison through the Ecomoda Extension Program. In the first half of 2018, a team of students will carry out the proposed project.

The teams also developed projects for services, products and consumption forms with reduction of socio-environmental impacts. With the method used, articulating theory and practice with active participation, it is believed that students will be better prepared to act in the fashion market.

## **6. Final Considerations**

In the discipline Sustainability and Fashion, there was the articulation between research, teaching, and extension, as well as the active participation of the students in socio-environmental projects and actions. It is believed that this method is fundamental in the teaching and learning process of sustainability in the context of fashion.

The basis for a more ethical and sustainable fashion is in the engagement with social and environmental responsibility, in the generation of fair income and in the preservation

of culture. This knowledge must be built together with the students of the fashion courses and applied in practice in community actions.

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