

Design, tradition and culture—past and future united to develop depressed regions

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ABSTRACT: Small economies need to adopt new practices and concepts to survive in an economic context driven by constant technological advances. Design, tradition, and culture can be linked to handicrafts, reshaping the traditional methods, and transforming them as a mean of self-production in a tendency of revivalism and value.

This essay intends to highlight the benefits of a possible partnership between design and handicrafts, as a contribution to the economic and social development of depressed regions. In a bibliographic search, it is shown the point of view of several authors about cultural value and the tradition of “forgotten” regions, underlining the critical role of inclusion and at the same time turning evident their local value and entrepreneurship.

The conclusion we intend to achieve is the understanding of how social design and handicrafts can be a synonym of regional innovation, and through the creation of new products, how they may contribute to the economic and social growth of underdeveloped regions.

1 INTRODUCTION

As a result of globalization, innovation has won an enormous focus in almost every area. Nowadays, we are looking for sustainable initiatives, which in the long term, enhance and promote regional development; have the ability to retain and capture new inhabitants; boost the tourism and, consequently, boost the investment and attract/encourage companies to stay. Every day there is a need of changing sustainable lifestyles and the search for new processes and new ways of doing something appear not only with technological change but also on the economic and social levels (Krabbendam, 2013).

It is in this context that concepts such as regional innovation arise. They combine planning and urban interventions, the projection of infrastructures and promote cultural events (Abreu, 2017), because a region must be seen as a civic place for cooperation and inclusion, must create connectivity and conditions for different lifestyles where one can grow intellectually, where there are purchasing power, jobs, and leisure opportunities.

Innovation stands for a process of creativity, transformation or experimentation and, once allied to entrepreneurship, can explore opportunities that improve social, economic and environmental surroundings. Plonski (2017) considers that a process of regional innovation is a set of structured actions, and is a multidisciplinary field applied to knowledge and the practice of administration, economics, and engineering among others.

A few decades ago, innovation was understood as the specific practice of development and launch of new industrial products, through modern design, new processes or new technologies.

Nowadays, innovation allied to design is considered the primary goal by several economic sectors, regional development, and other social segments, highlighting the search for change in society in a context of the exploration of new resources and new opportunities which emphasize positive results in the process of creating new realities.

The contribution of social design to the regional development is still feeble. However, modern economies face a global recession, which inevitably strikes all countries (low-income

taxes), present a fundamental characteristic and might work as leverage: substantial regional asymmetries. Even in the most developed countries, it is possible to find less developed regions, and despite the efforts to support their sustainable development the asymmetries still maintain.

Economic, social and environmental crises caused the emergence of new paradigms, and markets opened new paths and created new guidelines to development, which changed the use of resources, the structure of social systems related to work and social security, as well as the global production, and distribution of goods and services. The less developed countries position themselves strive for internal innovation and design skills growth. According to Canclini (2008), the culture of a region is an essential asset in the transformation of the social system, since it can function as a process capable of improving ways of living, ideas, and values.

Thus, through the view of several authors, it will be relevant to see if a partnership work between designers and artisans will be enough to create regional innovation and if through the development of new products, they will be able to contribute to the economic and social growth of a less developed region.

2 THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS ON THE SUSTAINABLE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

According to Sachs (1993), a process of local development should be a process of socio-structural changes, characterized by its autonomy in the use of available resources, by searching bio, cultural and economic developed sites. The changes to implement must be sustainable at local, regional and global levels. However, regional asymmetries remain, and though there was a little change, the persistence of a few unbalanced aspects represents an issue to have in mind when facing regional and developing growth, whenever possible sustainably and socially.

Since the establishment of the European Union, and particularly in recent years, a lot of considerations have emerged around the convergence and cohesion processes concerning regional development (Costa et al., 2005). Needs of adaptability began to arise in the market, invest in regional sustainable development, apply "eco-efficient" concepts trying to profit from natural and local resources with the purpose of rendering some value to a product. The regional development based on sustainability, besides revealing a concept of regional development and influencing the society's lifestyles, also reveals entrepreneurship and the performance of a community (Sachs, 1993). It is also capable of generating positive economic, social and environmental significant results.

Fonseca (2004) stands that the idea and importance of human capital start getting more and more visibility, so from an infrastructure policy, we should move to a service policy, with human capital reinforcement. Gonzalez claims (2005), from a regret economy, we need to move to a business economy. Therefore, this new way of creating regional innovation starting by profiting from resources in benefit of the local economy and cultural value and tradition might be a functional, sustainable and lucrative solution and a criterion of differentiation of the market.

One of the principles to sustainable and regional development is to maintain a right balance between production and the available regional resources (natural and local). Sustainable and regional development are supported by the implementation of new businesses and activities that bring more added value income to the local economy, boosting cultural, economic and social change processes. However, to achieve this effect, it is necessary to establish long-term regional goals and to motivate the participation of the local community in the process. It is also required to develop social and economic methodologies to follow up results at quantitative and qualitative levels.

According to Barbosa (2008), sustainable development turns into the combination of three components (economic, social and environmental quality). The concept of sustainability present in the economy and in the social sphere enables the development and choice of



Figure 1. Parameters to achieve sustainable development (adapted from Barbosa, 2008).

sustainable strategies that can contribute to improving a population's quality of life (image 1). The goal will be to develop gradually the value of goods and resources (natural and local) that can be transformed and promote their insertion into planning and the daily economy. There is no economy if natural resources disappear so that the ideal would be linking these two areas (Alves, 2010).

To Alves (2010), three interconnected elements compose the regional development: the cultural ability to think about oneself and to innovate; the political-administrative ability to make autonomous decisions and organize their implementation; the ability of production, ensuring their reproduction according to the social objectives established collectively.

Economic and sustainable management serves to contribute to the evolution of a new way of thinking from the social point of view to benefit the development of depressed regions. This process must highlight human, material and cultural resources, changing the local social context to allow the population to solve the problems of their region effectively. Regional development, based on sustainability, shows ethics, and at the same time appeals to marketing, reaching public opinion rapidly.

In conclusion, a development on regional level must provide the decrease of inequalities preserve the environment and stimulate sustainable development within a local system to a global one.

3 INNOVATION, DESIGN AND TRADITION – A PATH TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP

When we talk about innovation or innovate change, it can mean that change will lead to novelty, challenge or risk of instability. To introduce new products and services in the market a company (or a production unit) needs to be creative, paradigmatic, experimentalist and interdisciplinary; the principle of innovation has been a key element of changing not only on a technological level but also on political, economic, social and cultural levels as well. Innovation is also frequently linked to design.

Casagrande (2004) stands that innovation and design can be linked, as they both try to build processes and products that represent a dialog between technology and society, based on human creative process. However, this change has only been seen from a global perspective, putting aside depressed regions which cannot reach the global market due to their social and economic fragilities.

In times where global market appeals, more and more, to consumption and contributes to an environmental decline there is a need of changing, not only a technological changing but also a social one (Krabbendam, 2013). From this moment, new concepts become fundamental when we talk about regional innovation, where the use of natural and local resources contributes to the improvement and wealth of that same region.

At present, it is frequent to come across with situations in which the initiative and the ability of production existing in less developed regions is frequently overvalued. New entrepreneurs tend to adopt a vision that places the local resources as core-assets to create new products and create innovative solutions to achieve sustainable production. They aim to contribute to economic growth and stimulate social behaviours that conquer prestige and quality positioning to local production. Thus, a new perspective of design (social and inclusive) arises allied to handicrafts, as a new method of creation inspired by local culture, tradition, and resources.

To Krucken (2009), the intervention of design will contribute to overvalue new products, to promote local manufacture processes, establish links between producers and consumers, support the development of a sustainable value chain, and to encourage the creation of new micro or small companies. Shea (2012) states that design is changing and is helping to build the interconnection between tradition and innovation. This focus is placing design right in the centre of local communities economic development.

The design focus in social contexts brings to products an aura of genuineness, of traditional, of cultural rooted, and original. Consumers in general, and conscious consumers especially, are actively attracted to those values when integrated into new, and exquisite products. Brands structured over local cultural and traditional values as market differentiators, offer consumers not just a product use satisfaction: bring to their life a cultural narrative which reinforces the emotional links with the brand.

Handcrafts reveal the identity and the culture of a particular region, and an interdisciplinary approach may enhance the development and reinvention of products. Maintaining its cultural essence allied to the innovative thought of design, several techniques, and traditional materials can be combined into new processes of production as an answer to the needs of the market (Delgado, 2015).

The design allied to tradition (handmade processes) may promote a cooperative and inclusive work. In this context, design assumes the position of an interface of communication between an inherited past (handcrafts) and the desired future (innovation) (Albino, 2011).

4 SOCIAL DESIGN – THE NEW SCENARIO FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF DEPRESSED REGIONS

Setting strategies of entrepreneurship and creating regional products to the development of economic growth of depressed regions has been a worry in the past few years. The consumer begins developing ideas of goods and services within its territory; the development of sustainable solutions, as a synonym of entrepreneurship and regional innovation, start engendering a new approach to consumption. Fagianni (2006) argues that, after the creation of a globalized market and fast industrial development, the issue quality is no longer a differential factor, the innovation of a product must appeal to emotion.

Thus, integrated into the contemporary world, social design emerges as the focus of the relationship between economy and culture (Gomez, 2010). It should be used to aggregate value to local production and create competitive and symbolic differentiation in the market, to maintain the traditional cultures alive (Hall, 2006).

To promote this type of solutions, we need the contribution of several skills, and social design can reinforce this dynamic and interactivity with a logical collaborative and inclusive innovation, opening the way to the intervention of society. More than art, design is a cultural phenomenon (Schneider, 2010).

Design operates as a way of creating products that fulfill their function while remaining “communicable” and symbolic (Ono, 2004). According to this new perspective, when associated with its cultural and regional origin, a product can be placed competitively in the market and become an over-valued asset. Barroso (1999 *cit. by* Pichler, 2012) claims that developing new products with cultural references means reporting the product to its place of origin. The design must “be aware of” the creation of new products, through the use of raw materials

or typical techniques of production in the region or by the use of symbolic elements which can recognize the producers. Pichler (2012) also stands these products represent the cultural material of a particular place and the behaviour of its population.

The innovation towards sustainability requires social participation (Krucken, 2009), and the responsibility of the designer is to instill new consumption criteria in the society based on quality rather than quantity. Krucken (2009) declares it is essential to communicate the quality and the social and environmental contents of a product, presenting information that really shows sustainability to stimulate the development of the producer—consumer—region relationship.

When design collaborates in the development of a product in favour of its origin, it must contribute as well as to the benefit of its producers and its consumers. Social design arises as an ally, promoting cooperativism and inclusion, valuing land capital, making regional recourses advantageous in favour of development, creating entrepreneurship and rising the skills offer/answer in the global market (Krucken, 2009). So, the possibility of partnership work between designers, artisans or any other producers in the region may generate regional innovation through the development of new products and like this contribute to economic and social growth in these underdeveloped regions.

5 CONCLUSION

In recent decades, there has been an increasing interest in sustainability issues and entrepreneurship dynamic. Increasingly, it competes for high economic performance, and it requires a certain level of creativity, betting on regional innovation as a competitive advantage in the conquest of the global market.

After the research carried out on strategies of economic and social development regarding entrepreneurship and regional innovation with the intervention and influence of design, we concluded that social and economic development of cooperation and inclusion would be fostered, respecting culture and tradition of each region to be explored.

The present study initiates the approach to new researches on the subject and represents a contribution to the reflection on the relationship between entrepreneurship, regional innovation and the creation of competitive advantage in depressed territorial areas based on social knowledge.

It is evident throughout the article that several authors consider this new aspect of social design can enhance economic and social development respecting culture and tradition in each region which is intended to explore while promoting their products. The union between design and the region, an identity, allows the union of different elements in the development of new products that, despite a contemporary approach, may appeal to emotion by connecting them to their cultural roots.

Design as a creative and innovative activity can use local characteristics that transfer to the products new details and compositions, uniqueness and symbolism of the region where it was conceived. Here, the designer must assume the challenge of translating and interpreting the local culture as a differentiation and competitive factor. The communication of historical elements, associated to a product, allows knowing the “history of the product”, and the influence of design might be the answer to the growth and the enrichment of the territory.

We can concluded, social design and handcrafts can be essential when it comes to regional value, innovation and the development of a value chain through the creation of new products and it can contribute to the economic and social growth of less developed regions. It is supported in many levels, that to have regional innovation, an opportunity for entrepreneurship and the creation of a competitive and creative advantage in the global market, there must be sustainable regional development, both economically and socially. It is important to understand what the favourable elements are presented in a particular region to be able to exploit it adequately, favour and stimulate economic and social relationships, to increase a sustainable economy.

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