

# Creating a business model from the traditional to global fashion: the regional *Vianesa* costume as inspiration

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**Abstract.** The great challenge of this century is the creation of new models of fashion business with sustainable principles. Therefore, it is intend to present in this paper the process that gave rise to a set of differentiated designs for fashion accessories. This paper presents the relationship of a set of concepts more or less interconnected, which brings together sustainability principles of social and cultural, besides the environmental dimension, exploring the cultural and intangible heritage of the *Vianesa* Costume. The *Vianesa* Costume reflects the culture of a people and has a high potential for innovation, from both technical and aesthetic point of view, in the sense of a more contemporary reading.

## 1. Introduction

The design area has been producing new models and project concepts that promote the development of new services and products in a sustainable way not just focused in commercial needs, but also in regional communities' interests and cultural expressions. Manzini [1] defines this design paradigm as "*change in the way as the individual or the communities solve their problems and create new opportunities*", at the same time as "*both the social innovation and the technological solutions are part of a transition for the sustainability, being less oriented to the material and more oriented for the people*" [2].

As territorial design<sup>2</sup> increasingly shows, sustainable creation implies the valorisation and reinforcement of local identities, through the preservation of their products, ideas, and production guidelines. Handcraft work is one of the strongest aspects of territorial design insofar as in the preservation of technical concepts, the application of specific materials and collective values, are an identity that differentiates one region from the other.

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<sup>2</sup> "Territorial design consists of a project methodology whose result is the proposition of a vision of the future about a certain geographic space, that considers the local vocations, the opportunities and the desire of its inhabitants. A shared and constructed vision, including with an audience impossible to be present that are the future generations but being present in the form of the projection of their needs and demands." (<https://eduardobarroso.blogspot.pt/2015/02/design-territoral.html> (Accessed in 2016 November 11))



Creative communities aim to have active participation of local populations, bringing and renewing certain values and concepts that enrich local communities, allowing new perspectives to be explored from the cultural heritage of the region. It is also necessary to clarify that this strategy is also oriented for tourists and local people interested in knowing a little bit more of their region, and thus values should be faithful to the original conditions of handcraft in order to avoid the misuse of cultural expressions. *"The concept of Creative Communities emerges as a proposal for the sustainable way, as an alternative solution for products, systems and services, thus having a differentiated approach in which linear relationships are avoided, preferably giving form to an interaction systemic of each member"* [2].

This new conceptual approach is due to the saturation of globalized markets, and the search for new solutions for sustainable development, taking people and their regional contexts as the main focus of action. The phenomenon of globalization has negatively influenced social sustainability in local communities, as it promotes the capitalist economic system, often hostile to natural and social resources of local communities.

On the other hand, the principles of cultural sustainability seek to establish strategies that promote local communities using their resources in a dynamic and open system so that the present political, economic and social conditions can be adapted to the environment without harming the following generations [3]. *"A sustainable society assumes that all citizens have the minimum necessary for a dignified life and that nobody absorbs goods, natural resources and energy that are harmful to others. This means eradicating poverty and defining the pattern of acceptable inequality, delimiting minimum and maximum limits of access to material goods. In short, to implant the old and desirable social justice"*[4].

In the context of social sustainability there are other areas to be addressed, namely issues associated with the preservation of culture and material or immaterial heritage. By culture we mean the symbolic system shared by a community or society that structures its beliefs, values and practices in all spheres of life [5]. Cultural sustainability refers to respect for the values and cultural heritage of a given community, ensuring conditions for preservation, but also for transforming cultural practices and traditions, in the perspective that cultural manifestations are dynamic and communities must make decisions and take actions for the conservation of their cultural heritage, whether material or immaterial.

The role of designers is, through observation and experimentation, to create means that promote and make *"part of the solution, precisely because they are social actors, more than anything, dealing with the daily interactions of human beings with their artefacts. It is precisely such interactions, along with the well-being expectations associated with them, that must necessarily change during the transition towards sustainability"* [1].

Therefore, the main objective of the present work, focused on valuing the immaterial cultural heritage of Viana do Castelo traditional costume, is to promote innovation in fashion accessories, having as a priority the collaborative work with the local knowledge and practices, as well as creating a sustainable business model: From the Traditional to Global Fashion. The city of Viana do Castelo, in the Northwest of Portugal, has a rich cultural heritage with a potential for valorisation by applying sustainable development strategies, namely through the promotion and recreation of works and traditions, such as its already certified *Vianesa* costume.

Thus this work intends to value ancient and current knowledge in the local culture regarding this tradition, that is, "dressing the *Vianesa* costume". Also, we intent to give a voice to this cultural

symbol and to the people who make these products, by creating new fashion products in co-working as well as to demonstrate that tradition can be an asset in innovation in the creative industries.

## 2. The traditional costume of “Viana do Castelo”

There are not many documents that indicate a specific date of the origin of the traditional costume of Viana do Castelo, however it is known that these costumes have arisen according to the need to create clothing for daily activities. Until the middle of the 20th century, Portugal lived in a stage of poverty and there were no resources to invest in clothes sold in the market. It was a time of self-sufficiency, when people cultivated their fields and collecting from nature all kind of products that could contribute to the sustenance of the family, such as food and the raw materials to make their clothes. These materials were essentially made from wool, especially the wool of brown sheep (the “*churra*” wool, typical from the North of the Iberian Peninsula). This wool was used because it turned out to be more advantageous, as these clothes would serve to dress when working on the lands, and the dirt would be more easily disguised.

Each costume *“is the result of an intrinsic connection to the place where its raw materials are produced, manufactured and dressed. This process carries it with particularities that bring together in a single piece functional, aesthetic and significant elements that enrich it extraordinarily”* [6]. In fact, each community of the city of Viana do Castelo developed its own costume specificities, however not intentionally, but as a consequence of community sharing of raw materials and crafts techniques ended that certain details, cuts and shapes ended up resembling each other.

The festive costume was the most popular one, the richest and the most important. There are several designations that emphasize this festive dress, such as “luxury attire” or “*lavradeira* (farmer) attire”, and were used mainly at village festivals and festivals in honour of Senhora da Agonia in the city of Viana do Castelo. Along with the garments, the girls from the more rich families were adorned with a lot of gold filigree in order to display the prosperity of their families [6]. This suit consisted of a linen shirt, a vest, a skirt, an apron, a pouch, a pair of lace socks, wooden slippers, a scarf on the chest and one on the head, and gold ornaments (filigree earrings and necklaces).

The traditional costume may have some differences depending on the location. Each parish of Viana do Castelo<sup>3</sup> has its rules regarding the dressing, especially the best known, as in “Afife”, which denoted a greater simplicity, that of “Geraz do Lima” where the green colour predominates, the “Areosa” reddish, the “Meadela” similar to the previous one, changing only some details in the skirt and the colour of the scarf for the chest, and the one of “Santa Marta”, richer and attractive.

Figure 1 shows the clothes of the farmer (*Lavradeira* (a)), the *Mordoma* (b), the Bride (c), the mourning (*Dó* (d)), and the one of first-born Daughter or Half Lady (*Morgada* (e)).

There is even the “Sunday outfit” for the Sunday rides, and it was not as elaborate as the festive dress, but more carefully decorated than the simple “working outfit”. Normally it was used to go to the mass in the church service, to saunter and sell in the market, because it allowed a decoration more personalized than the other costumes previously referred. The working dress, as the name says, was a costume designed for heavy rural labour, and was characterized as a simple suit, with less elaborated materials [6].

There is even the “Sunday” outfit for the Sunday rides, and it was not as elaborate as the party dress, but more careful and decorated than the simple work outfit. Normally it was used to go to mass,

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<sup>3</sup> As parish of Viana do Castelo there is: Afife; Geraz do Lima; Areosa; Meadela; Santa Marta

stroll and sell in the market because it allowed a decoration more personalized than the other suits previously referred



**Figure 1.** Viana's festive costumes: *Lavradeira* (a), *Mordoma* (b), *Bride* (c), *Mourning* (d), *Morgada* (e).

### 3. Creating a new product

#### 3.1 Methodology

The methodology approach of this project is based on the design thinking from Brow [7] summarized in three phases: the inspiration, that identifies the real problem; ideation, which is the process of creating ideas to generate innovation that solves the underlying problem and the selection of the best(s) idea(s) and implementation, which as the name itself implies is the implementation of the solution(s) idealized. This article presents the results of the inspiration (figure 2) and ideation starting with a qualitative exploratory research through ethnographic observation, interviewing and literature review.

The potential of the *Vianesa* costume is enormous, and the possibilities for innovation increase progressively when associated with new concepts. One of the concepts taken into account throughout this project is sustainability. Having valued the cultural, technical and innovative aspects (such as materials, forms, and re-appropriations of use), as well as the social values underlying the experience of dressing this traditional costume, the pillar of environmental sustainability has been the major concern in the project.



*Intangible Cultural Heritage*

**Figure 2.** Mood-board with different elements of the costume

### 3.2. Results

*Viana's* costume is considered one of the most popular icons of Alto Minho region and even of Portugal. Its material and symbolic characteristics are widely recognized and praised. Although it is a symbol of great interest, there is a scarce development regarding the design of these costumes. Therefore, the current project to create sustainable design concepts in the field of cultural heritage in order to modernize and add value to a traditional object without changing its central and timeless conventions.

From this setting of inspiration we have chosen two pieces of the costume with the greatest visual expression, the apron and the pouch, for a contemporary reading. These pieces are characterized by the diversity of patterns and shapes, depending on the type of costume and the parish to which it belongs.

After analysing the elements in the inspiration panel (Figure 2), the ideation phase was developed, resulting in the creation of a range of fashion accessory products (Figure 3).

In this way, accessories have been designed to value and differentiate the basic clothing. One of the main characteristics of these products is the versatility of use that can be placed in the way that the user wants, giving the possibility to innovation in its daily use. The valorisation of small colourful textile flaps, (already used in the traditional costume), as well as the use of natural wool, are a contribution to the environmental sustainability of the production process. Also in the implementation phase, this project aims at the reuse of textile waste (with techniques of *upcycling*) in the perspective of ecological sustainability.



**Figure 3.** Products created from the elements: apron and pocket of Viennese costume

One of the principles of valorisation related to the fabrics waste is the *upcycling*: "*The reuse of materials and the transformation of these into products with high added value gradually developed the ecological awareness of who produces and consumes the products*"[1]. Also the patchwork technique was used, being the "*art of the domestic economy that consists in the utilization of fabric wastes*"[8]. For the design of new products, promoting the creation of new cloths with the combinations of different patterns and colours, thus allowing the production of something genuinely and unique.

This project was also focused on promoting social development through the relationship between artisans and designers based on the sharing of knowledge, so that designers and craftsmen can work together, overcoming the current paradigm of the designer as the one who creates and draws an idea

and the craftsman as an agent for performing the idea and the products idealized by the designers. For this project we established a partnership with an embroiderer of the city of Viana do Castelo, Isilda Parente, who besides making time to embroider the pieces, shared her knowledge for the creation of the innovative products. Figure 3 presents two of the products created which embody differentiation and innovation, designing the *Vianesa* costume pieces in a way that gives them a novel application, suitable for several occasions of use. Also these accessories require low maintenance and conservation. Moreover, these pieces have a story to tell about local culture and they may promote the desire to preserve and share the richness and exclusivity of traditional garments.

#### 4. Final Considerations

This work is the outcome of a master's thesis project in Design and Marketing, carried out by a young designer from the Minho region who is planning to establish a new Portuguese brand of fashion accessories, based on uniqueness, authenticity and a consistent regional/national identity. We believe the products may be very successful among clients who share the values of social, cultural and ecological sustainability and have the ability to recognize the worth of contemporary revisiting of traditional objects. According to the business model, (which is being worked according to the CANVAS Business Model) the products will be sold online through an Internet site so that it can be enjoyed and bought globally.

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