



Reimagining Fashion through Extension: Between Critical Pedagogies, Museums, and Communities

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Introduction

University extension, by articulating teaching and research in dialogue with society, constitutes a privileged field for rethinking the role of Fashion and Design in academic education and social transformation. In Brazil, since National Education Council Resolution No. 7/2018, which made the curricularization of extension mandatory, experiences have expanded that shift learning beyond the classroom and reorient curricula based on collective demands and contemporary urgencies.

This expanded abstract synthesizes a study that analyzes extension practices developed at Universidade Feevale, articulating Fashion, Design, museums, and communities, focusing on three experiences: the Zuzu Angel exhibition at the National Footwear Museum, the project Re-imaginar é possível? (Re-imagining is possible?), and the project Da Rua Para’Nóia.

The objective is to show how the curricularization of extension can function as a structuring axis for critical and decolonial pedagogies, repositioning the university museum as a pedagogical territory and the community as a co-author of knowledge.

The study starts from the following problem: in what ways can extension practices in Fashion and Design contribute simultaneously to (a) academic training, (b) social inclusion, and (c) cultural transformation? The hypothesis guiding the analysis is that extension, when conceived as praxis (rather than as a peripheral activity), produces formative and epistemological displacements: it transforms the student into a subject implicated in real processes; expands the university museum as a pedagogical laboratory; and recognizes communities as producers of knowledge rather than merely recipients of actions.

The theoretical framework is organized around four articulated axes. The first is Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy, mobilized to understand extension as dialogue, problem-posing, and the joint construction of meaning, avoiding both assistentialism and the one-way “transfer” of knowledge. The second is Orlando Fals Borda’s Participatory Action Research (PAR/IAP), which sustains implicated research and knowledge produced “with” people, recognizing them as co-researchers and co-producers of the

process. The third axis draws on Enrique Dussel to think the poietic dimension of action: extension as a creative and ethically oriented practice, committed to life and to transforming oppressive structures. The fourth axis engages Arturo Escobar and critiques modern-colonial design, emphasizing a shift from design as a market tool to design as a practice of care, justice, and coexistence—i.e., a practice that seeks to sustain “many worlds” within the same world.

The research is qualitative and exploratory, appropriate for capturing formative processes, disputes over meaning, and socio-cultural effects that manifest in relational practices (workshops, curatorial processes, exhibitions, and educommunication devices). The procedures combine: (i) a literature review on university extension, critical pedagogies, social design, and museology; (ii) systematization of records (reports, exhibition documentation, materials produced in the projects, and reflective journals); and (iii) documentary analysis of the three selected experiences. The scope is defined by criteria of alignment with extension curricularization, articulation between fashion/design and social inclusion, and pedagogical and community relevance.

1 Development

1.1 Case 1: Zuzu Angel exhibition and the museum as a pedagogical laboratory

In the first case, students from the course History of Brazilian Fashion designed an exhibition at the National Footwear Museum (MNC), articulating fashion history, curatorship, and inclusion. The museum is treated as a pedagogical territory: rather than functioning only as a repository of memory, it becomes an environment for didactic experimentation and public mediation. By involving students in research, creation, and installation, curatorship ceases to be a specialized task and becomes a formative practice, requiring decisions about narrative, materiality, communication with the public, and cultural responsibility.

A distinctive feature of the case is accessibility for people with visual impairment. The materializations are conceived to enable tactile engagement and sensory reading, accompanied by descriptive resources. This movement displaces fashion from an exclusively visual centrality

toward a multisensory experience, expanding repertoires of form, texture, and construction. Pedagogically, extension appears as situated learning: students must respond to concrete constraints and needs, negotiate solutions, and understand inclusion as a design criterion from the outset, rather than as an after-the-fact adaptation.

1.2 Case 2: “*Re-imaginar é possível?*” migrations, unlearning, and narratives

The second case also emerges from the course History of Brazilian Fashion and uses Project-Based Learning to integrate research and extension, with migration as its thematic axis. The creation of clothing artifacts functions as a device to problematize belonging, memory, and displacement, opening space for narratives that tend to remain outside museological discourses and the “official” histories of fashion. The proposal activates the museum as a pedagogical and political territory by creating a contrast between the historical collection and contemporary artifacts: this friction questions linear temporalities and invites critical readings of progress, modernization, and their social and environmental effects.

The inclusive dimension is reinforced by the participation of people with visual impairment in different stages of the process, including revision and evaluation of the exhibition. Extension thus approaches co-authorship: it is not merely about “serving” an audience, but about building conditions through which different forms of perception and experience can guide the project. At the same time, the case reveals important limits: certain representations may drift toward stereotypes, requiring critical vigilance so that emancipatory intentions do not reproduce residues of oppression. Even so, the experience expands education by connecting creation, social debate, and curatorship as a practice of cultural responsibility.

1.3 Case 3: *Da Rua Para’Nóia* and extension as social justice

The third case is a project carried out in partnership with the Centro POP of Novo Hamburgo, aimed at people experiencing homelessness. The methodological axis is PAR/IAP: the project integrates theory and practice and recognizes participants as co-researchers, able to influence the course of actions and to collaborate in the creation of concrete solutions.

The activities include workshops (such as educommunication and human rights), formative experiences that strengthen social autonomy and the public visibility of narratives produced collectively.

In this context, Fashion and Design enter as interpretive and expressive fields of culture, rather than as mere technical application. The project displaces the position of the designer and the student: instead of a neutral specialist, the figure that emerges is a mediator implicated in processes of listening, dialogue, and materialization of experience. Here, extension operates as a practice of social justice by placing academic knowledge in direct relation to structural inequalities and by recognizing historically marginalized subjects as producers of language, meaning, and knowledge.

Conclusion

Comparing the three cases makes it possible to identify three central results. First, education in Fashion and Design becomes more implicated and situated: one learns by designing within real scenarios (accessibility, migration, human rights), with explicit social consequences. Second, the university museum emerges as a pedagogical and political laboratory: **curatorship, heritage, and material culture are mobilized as devices for** problematization, inclusion, and the construction of critical repertoires. Third, communities cease to be “target audiences” and begin to appear as co-authors of knowledge, consistent with the understanding of extension as a poietic and emancipatory practice that articulates teaching, research, and social commitment.

The evidence synthesized indicates that the curricularization of extension, when guided by critical pedagogies and participatory methodologies, can function as a structuring axis for reimagining education in Fashion and Design. By mobilizing Freire, Fals Borda, Dussel, and Escobar, the study understands extension as a poietic and emancipatory practice that repositions university museums as learning territories and communities as knowledge producers.

As an implication, pedagogical innovation in the field is not reduced to adopting new design techniques; it requires ethical-political reorientations: accessibility from the conception phase, curatorships as formative

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practices, and research “with” subjects and territories. As a challenge, the need remains to strengthen reflexive devices to reduce stereotypes and asymmetries, ensuring that extension effectively expands cognitive, cultural, and social justice¹.

¹ Translated by: Regina Maria Gevehr, Licenciada em Letras, Universidade Federal de Pelotas (UFPeL), 2015. Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/7315928198423440>

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