

## Strategies in Design for social innovation within Alto Vale Project

### Estratégias em Design para inovação social dentro do Projeto Alto Vale

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#### Abstract

The article presents strategies of Design for social innovation used by the Center of Systemic Approach to Design (NAS DESIGN), from the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC), within the Alto Vale Project. Such project, developed with communities in the region of Alto Vale do Itajaí, Santa Catarina, Brazil, involves partners from the civil, private and public sectors, in order to stimulate the development of associations (informal and formal) and micro-enterprises to promote income generation, in parallel to the encouragement of the local cultural identity. For that, the article develops a literature review of concepts such as Design for social innovation and strategy, as well as a case study of the Alto Vale Project. As a result, a framework with a set of activities developed by the group is presented, analyzed in terms of strategic, tactical and operational actions. Finally, the article aims at contributing to the systemic approach of designers in projects for social innovation within communities.

**Keywords:** Design for social innovation, Design strategies, Systemic Design, Design Management.

#### Resumo

Este artigo visa apresentar estratégias de Design para inovação social utilizadas pelo Núcleo de Abordagem Sistemática de Design (NAS DESIGN), da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, dentro do Projeto Alto Vale. Tal projeto, desenvolvido junto a comunidades da região do Alto Vale do Itajaí, Santa Catarina, Brasil, envolve parceiros dos setores civil, privado e público, a fim de estimular o desenvolvimento de associações (informais e formais) e microempresas para promover a geração de renda, em paralelo à valorização da identidade cultural local. Para tanto, o artigo desenvolve uma revisão bibliográfica de conceitos como Design para inovação social e estratégia, assim como um estudo de caso do Projeto Alto Vale. Como resultado, é apresentado um *framework* com um conjunto de atividades realizadas pelo grupo, analisadas em termos estratégicos, táticos e operacionais. Por fim, o artigo visa contribuir para uma abordagem sistêmica de designers em projetos para inovação social dentro de comunidades.

**Palavras-chave:** Design para inovação social, estratégias de Design, Design sistêmico, Gestão de Design.

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#### Introduction

The concept of industrial design, when understood in its broadest sense, includes not only the production of physical products, but also the service and the communication of organizations that produce them (Krucken,

2009). From this point of view, the design approach changes its focus from products to systems (Manzini and Vezzoli, 2002). Changes in perspectives like these may contribute to a movement of design practice that promotes social transformation, which in practical terms can mean new ways to generate income, employment and new chains

of value creation. Talking about new ways of thinking and doing to meet unmet demands of society leads us to the phenomenon of social innovation.

Social innovations are new ways of thinking and doing, motivated by the goal of finding common goods to satisfy unmet social needs (Mulgan, 2007; Manzini, 2014). Design for social innovation, in its turn, is a design approach that aims to strengthen existing social innovations or empower social actors to create new ones (Manzini, 2014). From this perspective, designers are able to support and stimulate socially innovative initiatives, using techniques, strategies and design tools. Results of this perspective can be analyzed especially in projects from the DESIS Network (Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability), an association of design groups based in several well-known universities spread across the five continents (America, Africa, Europe, Asia and Oceania). Within the Brazilian context, five groups are part of this network: the UFRJ DESIS Group, from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ); the NAS DESIGN, from the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC); the CED-Tec, from the State University of Minas Gerais (UEMG); the NDS DESIS Lab, from the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR), and the Unisinos DESIS Lab, from the University of the Vale do Rio dos Sinos. In all these cases, designers have been committed to the creation of strategies to promote new interactions among actors, in order to contribute to the solution of contemporary social problems. Besides identifying cases of social innovation and use them as objects to research, working together with communities may be also part of the projects. In some situations, it is the strategic action of designers within this system of actors that promote socially innovative results.

The Center of Systemic Approach to Design (NAS DESIGN), specifically, has been developing design for social innovation projects, in order to promote the development of local communities in Santa Catarina, Brazil. These communities are characterized by European heritage, based mainly on German, Italian and Portuguese origins. This brings a cultural influence to their cities, whose families, in some cases, live or supplement their income through the sell of agricultural, artisanal and manufactured products such as jam, honey and pasta. Cooperatives, families and micro-businesses that relate with local organizations, as city halls and associations, form these communities. NAS DESIGN aims at collaborating with local communities by creating visual identity and packaging for their products, as well as suggesting new connections among local actors. The idea is to promote the practice of local initiatives, fostering entrepreneurship and creating new interactions among actors of the civil, public and private sectors. Within this practical context, it is evident the importance of having strategies to guide a set of activities, in order to promote systemic changes that lead to social transformation.

This article presents strategies of Design for social innovation used by the Center of Systemic Approach to Design (NAS DESIGN), from the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC), within the Alto Vale Project. This project, developed with local communities in the region of Alto Vale do Itajaí, intends to stimulate the development of associations and small enterprises, in order to promote

income generation, in parallel to the encouragement of the local cultural identity. For that, the article develops a literature review, a case study of the project and a qualitative analysis. As a result, a framework with the activities developed by the NAS DESIGN group is presented and analyzed in terms of operational, tactical and strategic design actions. Thus, the article aims at contributing to build a strategic knowledge about the practice of design for social innovation within communities.

## Methodology

The methodology of this article is based on a literature review of the terms: Design for social innovation (Cipolla and Moura, 2012; Seravalli, 2013; Manzini, 2014) and strategy (Mintzberg, 1987; Mozota, 2003; Best, 2006). Besides, a case study (Gil, 1989) of the Alto Vale Project is developed. The data collection was made from a process of action research (Dionne, 2007) and from a systemic approach to design (Muniz, 2009).

Action research, according to Dionne (2007), refers to a process of collective action aimed at generating practical change with social implications to a particular human group. In this sense, the input of designers is significant, because of their direct association with members of one community. This may lead to an exchange of information that builds technical and strategic knowledge.

The systemic approach to design (Muniz and Figueiredo, 2009) is defined as a strategic approach that considers the complex relationships among actors within a community, in order to identify the factors that influence the surveyed initiatives. Under this perspective, the actor is analyzed isolated from his community (understanding his mindset and the way he performs his activities) and in relation with his community (which his cultural environment is, which his obligations are, etc.).

Finally, the analysis of the design for social innovation strategies practiced by the NAS DESIGN group is developed based on Mozota (2003), who defines that design activities can be classified into operational, tactical and strategic terms. This analysis will be explained later and will be proved as essential to understand that operational activities of designers can be strategic when thought as a part of a system of actions to achieve a strategic goal.

## Design for social innovation

The definition of Design for social innovation can be found along with designers who work on projects related to social innovation. Mulgan (2007, p. 4) summarizes social innovation as “new ideas that meet unmet needs”. In this way, social innovations can be understood as processes of change that were motivated by novel strategies to combine actors and elements from their contexts, in order to satisfy their unmet social needs (Mulgan, 2007; Manzini, 2014). Some of the designers who have worked under this perspective are Cipolla and Moura (2012), Seravalli (2013) and Manzini (2014).

According to Cipolla and Moura (2012), the concept of design for social innovation is related to empowerment and replication of social innovation cases that represent alternative ways of performing everyday tasks.

In this sense, if favorable conditions are designed, social innovations can be “encouraged, empowered, reinforced, systematically enhanced, combined, consolidated, replicated, multiplied, scaled up, spread, integrated with larger programs to generate large-scale sustainable changes, or aimed in a more sustainable direction” (Cipolla and Moura, 2012, p. 41).

Seravalli (2013), on the other hand, believes that under this approach, designers work as catalysts for design actions aimed at exploring alternative futures in terms of new ways of living and working. To the author, design for social innovation creates experiments that promote new relationships among actors, enabling the configuration of new systems of production and consumption.

Manzini (2014, p. 65), in his turn, defines Design for social innovation as “a constellation of design initiatives geared to make social innovation more probable, effective, long-lasting and apt to spread.” Therefore, Design for social innovation enables designers to play a central role in solving social and environmental problems, through the involvement and development of collaborative processes for the promotion of new production systems.

It is noteworthy that Design for social innovation is an approach that may be developed at least through two ways: designers identify existing cases of social innovation and give them support; designers create new ways of thinking and doing and start a new movement of social innovation. In both cases, designers must create strategies to involve actors in the project, in order to co-create solutions to local needs. In the last case, when designers intervene in a community of actors to encourage social innovation, they must be able to articulate different institutions (civil, public, private) to promote lasting changes. Hence, a systemic perspective of the interactions among actors within a community is relevant, in order to have a holistic approach that considers their complexity in the project.

### Center of Systemic Approach to Design

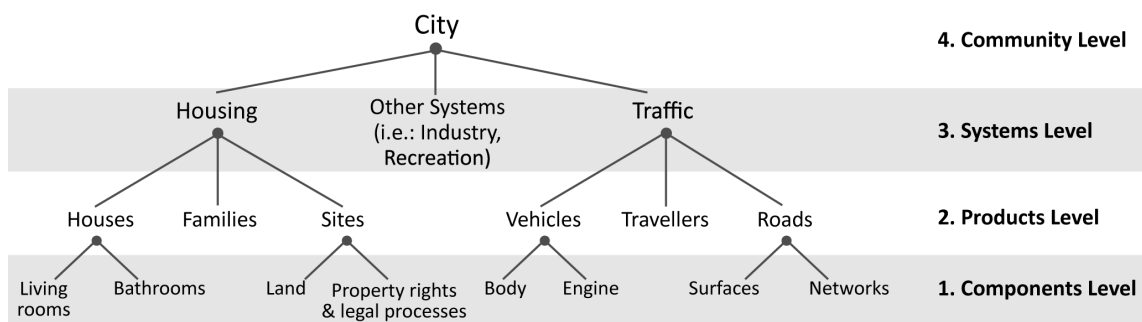
The Center of Systemic Approach to Design (NAS DESIGN) is a research group localized in the Department of Graphic Expression (EGR) of the Center of Communication and Expression (CCE), at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC). The group investigates and discusses about a systemic approach to design, to spread knowledge about its practical and theoretical dimensions.

The systemic approach to design understands products related not only to their economical logic of production, but also to the social systems related to their use. Therefore, a product is only an element of a system, within a system of systems.

When identifying the systems related to the design process (i.e., the relations among products, actors, etc.), as well as the products themselves, we should add another level (community level) to the structure of a systemic approach, as we can see in Figure 1. Thus, when considering the social aspects of users’ behavior as relevant to the relations among systems, we discover that a fourth level involves the communities of actors (Jones, 1992).

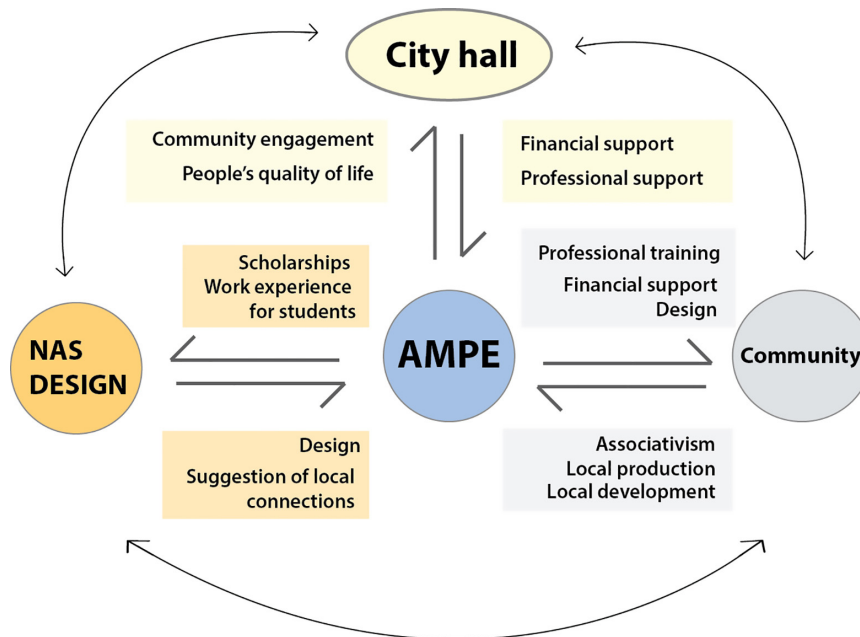
Many of the unsolved problems of design occur at the level of systems. This level is beyond the scope of traditional design and is also below the level of effective action within communities. To rise from Level 2 to Level 4, the complexity may increase considerably, greatly reducing the stability of the design process (Jones, 1992). This is because, as design complexity increases, the greater the number of people involved with the design of a solution will be, which includes professional and non-professional designers. These people, instead of being labeled as users, clients or consumers, are now active participants in the innovation process.

NAS DESIGN develops this approach by identifying and connecting social actors within communities, from different organizations, as well as students and researchers who are part of its group. According to Muniz (2009), within this perspective, design is used as a holistic process, which seeks to analyze all the factors that influence a system. Within a productive community, for example, demands and potential resources are identified. Likewise, social entrepreneurs (those who lead and organize initiatives), and other social actors are recognized, as well as the relations established among them. For that, the research team goes to the community, in order to know how the identified issues happen *in loco*. This step allows a direct relation between the community-system and the group, allowing a more effective exchange of information. Both research group and community are influenced. After that, the research team returns to the laboratory and with the collected information, develops suggestions of solutions to the identified demands and opportunities. Finally, the group takes the created possibilities to the community, promoting discussions and adaptations in their projects,



**Figure 1.** Relations among systems.  
Source: Adapted from Jones (1992, p. 30).





**Figure 3.** Relations among actors in the Alto Vale Project.  
Source: NAS DESIGN.

ly, in the city of Rio de Sul, visual identities were created for the microbusiness Bia Doces and for the cooperative Bioma. Below, in Figure 4, it is possible to see a diagram that shows the communities, which NAS DESIGN has been working with in the Alto Vale Project.

All these graphic and product design activities are the first step to insert design thinking within these communities; they are in the products' level of the system. After understanding the potential design has to project and value products and services, people start to be more opened to the design process and a trusting relation is established between the community and the research group. This is a key point in the project with every community. This is because, it is from this moment on, the group can start to intervene in the production system of these communities, suggesting strategies for the local residents and local authorities: strategies that will be heard. Examples in this sense are new connections with actors from other communities, new services (especially, touristic services) based on the local culture, new ways to deal with the waste of materials (reuse of production waste), new forms of production (organic production, for example), etc. Moreover, people are more likely to be involved in bigger projects, like the future continuation of Alto Vale Project, where an enabling virtual platform will be created with all the Alto Vale do Itajaí initiatives. Within this platform, people may be able to upload information about their initiatives independently, as well as know about other initiatives and create new connections among them, in the form of new partnership and new services.

Besides, NAS DESIGN invests in a long-term partnership with AMPE, the city halls and local communities of Alto Vale. Because of that, the project does not have an ending date. One of the concerns of NAS DESIGN is to develop the project respecting the time of the local community and the workload capacity of its research group team.

### Project's results

During the Alto Vale Project various products have been created: visual identity for all the initiatives (such as Fanton and Bork and Grünfeldt families – Figure 5); packaging (for Cachaça Pogalski and Franz family), and the prototype of luminaires of slate stone for the city hall of Trombudo Central – Figure 6.

In intangible terms, behavioral change and new articulations among local social actors (spontaneous and suggested by the group) are also products of the project. Such achievements are visible when people start to organize their household activities and production initiatives in an autonomous way; when the community begins to identify local potentials and create partnerships to assist them in their initiatives; and when people start to have a more active attitude about their production interests and their willingness to develop activities that generate an extra income. Hence, the community understands what design is and its value, in terms of form and regularization of products. Design thinking is also incorporated in terms of planning, execution, testing and achievement of results.

### Creating strategies based on design management

Strategies can be designed with the view to guide the practice of design for social innovation. Here, strategy is understood in the sense of what is done to guarantee the achievement of predetermined results. Strategies are plans created before actions, being consciously and purposefully developed. Likewise, strategy is a pattern of action in order to achieve pre-defined goals (Mintzberg, 1987).

The strategic approach to design of the Alto Vale Project is based on building alliances among community's actors and designers, in order to create new local networks

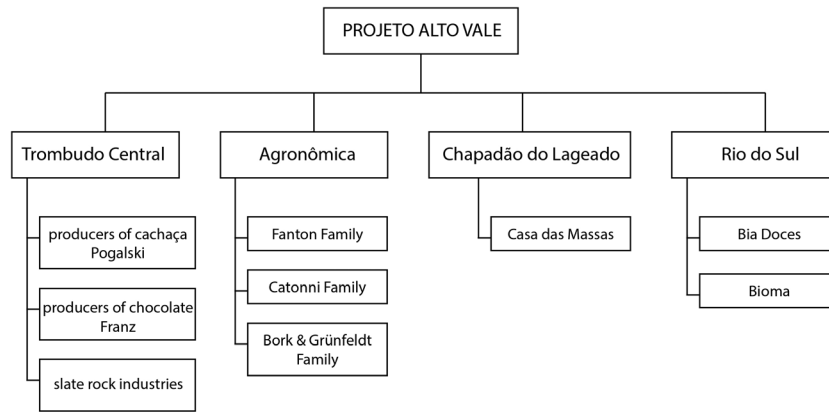


Figure 4. Subprojects of the Alto Vale Project.



Figure 5. Visual identity of Fanton family and Bork and Grünfeldt family. Source: NAS DESIGN.



Figure 6. Waste of slate rock and prototype of the luminaire. Source: NAS DESIGN.

where actors express their identities and value their locality. From that, the final goal is to promote local development.

Specifically, the qualitative analysis of the strategies within this article is structured based on the role of design in the organization, under the scope of Design Management. Etymologically, the term Design Management has its origins in the management studies, contributing with specifications about what skills design thinking can provide to organizations. The Design Management allows designers to fully understand the administrative processes, including the possibility of redesigning them if necessary. In this case, Design Management is not only about the de-

velopment and diffusion of organizational strategies, but also about the connection between two different mental models: the manager and the designer (Mozota, 2003).

Besides fostering a culture of management, social entrepreneurship and formalization of micro and small enterprises within communities, the Design Management knowledge permits the creation of a design culture within these human groups, in order to transform them in an innovative environment focused on local development.

The scope of Design Management considers three levels of decision-making: operational, tactical and strategic (Mozota, 2003; Best, 2006). Each level has its own goals

and strategies to be achieved. Moreover, this division also reflects in a hierarchical structure among levels. The strategic level of a project is related to the management of the organization according to principles and design strategies, leading design thinking to the organization's mission and creating an *organizational strategy*. The tactical management refers to the role of design thinking as introducer of design methods and processes within organizations, in order to create a *process strategy*. Finally, the operational design management involves a *product strategy* and it is responsible for implementing new ideas and managing projects of product-service systems.

Thus, after this brief initial explanation, we will detail the three levels of Design Management that will be used as the basis to analyze the framework of the strategic activities from the Alto Vale Project.

### **Strategic level of Design Management**

At the strategic level, the goal is to control the consistency of design activity in the organization. For that, a formulation process of the organizational strategy is created, incorporating design goals to the organizational mission. Design thinking, at the strategic level, transforms the organization itself, anticipating a clear vision of future markets and possible trends, for example. This may have a direct effect over the organization's positioning (Mozota, 2003).

In the context of this article, the word "organization" – and its derivatives, such as organizational –, are used as a dynamic term, designating both enterprise and productive group, or even in a broader sense, the local community itself. The accuracy of its sense depends on the level of the system we are working on. In this sense, the organizational strategy can be seen as the strategy of the whole community or of a specific productive group.

### **Tactical level of Design Management**

The tactical level of Design Management aims at defining the *process strategy* related to the organizational strategy. In accordance to Mozota (2003), the process strategy is a plan to spread design thinking throughout the organization. Under the systemic approach to design focused on local development, the process strategy can be understood as a plan that helps spreading design ability throughout the community, contributing to create a conducive environment to innovation in product-service-systems and local networks of actors.

The designer, at this level, should create a framework for innovation and projects, organizing internal and external communications about the project, cultivating an understanding of design thinking among partners and collaborators, in order to improve the design process. In this tactical level, it is also a responsibility from the design manager to insert a strategic design process approach to implement the organizational strategy. In this sense, the designer is connected to the management processes of the organization and, consequently, to the management of innovation (Mozota, 2003).

From the point of view of local development, this level is related to the creation of an environment for innovation in the community. According to Buarque (2008, p. 31),

this environment of innovation "is understood as a social space with capacity for creation, expansion of knowledge and continuous learning, inventing, testing and adapting alternative paths for development".

### **Operational level of Design Management**

At the operational level of the design process, design thinking manifests itself in tangible products – implementations of projects and processes that effectively people can see and touch (Best, 2006). At this level, the design gives form and function for products within a *product strategy*. The operational level of Design Management is, therefore, related to the management of the part of the project that aims to improve the product, packaging or service performance, increasing their perceived value and the environmental and social responsibilities of their production (Mozota, 2003).

### **Strategies within Alto Vale Project**

To understand the strategies of the Alto Vale Project, it is necessary to review the main goal of this project, which is to promote the local development of the Alto Vale do Itajai region. Here local development is understood, according to Buarque (2002), as an endogenous process of change that fosters economic dynamism and improves the quality of life in small territorial units and human groups.

Thus, within this strategic scope, activities performed by the group are the following:

#### *(a) Creating a tangible language to involve communities in the design process*

During the first contact with communities, there is an obstacle about which language can be used to make people understand about design and feel motivated to participate in the project. One idea implemented by the group is to establish communication through a 'tangible language'. Thus, NAS DESIGN creates suggestions of visual identities, packaging of products and prototypes, in order to explain design to people in a more accessible way. This is observed as positive, since people start to be more opened to the design process, as well as to be more active to organize their associations with the products created. With the greater acceptance from the community, the group moves to a second phase of the project, in which design ideas are inserted to suggest new local networks among actors, for instance. As an example, there is the case of the prototype of luminaries by reusing the waste of slate rock, a material explored in the city of Trombudo Central. The group identified the reuse as an opportunity to connect local industries and small factories to produce slate-based-products.

#### *(b) Promoting the formation of local productive systems*

After identifying the social, economical and environmental potentials of the community, the group suggests new connections among actors. These connections can be alternatives to form partnerships, to exchange raw materials and, therefore, to create local networks. In this

way, the group contributes to the design of new forms of production and consumptions, through local networks, what strengthens the system of family farming and goes against the mainstream agricultural systems, mainly intended for profit. Besides, these new social configurations arise spontaneously from communitarian initiatives. An example is the case of the group of women from the Casa das Massas, which is an association that produces food-based-products in the city of Chapadão do Lageado. They were unable to produce its entire demand of spices, so they decided to involve other women from the community to also grow and contribute for this production. Another example is from Bia Doces, in the city of Rio do Sul. This producer was used to buying raw sugar from São Paulo. However, the Fanton family, from the city of Agronômica, also produces this product in a factory situated approximately six miles from Rio do Sul. From the identification of these complementary demands, the group suggested the partnership between Bia Doces and Fanton family. Nowadays, the first purchases sugar at least 30% cheaper, besides being produced locally and having a greater control over this production.

*(c) Using the credibility of partners and local social actors*

A strategic action is to use the credibility of the name of the Federal University of Santa Catarina to present the project to local authorities and communities. Likewise, the local partnership with the Executive Secretary of AMPE, Luiz Alberto, facilitates the connections with the city halls and local residents. Therefore, Luiz Alberto works as a social entrepreneur, who intermediates the relations among these actors.

*(d) Pointing out the positive aspects of the community*

Other strategy used by the group is to point out the positive aspects of the community, instead of focusing on their problems. This strategy is developed when the group is with the local actors in the community. For that, the team tries to never speak negatively, always valuing and looking for the positive side of situations encountered in the community. For the group, this is a way to generate behavior change gradually through the recognition of the local values, in parallel to the suggestion of new ways of doing. An example is the case of women from the Casa das Massas, in Chapadão do Lageado. These women organize the production of pasta alternately, in which different groups of women are committed to this task throughout the week. This happens because women need to keep their household activities along with their husbands. This alternation in the production reflects on the loss of standardization, since each group of women cooks in a specific way. Within this context, NAS DESIGN understands this loss of standardization as an opportunity to create a line of products for each woman, with a specific tag as Maria's pasta. At the same time that this values their individual work, it makes them concern about maintaining a standard of their production, since the quality of their products reflects on their personal identity.

Another way to motivate people to value their community is to strengthen the local differential that it has. For that, the group suggests services based on touristic potentials – creation of restaurants, sales points for tourists, observatories for watching landscapes, etc.

*(e) Promoting gradual behavioral change and engaging new generations*

Another strategy from the group, which follows the one aforementioned, is to motivate adults to develop their own family businesses and to attract their children to work later in the family initiative. As mentioned before, many of the families have an Italian, Portuguese and German origin, what reflects on traditions to produce pasta, jam, biscuits and fermented alcohol. So, it is common families to sell food-based-products to have an extra income. For example, there is the case of the producers of the cachaça Pogalski, in Trombudo Central. After starting using a brand and a packaging for their cachaça suggested by NAS DESIGN, the family increased its sales. This motivated the children to be part of the family business, instead of being underemployed in other job positions.

Nowadays, the family has been searching for new potentials. They want to create a visitation area of production and tasting of cachaça, and want to enter a touristic tour route. These ideas emerged from conversations with the group. Then, behavioral changes happen because they get more confident and proactive with their productive activities.

*(f) Promoting volunteerism of undergraduate and graduate students*

Volunteering means no financial payment for work, but there are other associated benefits that can create value for students. In the case of undergraduates, they gain experience working on real projects. There is also the possibility of students to be enrolled as CNPq volunteering researchers. Graduate students get involved in projects, developing knowledge for their research thesis. Thereby, it provides an environment of knowledge generation that creates value for all parties (students, laboratory and community).

*(g) Stimulating the creation of new ventures through lectures and workshops*

This activity is a strategy for the dissemination and establishment of partnerships developed by the group. Luiz Fernando makes presentations of the developed projects with communities in other cities. Thus, the professor demonstrates the potential of the systemic approach to design, which attracts mayors to participate in the project.

An example is the presentation of the case developed with the cooperative COLIMAR (Cooperative of Women Producers of Food from Governador Celso Ramos, Brazil), in which the group developed visual identity, packaging and an ergonomic project for the women. Nowadays, COLIMAR is a reference for AMPE to show people who want to learn how the process of organization, legalization, formalization and the production process itself within associations of producers of food-based-products works.



**Chart 1.** Strategic, Tactical and Operational activities within the Alto Vale Project.

<b>Strategic Level</b>	<b>Organizational strategy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting the formation of local productive systems.</li> <li>• Using the credibility of partners and local social actors.</li> </ul>
<b>Tactical Level</b>	<b>Process strategy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stimulating the creation of new ventures through lectures and workshops.</li> <li>• Promoting gradual behavioral change and engaging new generations.</li> </ul>
<b>Operational Level</b>	<b>Product strategy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a tangible language to involve communities in the design process.</li> <li>• Promoting volunteerism of undergraduates and graduate students.</li> <li>• Pointing out the positive aspects of the community.</li> </ul>

### Framework of strategic activities within the Alto Vale Project

According to the explanation about the three levels of decision-making (operational, tactical and strategic), it is possible to finally demonstrate the activities performed by NAS DESIGN in a qualitative framework. The framework is shown in Chart 1, which summarizes this analysis.

In the strategic level, it is possible to highlight the main goal of the project, which is to achieve local development. Within this context, the mission of the project is related to the strategic activity of "Promoting the formation of local productive systems". When working at the community level, this activity is the essence of the organizational strategy itself. The definition of the working system of the project, the Alto Vale do Itajai region, and the production groups where the project seeks to develop its activities, derives from the strategic activity of "Using the credibility of partners and local social actors." All this process of decision-making was based on connections and alliances among University, communities, AMPE and local city halls.

Directly involved with the tactical level, we can associate the activity of "Stimulating the creation of new initiatives through lectures and workshops". This activity aims at fostering a culture of design in the community or, in other words, at creating an environment of innovation that promotes local development through the formation of new local productive systems. As local initiatives are rising and achieving success, they motivate the children of entrepreneurs to be part of their social enterprises, contributing to change the community's reality. Thus, this level is also indirectly related to the strategic activity that seeks to "Promoting gradual behavioral change and engaging new generations".

In the operational level, it is observed activities to increase the perceived value of products and to identify local potentials. This level may be related to the strategic activity of "Pointing out the positive aspects of the community". Moreover, it is pointed out the strategic activity of "Creating a tangible language to involve communities in the design process". This last strategy illustrates the most common application of design thinking by organizations, in order to achieve results in the short term. The group considers the development of visual identity, packaging and prototypes as a strategic way to start working with communities that have no conscious knowledge about design and its value. However, when the activity is isolated

without a strategic continuation, the design process may not generate social innovation. Within the work context of the group, mostly volunteer undergraduate and post-graduate students develop these project's demands. This happens due to the lack of scholarships to pay for all the demands. Thus, the activity of "Promoting volunteerism of undergraduate and graduate students" becomes essential for the implementation of projects, being fundamental within this operational scope of design.

### Conclusions

The discussion so far here presented argues that a systemic approach is the central strategy from NAS DESIGN for the practice of Design for social innovation. This approach shifts the focus from the product to the local productive system and considers the complex interactions established within communities. Under this perspective, it is considered essential that the project involves social actors in an active role of expression of their identities and capabilities, which is done by motivating them to develop their own productive associations (co-operatives, for instance). In the context of the Alto Vale Project, applying a systemic approach to design reflects on all project activities, in order to achieve the final goal, which is to promote local development. This approach considers factors (objective and subjective) that may influence the project and, therefore, indicates which strategic, tactical and operational activities should be followed to overcome possible limitations.

Within this context, the group suggests a framework about how design activities may be organized in order to be part of a strategic system aimed at achieving systemic goals of incremental social transformation. In this sense, it highlights the design activities that are employed in the formulation of the organizational, process and product strategies. In the case of the Alto Vale Project, the direction of all activities turn to the main objective of the project, which is to promote the local development of the region of Alto Vale do Itajai.

The strategies here presented may be used as inspiration for projects that aim at promoting incremental social innovation within communities, creating networks to value the local production and consumption systems in order to foster local development. The structure of the strategies in the form of a framework contributes to understand that, from operational, through tactical, until strategic activities,

all have their value when articulated within a system to achieve the targeted goals. Therefore, they are all strategic.

Another strategic issue that deserves to be highlighted is the fact that the whole project does not have an ending date. This is because, new communities from Alto Vale do Itajaí are progressively involved in the project and new design and research opportunities are identified. Observations from the group and other authors, as Seravalli (2013), lead to the conclusion that the use of the design ability to promote social innovation and, therefore, social transformation within communities, depends on time. This is because, institutional changes, new production articulations and the creation of new initiatives are mainly based on behavioral change and new connections among actors, what takes time to be achieved.

For continuing research activities, the group aims at creating a virtual platform to upload information about the Alto Vale initiative, in order to facilitate connections among local actors. Moreover, the group intends to inform about the practice of co-creation among designers, communities, city halls and other partners, highlighting the used processes, methods and techniques.

Finally, this article summarizes the group's efforts to contribute for the debate about the practice of design for social innovation within Brazil.

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