

# Handicraft Productive Chain: a mapping of the ceramic women of the Flor do Barro group through the social and sustainable dimensions of the historical context of Alto do Moura, Caruaru-Pernambuco/ Brazil



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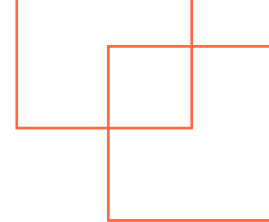


## SUMMARY

This article presents the partial results of the extension project “Flores do Barro: mapping and ideation of the handicraft production chain”. Which aims to propose, through design and its dialogic character, strategies for resource enhancement for the production and commercialization of the ceramic group Flor do Barro in Alto do Moura, Caruaru - Pernambuco - Brazil. The work method used was designed based on the Handicraft Production Chain Analysis Model. Method developed by the Design Laboratory O Imaginário/UFPE- Federal University of Pernambuco, to collect information from the actors involved in the stages: identification of the raw material; production processes and market access. As a result, we can identify obstructions and/or bottlenecks in relation to “know-how” practices, as well as opportunities to improve the approximation of other market niches with an emphasis on the community’s creative and productive capacity.

## KEYWORDS

Production chain; handicraft; sustainability



## 1 INTRODUCTION

Brazil has a remarkable creative diversity. Its cultural expressions can play a central role in the development of the country, with special emphasis on traditional, indigenous and afro-descendant peoples. Areas such as traditional handicrafts, small manufactures, fashion and design are strategic for development, due to the potential to improve the living conditions of communities (UNESCO, 2012). The authors of this research believe that the integration of these creative areas can bring economic benefits, individual empowerment and contribution to the cultural sustainability of communities aiming at income generation.

The Brazilian Handicrafts Program (PAB) aims at disseminating and valuing handicraft production through the promotion of fairs for the sale of products that contribute to income generation.

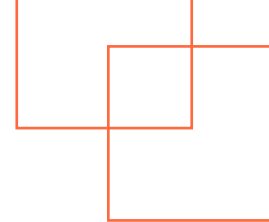
In Pernambuco, the PAB operates within the Centro de Artesanato de Pernambuco and the State has also coordinated, since 2000, in the city of Recife, one of the largest actions aimed at handicrafts in general, FENEARTE - Feira Nacional de Negócios do Artesanato. This event is considered the largest handicraft fair in Latin America, attracting an average audience of 300 thousand people each edition.

Currently, more than 11,000 artisans are registered in the Brazilian Handicraft Registration Information System (SICAB), 77% of whom are women (SEBRAE, 2013). Many of these artisans need to intersperse their artisanal practice with other occupations and domestic activities. Based on these data, since 2017, the Secretary of Policies for Women - SPM, linked to the municipal government of Caruaru, in Pernambuco - encourages public policies for women in the city, with an emphasis on local handicrafts.

In Caruaru, the Alto do Moura neighborhood, located seven kilometers from the city center, is home to one of the most important craft centers in the country. It gained national notoriety from the projection of one of its most distinguished artists, Mestre Vitalino.

The sale of handicrafts takes place in the artisans' own homes and workshops, which makes it possible for the place to continue to be a permanent tourist attraction.

Currently, inspired by the reproduction of works created by Mestre Vitalino, the themes produced by the artisans are folkloric motifs that portray the daily life of the sertanejo man, such as: the bumba-meu-boi, the maracatu, the fife bands, the refugees from the drought, the cangaço and the bandits (mainly the famous Lampião and Maria Bonita)



the cowboy, the rodeo, the wedding and the funeral ritual in the rural area.



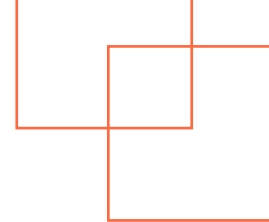
Figure 01. Bumba-meu-boi, Alto do Moura souvenir.  
Source: Barbosa (2017).

ABMAM - Association of Clay Craftsmen and Residents of Alto do Moura, has registered more than 700 craftsmen who, for the most part, work producing utilitarian pieces, dolls and surrealist works that follow the aesthetics of Mestre Galdino, a contemporary of Mestre Vitalino.

Barbosa (2019) considers that the practice of artisanal activity in Alto do Moura occurs, for the most part, individually, but traditionally inserted in family groups that share spaces for creation, production and commercialization. Even within this family context, individualistic practices dominate the daily lives of artisans, each one working autonomously and being responsible for their own production.

Since 2014, the Flor do Barro group has been working to achieve greater recognition of local women's handicraft production. The group is formed by twenty women artisans who live in the neighborhood and who make up, or not, the traditional craft families of Mestre Vitalino, Mestre Galdino and their disciples. The group's meetings take place at the Flor do Barro group headquarters, Espaço Cultural Flor do Barro, located at Rua Mestre Vitalino, number 227, Caruaru-PE, which is managed by artisan-leaders Maria do Socorro Rodrigues da Silva and Cleonice Otília da Silva.

To emphasize the mission of these women and in an attempt to bring design closer to local handicrafts, an Academic Extension Project was proposed entitled: "Flores do Barro: mapping and ideation of the handicraft production chain". This project is coordinated by professors from the Design Course at UFPE/Federal University of Pernambuco/Brazil, at Campus do Agreste.



The general objective of the project is to propose, through design and its dialogical character, strategies for valuing the resources involved in the production and commercialization of the Flor do Barro group do Alto do Moura, in Caruaru.

Inherent to this objective is the premise that from the design tools it is possible to collaborate with the processes of management, production and access to markets for the dissemination of Pernambuco handicrafts (SANTOS et al., 2022).

Within the above, the article presents the result of one of the goals of the extensionist action related to the analysis of the handicraft production chain.

These results are inserted in the vision of the economy of culture, considering economic, social, environmental and cultural sustainability parameters, and aiming to add value to the dissemination, distribution and consumption of Flor do Barro group products. This process begins with the analysis of social hierarchies that are traditionally established among artisans in the neighborhood.

## 2 SOCIAL HIERARCHIES OF THE ALTO DO MOURA – CARUARU/PE

The social classifications present in the community of artisans in Alto do Moura act as signs that result in the appreciation and recognition of the pieces produced and, consequently, of their creators. When walking along the sidewalks of the neighborhood, it is possible to notice the existing power relations between the artisans. The houses-ateliers of some receive totems communicating their place of work, and in them it is already discriminated whether the artisan mentioned is a master or not, like the totem of “Ateliê Mestre Marliete Rodrigues”.

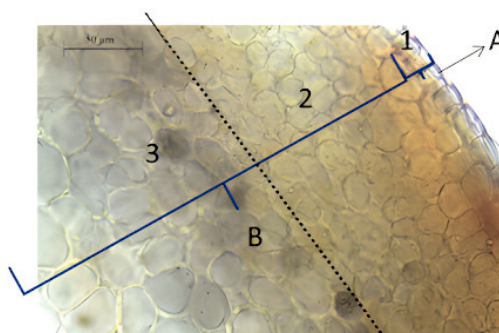
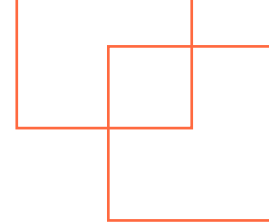
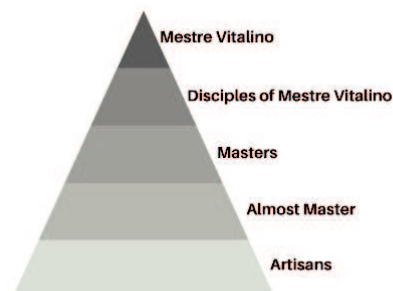


Figure 02. Mestre Marliete's Atelier House. Source: Barbosa (2017).



We noticed, just like Rocha (2014), that there are three categories used by the community: the masters, the near-masters and the artisans. The three categories listed by the author are the terms used in the artisans' speeches, including the "almost masters". However, the constant reference to Mestre Vitalino as sovereign is inherent to the narratives. And the indication of the master's first disciples as responsible for the continuation of the art.

As Barbosa (2019) describes, in the speech of the artisans, one of the criteria for occupying certain prominent places is to belong to the family of a master craftsman. The author characterizes this hierarchical relationship as follows: Mestre Vitalino as the sovereign, followed by his first disciples who are held responsible for perpetuating the art. Then come the contemporary masters, as they are descendants of the first disciples. Followed by the almost-masters, who aspire to the title of master; and artisans (Figure 03).

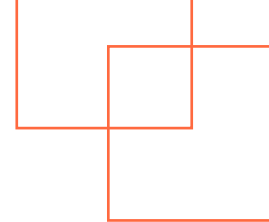


LEGENDA PARA FIGURA 3. NÃO PERMITE ABRIR.  
Figure 3. = Mestre Vitalino/Disciples of Mestre Vitalino/ Masters/Almost Master/Artisans

Figure 03. Graphic diagram of the hierarchy among artisans in Alto do Moura. Source: Adapted from Barbosa (2019).

Still in the analysis of social relations, we noticed that the few authors who report the story of Mestre Vitalino mention Mestra Dona Ernestina in the niche of disciples. Ismael and Cunha (2018) highlight Mestra Dona Ernestina as the only woman who, at the time, reproduced the regionalism of Mestre Vitalino, who is recognized as the first craftswoman to mold figurative art in clay.

Although historically the Alto do Moura region has the practice of developing pottery for utilitarian purposes presented under female skills, we observe that the number of women with the title of Master is much smaller than the number of men. Currently, there are only three: Mestra Marliete, Mestra Terezinha Gonzaga and the aforementioned



Mestra Dona Ernestina (In Memoriam). With the title of master being essentially held by men, we believe in the existence of a watershed (or gender) in the artisanal production of Alto do Moura.

The representation of women, in the exercise of ceramic production and receiving the title of Master in Alto do Moura, still remains in a slow flow. In the artisan woman's daily life, in addition to the concern with the generation of her pieces and/or number of sales, there is also the occupation with the maintenance of her domestic environment and of those who live in it.

### **3 HANDICRAFT PRODUCTION CHAIN ANALYSIS MODEL: THE EXPERIENCE OF LABORATORY O IMAGINÁRIO**

O Imaginário Design Laboratory aims to meet demands related to both artisanal and industrial productions based on the collaboration of professors, students and technicians from different areas of knowledge, integrating extension, teaching and research. And so, based on its objectives, it works within five axes: management, production, design, communication and market (ANDRADE; CAVALCANTI, 2020).

Among the works carried out by the laboratory, the research project "Analysis model of the handicraft production chain", promoted by the Culture Incentive System (SIC) of the State of Pernambuco, was implemented with six groups of artisans over a period of three years (2012, 2013 e 2014). At the beginning, the research was directed to two communities that work with the raw material in its natural state. In the following year, the studied groups used materials of industrial origin and, in the end, the research turned to artisans who worked with recyclable raw materials (TABOSA et al., 2016).

The Handicraft Production Chain Analysis Model, which has already been validated and tested with various types of handicraft (wood, fabric, cane and ceramics), is based on three pillars: suppliers, producers and consumers; which suggest the analysis under the emphasis of raw materials, production and commercialization, respectively (Figure 04).



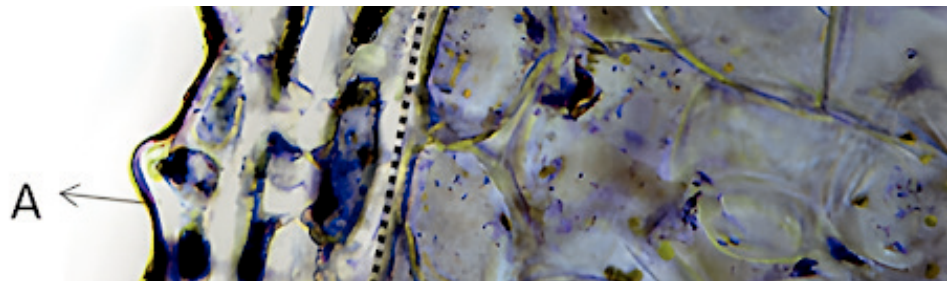


Figure 04. Bidimensional representation for analysis of the production chain.

Source: Handicraft production chain analysis model. Cultural Project 1111/12, Government of the State of Pernambuco - Culture Incentive System, 2013.

It is worth noting that the Model is based on the following biases: a) of sustainability – economic, social, environmental and cultural; b) of the dynamics of flows and counter-flows – resources, products, information and knowledge; c) and, of the movement of the cultural circuit – identity, production, representation, consumption and regulation.

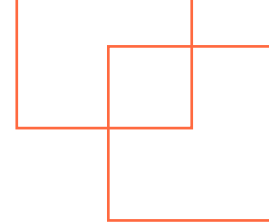
The data collected during the observations of the flow of activities, interviews with the artisans and technical visits to the communities are crossed to identify possible weaknesses in the chain, mainly with regard to the quality of the raw material and the production processes, the distribution channels and commercialization; for the recognition of the vision of the future through aspects that reiterate prosperity, identity, organization and its power relations; and the signaling of opportunities for improvement and competitive differentials, in order to facilitate the action plan to capture the model's benefits.

## 4 RESEARCH METHOD

To comply with the mapping stage, the analysis protocols proposed by the Handicraft Production Chain Analysis Model were applied: I) Identification of raw materials; II) Identification of production processes and III) Identification of market access.

### 4.1 IDENTIFICATION OF RAW MATERIALS

The dimension of sustainability is present in this protocol from the aspects of capturing and regulating the material used in production.



The social and economic dimensions of sustainability are present in the aspects of resources used for processing, technical knowledge and identity of doing. Data relating to costs, availability and access to raw materials are also dealt with, as well as the organization of this production in the craftsman's workspace.

## 4.2 IDENTIFICATION OF PRODUCTION PROCESSES

In this protocol, the aspects of environmental, social and economic sustainability related to knowledge and resource flows are registered. The stages of preparation, production, finishing, stock, shipping, quality control and ergonomics are identified and discussed with the actors involved in the chain.

## 4.3 MARKET ACCESS IDENTIFICATION

The last protocol considers the dimensions of economic and social sustainability and identifies the flow of information, identity and sociocultural representation. At this stage, attention is paid to aspects related to the commercialization of products, sales actions, publicity and after-sales. Visits were made to the private production spaces of the artisans of the Flor do Barro group, with the intention of mapping the processes, paths and agents involved in the process, from obtaining the raw material to the dissemination and commercialization of the pieces.

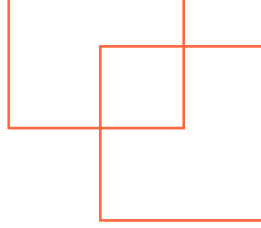
Data were filled in based on systematic observation and unstructured interviews with the artisans of the Flor do Barro group and other actors directly and indirectly involved. Technical visits were carried out for the recognition of practices; market niches or more effective targeting of creative and productive capacity.

## 5 PARTIAL RESULTS

Based on the results obtained during this article, a summary of the set of forms of the Analysis Model is presented below, in text format, for each of the three pillars presented in the previous chapter: Raw Materials, Production Processes and Market Access with a focus on sustainability.

### 5.1 IDENTIFICATION OF RAW MATERIALS

**Environmental Sustainability:** The inputs used by the artisans are



taken from natural deposits of the Ipojuca river - PE. The clay is extracted in an artisanal way using carts and hoes. Seu Genário is the supplier of the raw material and has the purchasing preference of the associated artisans due to the quality of the processed material. However, it is observed that the clay used by the artisans still presents a low technical quality for applications in utilitarian handicrafts (Figure 05).



Figure 05. Manual modeling of the processed raw material. Source: Karolyne Farias.

**Economic sustainability:** The artisans believe that the current extraction area is in serious danger of being depleted and that is why the municipality is looking for new suppliers. The clay used can be purchased at any time of the year, in packages of 5 and 10 kg, made from plastic bags, which keep the clay's moisture. The value of 10 kg of raw material is R\$ 5.00 (five reais) and the purchase is made individually by the artisans (Figure 06).

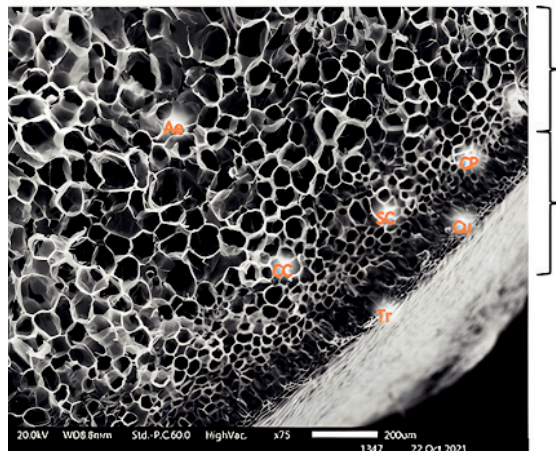
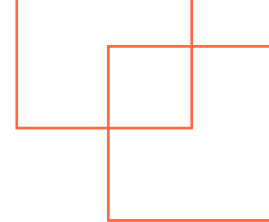


Figure 06. 10 kg processed raw material ready for use. Source:



BARBOSA, 2019.

**Social sustainability:** The human risks involved in extracting and handling clay are high as it is a manual operation. Manual production equipment such as shovels and hoes are used to extract these resources.

## 5.2 PRODUCTIVE PROCESS IDENTIFICATION

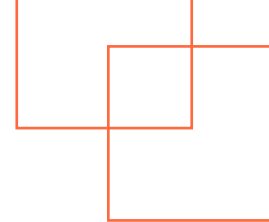
**Knowledge flow:** It encompasses the stages of pre-production and preparation of the clay, that is, in the description of how the artisans make it. Each clay sphere is shaped by hand using utilitarian tools such as bowls, spatulas, knives, wires, wooden meat boards. The part to be molded is sectioned during modeling and then joined together for details and finishing.

In the post-firing finishing phase, different painting modalities are used, generally involving synthetic, oil and acrylic paints. The pieces are separated and individually packed in bubble wrap and/or newspaper contained in cardboard boxes. The stock of parts for shipment is in the homes/ateliers and stores of family members (Figures 07, 08).



Figures 07 and 08. Workstation of artisans Ivonete and Margarida.  
Source: authors.

**Environmental sustainability:** It encompasses the quality control that starts in the pre-drying, when the pieces are placed to dry naturally. For burning, the pieces are organized in a brick and wood oven, in which leftovers donated from sawmills and pallets are used. Heating and cooling control is done manually. When removing parts from the oven, damage is checked. If damage is found, the chances of discarding are



high because correction alternatives are rare (Figure 09). All the raw clay residue is reused in the manufacture of other pieces and the firing waste is disposed of in landfills.

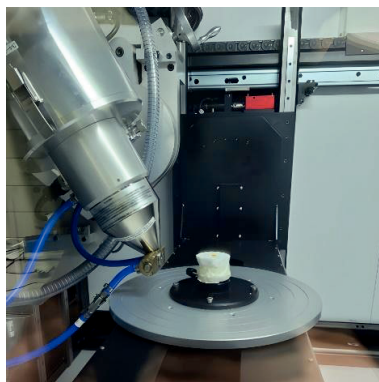


Figure 09. Tower-type wood-fired ceramic oven. Source: authors.

Electricity is used only for lighting and, like the internet, payment for it is divided among the entire group. Women demonstrate an interest in ovens with different technologies, however, sharing wood ovens between families and neighbors is a traditional practice in the artisan community, causing reactive opinions in the neighborhood.

After the previous step, another flow of knowledge occurs in the finishing phase. As different painting modalities are used, generally involving enamel paints, oil paint and acrylic paint, the pieces require drying as a post-finishing activity. The stock is located in the houses/ateliers and stores owned by family members and the logistics are directly applied with the individual separation of the pieces. They are packaged in bubble wrap, newspaper and a cardboard box, taking great care not to cause damage to the pieces.

**Social sustainability:** The cultural and organizational practices for using the ovens are aimed at hired people. These people who deal with the respective techniques for feeding the burning in the kilns and who do not use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) when handling the kilns within the group.

**Economic sustainability:** Directed within a method of developing products that constitute reproductions of the works of Mestre Vitalino, own creations with folkloric/figurative representations and suggestions

from customers.

The steps observed in the dimensions of the raw material and production processes are exemplified in the following diagram (Figure 10):

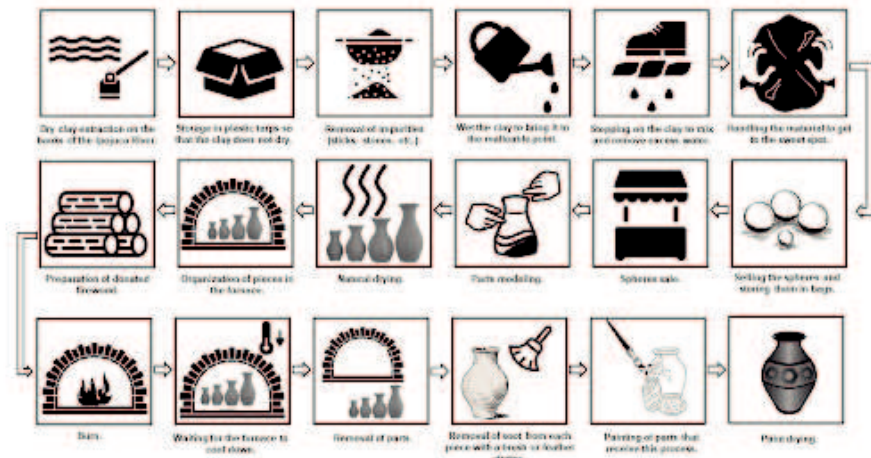
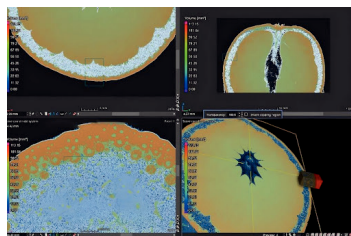


Figure 10. Productive process. Source: authors

### 5.3 MARKET ACCESS IDENTIFICATION

**Social sustainability:** The Flor do Barro group has few collective actions, restricted to specific orders such as the flower Christmas tree and other decorative ornaments in popular celebrations. They usually act individually in their homes or ateliers following their own styles of creation and commercialization, each in their socially hierarchical position in Alto do Moura (Figure 11).



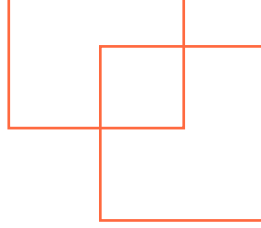


Figure 11. Nicinha's Atelier House. Source: authors.

**Economic sustainability:** The pieces created by these artisans are distributed through the Casa da Cultura, public markets in Pernambuco and other states, production environments and stores in Alto do Moura, handicraft fairs, orders from collectors and resellers. The price of each product varies according to the size of the artifact produced and the hierarchy of the craftsman in the local craft tradition, and there may be discounts for large quantity sales. The artisans also work with reverse logistics, in which the broken pieces are returned through the post office or carrier.

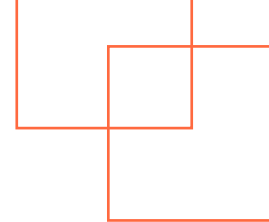


Figure 12. Photos of the artisans' pieces

**Information Flow:** The Flor do Barro group is publicized through the press, exhibitions, conferences, cultural events with the help of the local city hall and the Fundação de Cultura de Caruaru, in addition to the support of promotion networks such as Artesol (National Network of Brazilian Cultural Crafts - a public policy program to promote crafts of Brazilian cultural tradition).

## 6 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

From the intersection of the collected data, it was possible to analyze the artisanal environment with its different sustainability approaches, considering the interferences to which it is subject. Based on the collected data, we ratify that the experimentation of the model indicates its potentiality to be applied in the artisanal environment and its specificities.



The main contributions found are directly related to the following aspects:

- Identification of improvement opportunities;
- Valuing women artisans;
- Strengthening of the traditions of the Flor do Barro group, reinforcement the social ties between the members and subsidy for representation of speeches in the sale with added cultural value.

Another extremely important issue is the dedication of the artisans shown in this project. Although some already belong to families of well-known artisans, the affection for clay and the recognition of the effort used by each one of them gave rise to the movement of the Flor do Barro group. Which constantly seeks greater visibility and new perspectives for the female artisan. Which constantly seeks greater visibility and new perspectives for the female artisan.

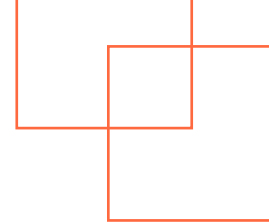
The Flor do Barro group receives support from bodies and institutions such as the Fundação de Cultura de Caruaru and ArteSol. However, the actions do not operate in the dichotomy between the individual work of the artisans and the collective thought, as a group. Establishing this relationship is one of the gaps identified as opportunities to foster their enthusiasm in exploring new possibilities and different processes with clay.

In view of the above, the meetings and actions of the project directed the artisans towards the creation of ceramic bio jewels. This demand had as its main function the act of reinforcing the female empowerment that the group demonstrates and expresses in their daily lives. The initiative came from the artisans themselves, who together want to work towards the realization of a collective collection with the exploration of new techniques.

Based on the partial results presented in this extension project, the decision taken as one of the next strategies is to seek to strengthen the work of the women artisans group. This is in line with the historical behavior of artisanal production in the neighborhood, especially with regard to the traditional and individual recognition reserved for Master men. In this sense, a meeting between women artisans and potters from different groups in the state of Pernambuco was proposed and planned.

With the aim of promoting the exchange of craft processes and





techniques, as well as experiences related to the traditions of each territory, the group chosen for the meeting and approximation between the artisans was the group Cerâmica do Cabo, from Cabo de Santo Agostinho - PE, which is already accompanied by the laboratory O Imaginário. The dialogue, treated as an exchange, is being developed as one of the strategic actions resulting from the mapping of the productive chain presented in this article.

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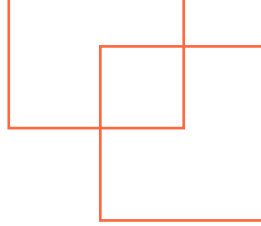
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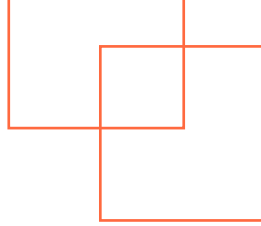
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## Ana Carolina de Moraes Andrade Barbosa

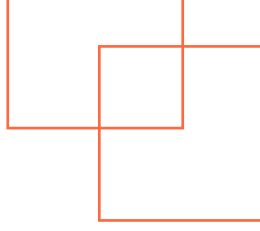
Permanent Teacher of the Graduate Program in Design at the Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE). Associate Teacher of the Design Course at the Campus of the Agreste at UFPE, PhD at PPG Design at UFPE, Master in Urban Development at the same institution and Designer graduated at the Federal University of Campina Grande. Coordinates research and extension in areas that relate design to culture, cities, artisanal production and territory. Author of the book: Image, Landscape and Situation: an apprehension of design in the city.

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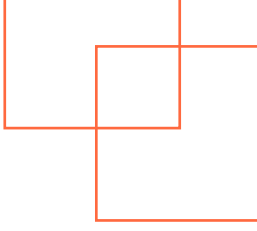


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