

Artigo de John Thackara

Publicado em 13 de maio de 2012 em

<http://thackara.com/place-bioregion/its-not-just-the-bags/>

Adelia Borges' new book *Design + Craft: The Brazilian Path* contains a glorious array of artefacts collected in every Brazilian region: pottery with rock painting motifs in Piauí; recycled cardboard pulp and banana tree fiber bowls from Minas Gerais; annatto seeds used as fabric dyes in Amazonas; knotted rugs from Rio de Janeiro; fish leather flowers from Mato Grosso do Sul; golden grass bags and baskets from Tocantins....

But this important book is not just about desirable souvenirs. On the contrary, Borges' commentary breathes new life into discussions about the relationship between designers, and artisans in the south. In particular, she is worried about "how many persons want to help us in the Southern hemisphere, but with lack of respect for local knowledge".

Exchanges between designers from the north and craft communities in Brazil have been intensifying since the 1990s, but there are far too many occasions when designers or design students "arrive with or maintain a superior attitude to the artisans".

There are many ways in which interactions with designers can benefit artisans. Designers can improve the quality of objects being made, and sometimes reduce the use of raw materials. They can be effective communicators to consumers back home, and explain intangible qualities of an object such as its historical context.

But a bigger and more important story hardly ever figures in these exchanges: this is, the extent to which modernization and 'development' threaten many of the unique agricultural and artisanal heritage systems, including the biodiversity on which they are based, as well as their societies.

Agricultural systems and landscapes have been created, shaped and maintained by generations of farmers and herders. Building on local knowledge and experience, many indigenous agricultural systems, and their related artisan traditions, are the result of a profound relationship with nature that is missing from modern industrial agriculture. A proper respect for and understanding of these knowledge systems and cultures is too often missing when designers come calling.

A particular challenge, Borges writes, is "to ensure the work is meaningful to the community so that it can be continued after the exotic design visitors have left". One-off visits, or short consulting trips of a few days, can bring great media coverage for the designers who travel to the communities. But too often they leave no positive results in these communities "besides enormous expectations which are almost always frustrated".

Borges further counsels that “the potential dangers of a badly carried out intervention are many, and their effects can be damaging. The older a tradition is, and the more “away from civilization” the community it belongs to, the greater the dangers and the greater the necessary care”.

The basis for these north-south interactions, for Borges, must be respect: “respect for the work rhythm of the artisan, respect for the signs that have resisted over the years, respect for the whole system of symbols that culminates in an object”.

“One way to enrich the connection is to focus on ways designers and makers in the north can learn from sustainable techniques that Brazilian artisans have used even before the word ecology was spread.

Borges does not believe in magical formulae or recipes, nor does she believe in “external saviours”. The process must involve whenever possible professionals from that specific region. External consultants can start up a dialogue, and set things in motion, but there must be continuity based on local links.

“We must urgently reflect upon the ethical parameters to be observed in this encounter, as well as share methodologies which will allow a true dialogue to take place”.

John Thackara é um escritor e consultor inglês. Criou e dirigiu por 20 anos a conferência internacional *Doors of Perception*, na Holanda e na Índia. Seu foco principal de atuação é o design social, ecológico e relacional. É senior fellow do Royal College of Art, de Londres, e professor visitante da School of Visual Arts em New York e da Pontio Innovation, laboratório de inovação da Bangor University, no País de Gales.