

# ARTESANATO SOLIDÁRIO (ARTESOL)

A non-governmental social organization founded in 1998, ArteSol was recognized as a Civil Society Organization of Public Interest (OSCIP) in 2002, with the aim of contributing to the safeguarding and development of traditional craftwork in areas of Brazil with low human development index. With the support of diverse partners, ArteSol has conducted around 100 projects in 17 of the country's 26 federal states. These projects have benefitted approximately 5,000 artisans and their families: producers of pottery, weavings, lace and embroidery work, wooden and clay sculptures, musical instruments and toys, among other artifacts made primarily by women.



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## **Weaving networks for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage**

By :

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The intangible cultural heritage in general, and traditional craftwork in particular, is a resource of special significance in terms of history, worldviews and ways of life of their practitioners. These resources are potentially available to most, if not all, members of cultural communities, allowing for differences in gender, age and other forms of social differentiation, which organize the practice and transmission of this knowledge. Their holders often use the craftwork as an important component of family income. For this reason, its safeguarding and development, when sustainable, can contribute decisively to improving the living conditions of artisans and their families, as well as boosting their self-esteem and promoting access to citizenship rights.

ArteSol began by identifying groups of traditional craft workers living in poverty, understanding that this activity formed an integral part of family life in such communities. Being aware of the social characteristics of each community, the diversity of tastes and techniques, our goals were to contribute to the formation



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of associations; understanding of consumer needs and preferences; redesigning products when necessary; helping in price formation and; establishment of direct artisan-market relationship. Our priority has always been to mediate the traditional crafts producers' relationships with the market and the formation of strategic partnerships, aiming to safeguard the local cultural heritage as well as the autonomy of the artisans as producers and as citizens.

## **Social Technology**

ArteSol has developed its own social technology methods through close contacts with artisans, guided by anthropological research and the support of diverse



strategic partnerships built over the course of its trajectory. This approach combines actions in the following fields:

### **Empowerment of the artisans**

- Solidarity – rather than charity – is an effective way of fighting poverty and social exclusion.
- Artisans are the protagonists of their activities; hence, they must be at the centre of the decision-making processes.
- Empowerment depends on the formation of associations and partnerships.

## **Strengthening the respect for traditional knowledge and aesthetic values**

- The transmission of values and knowhow depends on dialogue and good understanding between masters and apprentices, which means the creative inclusion of the realities of contemporary life within the continuity of tradition.
- Economic agents and the public should become aware of the significance of traditional artifacts for their holders and practitioners, as well as of the contribution of the knowledge and creativity embedded in them to the enhancement of cultural diversity.
- The dialogue between artistic, academic and traditional knowledge and the collaboration between specialists from these fields help confront the challenges to survival, faced by traditional craftwork practices and intangible cultural heritage in general.



## **Promotion of sustainable development**

- Safeguarding actions and plans must include the sustainable use of the natural resources that are necessary to the continuity of craftwork and traditional cultural practices.
- Changes to traditional craftwork must observe the structural limits and moral interdictions established by the social organization and worldview of practitioners and holders.

## **Establishment of fair trade practices**

- Fighting child labour and gender inequalities
- Transparency and accountability in the management of production and sales
- Fair price and direct negotiations between producers and consumers

### **Actions are coordinated as follows:**

The social technology developed by ArteSol contributed effectively to safeguarding expressions of intangible cultural heritage at risk in Brazil, such as lace making techniques in Divina Pastora (Sergipe state), viola de cocho instruments in Corumbá and Ladário (Mato Grosso do Sul state) and earthenware cooking dishes in Goiabeiras (Espírito Santo state). These three cultural elements today form an official part of Brazil's Cultural Heritage, protected by the National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN). In addition, this approach contributes significantly to regional sustainable development projects like those taking place in Polo Veredas project (Minas Gerais state).



### **Projeto Polo Veredas – weaving the present, spinning the future**

There is little rain in northwestern Minas Gerais in central Brazil, 700 km from the state capital, Belo Horizonte. The Human Development Index - HDI is low, there are few job opportunities, and work is linked to family farming. Weaving, a task shared by women and children, is the complementary activity that traditionally supplied the need of clothes for their own use and for the home, in an economy with almost no currency circulation.



Weaving is also culturally important as it promotes the meeting and socializing of women to spin, pray and sing when a woman is not able to take part as weaving producers the other ones organized a “task force” coming by surprise, launching fireworks, with their carding and spinning wheels, plus groceries for lack of food during the day of collective work. They mixed tasks such as ginning, carding and spinning cotton with preparation of food. At the end of the day, the meetings turned into celebrations with the participation of husbands and brining drinks, music and dances.

Time and better roads facilitated access to the cities to buy industrialized fabrics. The planting of cotton decreased and the tradition was lost, leaving woven pieces made by older generations and stored in chests as part of family’s memories. The “task forces” became less frequent and eventually disappeared and the songs and dances were lost in time.

It was in 2001, Artesol consultants went house to house in the villages, spreading their mission to rescue traditional knowledge and to revitalize the weaving to generate income and improve the quality of life of the residents. They gathered about 200 women from five villages, which were stimulated to return to production, within a solidarity network and to value this activity as part of the cultural heritage of the region. The training workshops fostered human and technical development of women, diversifying the culture of collaborative work and benefiting the community.



The methodology developed by ArteSol included also the establishment of partnerships with local public and private agencies aiming at the project's sustainability.

In 2006, with the initiative of one of these partners, Fundação Banco do Brasil, the five communities received new training in the technique of traditional embroidery. The embroiderers were associated with weavers, integrating all groups in a large production network. Some spin, some dye and others weave while embroider and others produce frames and boxes to display and pack the unique products of this network. As the communities are far

apart, the Foundation also supported the creation of Central Paths – an association that manages the network with expertise to strengthen the network and promote marketing of products – and has also provided the financial means for its existence.

ArteSol's proposal was to gather the groups in a single place for textile production to revitalize and strengthen local cultural identity; empower artisans as agents of preservation techniques and of the appreciation of the craft; form agents acting as multipliers of knowledge; optimize the production process for income generation; maximize results; stimulate consumer access to products and; to ingrate these local communities in the tourist's circuit.

Results were many: creation of associations, collective management of production, improvement of traditional techniques, adaptation of products to the market, recovery of songs of work in task forces. In addition to increased income, the major result of this action was the social integration of women at local and regional level.

Thanks to this social technology, their work is now being recognized, communities moved out of their isolation, people become proactive and entrepreneurial, and started participating in cultural events in their localities and beyond.

To attract young people, the women, in partnership with local schools, encourage students to survey the local culture, folklore, dances, traditional festivals and the biography of the former residents. The fauna and flora are also studied, as well as local productive arrangements and the preservation of nature. Children make drawings of their learning, value their surroundings and share their representations of reality with the artisans who reproduce them in their artifacts.

Veredas (Pathways) are the valleys between the hills, where the spring water mines and palm trees that gave rise to the first threads that were woven the region. This project is an example of how to create a coordinating system of converging forces to stimulate the formation of networks, contacts and exchanges between the agents of the safeguard intangible cultural heritage. A case that reveals other aspects of our diverse society deep inside Brazil.

## **ArteSol Network**

ArteSol developed partnerships to consolidate its role as an ally and a provider of technical and sometimes material inputs to the groups of artisans, and to contribute to the formation of a niche market that would strengthen the sustainability of safeguarding this traditional know-how.

Although this work continues to accept new groups to be included in the program, the main objective of the organization has been redirected towards the construction of ArteSol Network. (<http://www.artesol.org.br/rede>)

This Network's objective is to develop a specific website allowing direct contact

with associations, cooperatives, masters, artisans and their commercial partners – i.e., agents belonging to the productive chain of traditional craftwork, many of whom have participated in activities developed by ArteSol since 1998. A key objective of this initiative has been to strengthen the autonomy of the artisans in selling their products and advise them on how to deal with market economy in line with fair trade principles.

The Network is aiming at the inclusion of stores, support institutions and government programs through a communication plan that provides access-ready information and contacts. It is not intended to be a sales site; rather, its objective is to become an effective networking tool for the development of traditional craftwork in Brazil. This initiative has produced very positive results, encouraging us to continue to work in this direction.

