

The Old New Market: Design and Reuse in the City

O Velho Mercado Novo: design e
reutilização na cidade



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ABSTRACT

This article presents a case study of Velho Mercado Novo (Old New Market), in the city of Belo Horizonte: a design approach that reuses empty storefronts at Mercado Novo (New Market) and accommodates the interests of old and new vendors. The strategy adopted there renewed the importance of this location in the city and highlighted that which is old and traditional. The theoretical background includes discussions in the fields of social sciences and design that understand sustainability not only through reuse, but also through reconnection between people and locations. In this case study, the bonds built with the history and life of the space, revealed in formal and symbolic aspects of the new businesses, are analyzed. The successful occupations focused on the construction of an idea of the market that could articulate tradition, ruins, diversity and the future.

KEYWORDS

Design; Social innovation; Sustainability.

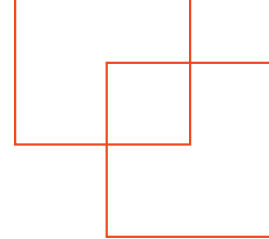
RESUMO

O artigo apresenta o estudo de caso do Velho Mercado Novo, na cidade de Belo Horizonte: uma abordagem de design que reutiliza lojas vazias no Mercado Novo e concilia os interesses de antigos e novos comerciantes. A estratégia adotada renovou a importância desse lugar na cidade e valorizou o que é velho e tradicional. O referencial teórico reúne discussões dos campos das ciências sociais e do design que compreendem a sustentabilidade não só por meio da reutilização, mas também a partir da reconexão entre os sujeitos e os lugares. No estudo do caso, são analisados os vínculos construídos com a história e com a vida do lugar, revelados nos aspectos formais e simbólicos dos novos empreendimentos. As ações de ocupação bem-sucedidas prezaram pela constituição de uma ideia de mercado capaz de articular a tradição, as ruínas, a diversidade e o futuro.

KEYWORDS

Design; Inovação social; Sustentabilidade.



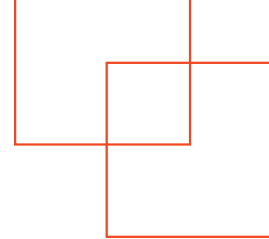


INTRODUCTION

This project presents a case study of Velho Mercado Novo (Old New Market), in the city of Belo Horizonte. It is a design approach, in progress, that began in 2018, with the reuse of empty storefronts at Mercado Novo (New Market). The strategy favors interaction between old and new vendors and appreciation of the location, its history, its diversity and its formal characteristics, including those that show the passage of time. The research was developed from a theoretical background with discussions in the fields of social sciences and design. While seeking sustainability, one possible path is reuse in a context of resource depletion. More than that, there is a need for a wider cultural transformation, able to bring people closer together and closer to the places where they live, so that together, they may think on what is to come. A valuable contribution of design, in this context, comes from the engagement of designers with communities for the collective creation of management strategies for a sustainable future, aimed at the wellbeing of all.

The case study, done through observation and document research, revealed that the appreciation of the old and of tradition was only possible through the development of design practices. These practices sought positive interaction between old and new vendors, appreciation of the tradition of the Market and its products and the creation of an identity based on the aged architecture of the space, as well as on the vernacular culture of Minas Gerais. In the analysis that was done, recent businesses, composed of furniture, objects, colors and textures, were made notable through formal and symbolic dialogue with tradition. It is the ballast for a plural future, where all activities that already exist in the Market can and should coexist with the new, which is, in turn, in conversation with the past. Thus, the reuse of spaces and objects at Velho Mercado Novo shows a new form of production that is interested in the life and culture of a place.

In a context where ways of life and production are characterized mostly by segregation, alienation, individualism, excessive consumerism, programmed obsolescence and the understanding of nature only as a resource, Velho Mercado Novo shows itself to be an innovative design approach. The Market today can be seen as a place



where design practices invest in coexistence and a cultural plurality that can provide significant experiences, possibly revealing other ways to be with objects and living things. The connection between people and production processes can be seen, from raw materials to disposal, displaying other ways of living and producing.

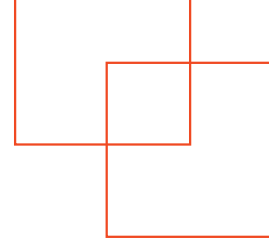
1. THE CITY, PRODUCTION AND WAYS OF LIFE

In order to imagine possible futures for planet Earth, it is important to understand how we got here. The investigation of human settlement in cities reveals specific relationships with nature, people and all living things. Cities, particularly large cities, radically transformed the context of their establishment, creating a new landscape with imposing proportions. The so-called urban landscape, which began in the context of industrial production, was able to gather a crowd in a new space-time known as the modern age. Electric lights, public transport, iron and glass architecture, commercial galleries and train stations were brand new elements of daily life in the age of machinery, with technical images and mass communication (Benjamin, 1985a, 1985b, 1989; Brissac, 1996).

While the big city consolidated itself and advanced, following the productive logic of capital, everything and everyone became resources to be exploited and products to be consumed, even nature. Natural elements would remain in the landscape organized into gardens, zoos, fairs, markets and in the sky, interspersed with buildings. A new ecosystem was established along with new ways of living.

In the modern age, traditional ways of living — characterized by strong social ties, close bonds with nature and its rhythms, and communal production almost always aimed at subsistence — were supplanted by a culture based on individualism, alienation, the unbridled production and consumption of products with programmed ends. The gears of industry could not and cannot stop. It is necessary to maintain and expand production and consumer markets (Rolnik, 1984). The word is wealth generation and infinite growth! Under these conditions, life follows the pace of capital and pulses for what is always new. Time is money and cannot be wasted.

In order to speed up industrial production, the fragmentation of

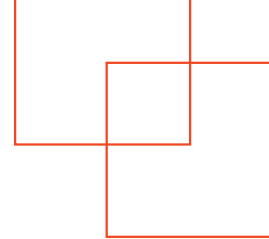


processes was essential, as well as the specialization of functions. This logic, seen from manufactures in the early days of capitalism and today, is part of the domination strategy that segregates and separates in order to keep power and control in the hands of the few (Rolnik, 1984). It also breaks community ties and makes conscientious shared work non-viable (Federici, 2022). In production lines and in consumerism, the notion of a whole is lost. What happens along the process seems not to matter. Each person, isolated in their function, sees and reflects only upon their fragment of reality. Awareness of being together and inhabiting a living planet that requires care becomes almost impossible. Today, many forms of prejudice — such as racism, xenophobia and the fear of others — have added onto segregation and become a serious problem in social life (Sennett, 2018).

The logic of segregation designed cities, architectures and interiors and is now intensified with digital culture. Through screens, relationships are formed with no physical contact, without looking into each other's eyes. Access to data can be permanent on screens and devices attached to the body or on interfaces available in the environment and landscape. The screen draws the gaze, stimulates and codifies it, feeding algorithms that enmesh people, their affections and desires in addictive structures, usually disconnected from life in a specific place (Crary, 2023). Too many hours before a screen isolate people and free them from any commitment to others.

Life comes to be understood through clicks, at one's fingertips, like an exciting video game that can always be restarted. There are no bonds, much less connections to the rhythms of nature (Crary, 2023; Han, 2021). There is no day or night. On screens, time for work, leisure, production and consumption blend together and are seen as endless realities. This is why capitalism in the digital era constitutes a threat to life on this planet (Crary, 2016).

According to Han (2022a, p.9), “digitalization unthings and disincorporates the world”. Uninterrupted digital communication does not promote meetings. There are only likes and followers to hoard. There is also an infinity of stored data that will hardly promote knowledge and memory. Things no longer matter, much less the simplicity of the trivial and the ordinary, that stabilize and anchor people in reality, through doing, care and dedication. Life without



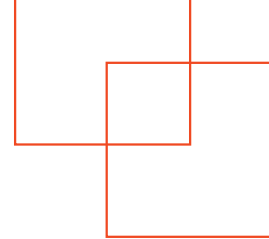
things can be lighter and more fluid, with no attachments. Ownership and responsibility are replaced by experiences, by the frantic search for stimulus on and offscreen. Meanwhile, things, connections, bonds and the real world itself tend to disappear.

Stopping, sleeping, dreaming, carefully rebuilding the bonds torn apart by segregation are framed as actions that could quite possibly ensure the future of life on this planet (Crary, 2023; Federici, 2022; Han, 2022a, 2022b, Krenak, 2020; Ribeiro, 2022). Crary (2016) believes in sleeping and dreaming as ways to escape capital's space-time. Dreaming reveals other paths, visionary perspectives that can reconnect people to themselves and others. Crary (2022) believes, however, that a slow and careful time will only be possible with the end of the internet and the digital. It will demand interaction and the rebuilding of community bonds through daily rituals that give meaning to time and physical space. It is through the repetition of these actions that habit and habitation will be recreated. This is the only way to make it possible to seek stability and put down roots, turning "being-in-the-world into being-home" (Han, 2021b, p.10).

The space-time ruled by industry and the digital world contributed to the gradual distancing of people from nature, making the conscience and feeling of being together in the world non-viable. The life of everyone and of the planet is at risk. The possibility of a future seems to involve the reconstruction of bonds and of the meaning of living on Earth. From this understanding comes the task of starting to cultivate new times and spaces. How to do this is set as a design problem.

2.DESIGN AND SUSTAINABILITY

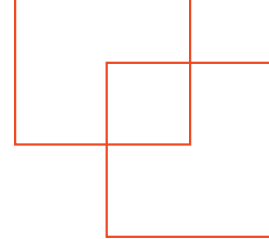
In the field of design, Fry (2009) and Manzini (2017)'s approaches introduce important reflections on industrial culture and its current state of unsustainability. Possible futures may come from new ways of thinking about design and our relationship with other living beings and the planet. For Fry (2009), it is a cultural reconstruction, by redesigning design. Manzini (2017) also believes in a new culture that may result from design for social innovation and sustainability. In a potential new civilization, development will mean the wellbeing of all living beings and the planet.



Industrial culture, according to Fry (2009), took in all phases of the modern age and created an environmental, aesthetic and material model that many grew used to. The main problem is that this model does not seek the preservation of life. Certainly, it is impossible to dismiss this culture, but its rebuilding is urgent for biosocial survival. To Fry (2009), this rebuilding involves the transformation of people, who become what they are through culture, social relationships and materiality.

To rebuild industrial culture, Fry (2009, p.25) believes in design, “as design itself is redesigned”. Design embodies economic thought and its practice in the way it designates the material form, prefigures directions, value systems and behaviors. It involves those who design and those that are designed, as all creation is inseparable from destruction. As such, in order to reshape design, all must be involved in understanding the environmental and symbolic impact along the production process, from the extraction of raw material to the disposal of waste. Design questions - how we experience, define, use and distribute resources - must be posed to all. “Everyone must know that everything we, individually or collectively, do, buy and use has directional consequence” (FRY, 2009, p.27-8). An education in design is of interest to all, and it is essential to begin the construction of a possible sustainability.

According to Fry (2009, p.18), “the problem is not immediately achieving sustainability, but initiating the process.” The great challenge of this endeavor, which will demand numerous steps and sacrifices, is “redirecting human development toward sustainable goals” (Fry, 2009, p.14). The economy and the production of wealth must seek the wellbeing of all and its maintenance. To that end, attention must turn toward resources from the natural world, resources from the artificial world and reciprocity between people. Breaks in any of these spheres put life at risk; discrepancies as well. Fry (2009) highlights that extreme wealth, through the waste of resources, as well as poverty, are harmful. To rebuild industrial culture, we seek a culture of sustainability, with sustainable industry and agriculture, “redistributive justice, better-organized cities, housing for all, expansive environmental protections, ecological education (...) the improvement of democracy as sustained liberty” (Fry, 2009, p.22).



Manzini (2017) also believes in a new culture, with new ethical and aesthetic values focusing on the life of our planet. Much like industrial design was associated with industrial culture, a widespread new design approach, that is also promoted through sociotechnical networks, could contribute to a new culture, to manage a new civilization. To that end, Manzini (2017) seeks a new socio-environmental sensibility through the DESIS Network (Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability), which connects dozens of labs around the world today.

In Manzini (2017, p.15)'s approach, "design becomes, inevitably, a pervasive social process, practiced both by specialized designers and by non-designers". Non-designers are all people who do not possess specialized design knowledge, but who, through their innate creativity, may invent and create something new. Per Manzini (2017), the great innovation is social, and lies in meetings in daily life, where everyone designs in a connected world, transitioning toward sustainability. Each successful experience, through the DESIS Network, is a reference for the next ones. These meetings involve the people, public and private enterprises, and designers, who gain a new role.

The designer is seen as a protagonist who is immersed and aware of local and daily life, observing, facilitating conversations, planning and articulating collaborative forms of production and organization. The designer nurtures and supports these life projects that are meaningful for all involved. The approach is collective, with sustainable and resilient production, aimed at local consumers. It transposes the industrial model of economy and work. Work is now understood as "meaningful work" (Manzini, 2017, p.38). It is connected to the context of the lives of the people who seek viable futures together. It involves, for example, care for the neighborhood, the city and life in that place. It breaks with individualism in initiatives in which collaboration is a choice to make things happen.

On the path to a new civilization, these daily life initiatives, made instrumental by specialized design, compete for the construction of a new culture, with new forms of interaction between people, places and products. According to Manzini (2017, p.40),

The small scale and interconnectivity of social organizations allow them to grow deep roots in a place. At the same time, because they are so interconnected, they can also be very open

- to global flows of ideas, information, people, goods and capital.

This new culture involves intense relationships and a slower time that allows bonds to be created. The discovery of this new time does not entail, according to Manzini (2017, p.39), the substitution of the existing time of industrial acceleration, but the management of multiple temporalities, in a true “time ecology”, where different kinds, with different traits and steps, coexist”.

At Mercado Novo, the approach called Velho Mercado Novo certainly contributed to the establishment of a culture that could appreciate the history of the place, its surroundings and the city. Another temporality was established through design actions that involve care and daily interaction. The understanding of the Market and its traits as something valuable is what guides the design of its future. New colors, smells, tastes and textures refer back to tradition to compose their cuisine, new environments and products.

3. MERCADO NOVO AND VELHO MERCADO NOVO

Mercado Novo was planned to be a large supply space in downtown Belo Horizonte. Its modernist project was developed by architects Fernando Graça and Sandoval Azevedo Filho in 1962, with a concrete structure and sealing in cobogó ceramics. Its occupation, however, did not happen as expected. The established vendors' decision to stay where they were, also in the downtown area — handling the property, construction work and future administration of Mercado Central (Central Market) — made the transfer and occupation of Mercado Municipal Novo (New Municipal Market), the name it was given by the State, unfeasible (Mafra; Souza, 2019).

In 1963, the building of Mercado Municipal Novo was opened and acquired in auction by Companhia Edificadora Sobrado. The sale was made according to Municipal Law No. 814 of December 19th, 1959, which determined the use of the space as a hypermarket and the preservation of the architectural style of the building. Sobrado Company declared bankruptcy and left construction unfinished, lacking roof coverage and essential components of electric, hydraulic and sewage structure (Mafra; Souza, 2019).

According to Mafra and Souza (2019, p.6), as the years went by, there were internal changes to the space, such as the construction of a parking lot and the sale of storefronts. Some “were acquired, in 1975, by the company REGE – Realizações Empreendimentos Gerais Ltda. In 1985, Companhia Edificadora Sobrado donated the roof slab of the building to the Municipality of Belo Horizonte”. Today, the building is private and public property, as the floor of Mercado Novo's recently-covered terrace is property of the Municipality of Belo Horizonte (Mafra; Souza, 2019). Through the years, Mercado Novo remained underoccupied, while Mercado Central consolidated itself as an important space for supply, leisure and tourism in the city.

Today, the management of Mercado Novo is run by two condominiums, one responsible for the ground part of the building, and the other responsible for the three remaining floors above ground level. Usage is varied, with around 1,200 private shops (Mafra; Souza, 2019). On the ground floor, there are mainly produce, butcher's, dairy and packaging stalls, and affordable restaurants that serve set meals at low prices. Greengrocers' stalls as seen in (Figure 1) are part of the traditional ambiance of the place.

Figure 1- Greengrocer's stall on the ground floor of Mercado Novo



Source: Josana Mattedi Prates Dias

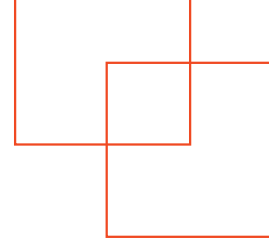
The first floor holds a variety of activities and services, such as shops that produce signs and uniforms, electricians' workshops, musical instrument sale and repair shops. There is also a large number of print shops. (Figure 2) shows a well-known uniform shop there. The second and third floors of the building remained underoccupied since its opening. They were the target of many cultural initiatives to promote the space, run by REGE – Realizações Empreendimentos Gerais Ltda, the owner of nearly 70% of the properties at the market (Maфра; Souza, 2019).

Figure 2 – Uniform shop on the first floor of Mercado Novo



Source: Josana Mattedi Prates Dias

The first initiative was in 2010, with what was called Mercado das Borboletas (Butterfly Market). The proposal hoped to create an Arts and Businesses Incubator, with cultural themed spaces focused on theater, visual arts and cinema. There would be film screening rooms, a theater, toy areas and a food court. It was expected to occupy 309



storefronts on the second floor, on around 4,000m² next to the parking lot. The cultural project, however, was never implemented (Mafra; Souza, 2019). In 2011, the fire department closed down the area after a fire. In 2012, the cultural proposal was taken up again, but unsuccessfully. City Hall demanded a Neighborhood Impact Study and new construction work that was not possible for the organizers then (Mafra; Souza, 2019).

In 2018, a new occupation initiative called Velho Mercado Novo began, apparently making reference to the Market, its history and its ruins. Mafra and Souza (2019) observed, from a field study in 2019, that the new occupation sought to coexist with the life and type of commerce that already existed there. There was no sign of gentrification of Mercado Novo or its surroundings at the time. There was a new clientele and new businesses that sought the coexistence and permanence of all, especially of the affordable and diverse market that existed there.

The new business owners created a “Statute of Mercado Novo” in 2019 and formed a council to act alongside leadership of the condominiums. Their purpose was to highlight the culture and history of the place, ensuring the permanence of the old vendors and the usual clientele (Mafra; Souza, 2019). For the stores belonging to REGE, they developed an occupation study, with types of commerce (food, clothing, trades, etc) with sectorization and rules for the use of the space to avoid excessive crowding in the hallways and further issues with the Fire Department (Mafra; Souza, 2019).

Mafra and Souza (2019, p.11) highlight the attention given to the market's physical characteristics and the zeal toward visual and symbolic unity. The statute recommends the use of materials and furniture that can be in conversation with the history of the place and of other traditional markets. In the occupation guidelines, “the furniture of old corner shops, warehouses, pharmacies, kitchens and bars, factories of decades past” are mentioned as aesthetic reference points. The identity of the place must be reaffirmed through the usage of all kinds of services offered at the market, such as the production of: signs for the stores, uniforms and print materials. New bars and restaurants must use local produce. (Figure 3) shows *Herbário YVY*, which sells drinks with fresh herbs. The ambiance is constructed with furniture

typical of old pharmacies, with drawers and nooks with dried herbs that perfume and decorate the space. The reuse of furniture and objects is an example of the dialogue between the new and the traditional in the Market that broadens its ways of life without much formal contrast.

Figure 3- Herbário YVY with reused pharmacy furniture.



Source: Portal Belo Horizonte

Among the new business owners, there is a genuine interest in the space and its traditional trades. One can see their respect for the occupation guidelines in interior design projects and in visual identities. Mafra and Souza (2019) cite the study conducted by designer Flávio Vignoli, owner of Papelaria do Mercado Novo (New Market Stationery), one of the new business owners that started at Mercado Novo in 2018. Having an interest in printing techniques, he mapped all the print services available at the market: offset/typography, digital print shops, bookbinders, screen printers, stamp makers, promotional services, invitation manufacturers and paper distributors.

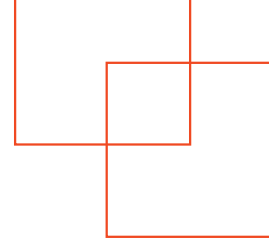
Mafra and Souza (2019) also noted in their research that a certain unfinished character in the building did not bother the new crowd. Recent quick observation of the space reveals exposed wiring, various signs of time, lack of sanitary infrastructure, lack of acoustic treatment and difficult access due to the long stairs and ramps for shared pedestrian and vehicle use. Aside from the ramps, (Figure 4) shows the disrepair that remains a strong characteristic of the market's aged architecture. As such, it remains alive and diverse, much like its surroundings.

Figure 4- Interior of Mercado Novo



Source: Photograph by Charles Tôres

Mercado Novo survived the pandemic, the period when the third floor occupation took place, according to Gabriel Filho, REGE superintendent (Gomes, 2022). Around the Market, new bars were opened, reusing spaces of interest that were underutilized until then, with a similar clientele to that of Velho Mercado Novo. Examples include Bar Palito and Bar Pirex, at Galeria São Vicente, an Art Deco building with balconies facing Praça Raul Soares (Para, 2022). The latest novelty, with a rather distinctive approach, is the announcement of the opening of a McDonald's in an empty storefront by Praça Raul Soares (Pacelli, 2023). In any case, at the moment, there is no sign of



gentrification of the Market or its surroundings. What can be seen is a broadening of the public that frequents the area, which now hosts culture and leisure activities. The surroundings, very close to the southern region of the city, remain, in spite of the land value, a marginalized and diverse center, with old, yet uncared for, architecture. Curiously, it may be the aged aspect of the ambiance that characterizes the newness that is produced there.

4.DESIGN AND VELHO MERCADO NOVO

In the case study of Mercado Novo, the care with the history and the life of the space is notable. Successful occupation actions prioritized the construction of an idea of the market that could articulate tradition, ruins, diversity and the future. The process started in 2018, when a group of entrepreneurs chose Mercado Novo as a place to grow their businesses. According to one of the partners, designer Rafael Quick, they sought somewhere that had history:

a history that was long and relevant to the city and, at the same time, wasn't well told and we wanted to make it so this history would be remembered. At the same time we wanted an authentic and real space, that was in conversation with our Minas Gerais culture. One time when we came to the Market to make a purchase for the brewery, we decided that this was the place (Lacerda, 2020).

When hearing about the occupation of Mercado Novo, its history is felt: the history of the space, histories of Minas Gerais, the history of things and ways of doing them. The new spaces that were created are in conversation with memories of the market and with Brazilian popular culture. A formal and symbolic care can be seen in the businesses that start and characterize the design approach called Velho Mercado Novo. The pioneers are Distribuidora Goitacazes and Cozinha Tupis. They are emblematic of a design conduct that can articulate new and projected elements with preexisting ones. The practice involves the interiors, the uniforms, the entire graphic aspect and the products. Distribuidora Goitacazes, seen on (Figure 5), combined old brickwork countertops from the market with iron and wood elements from old architecture. Cozinha Tupis, seen on (Figures 5 and 6), in light blue and red, with

formica and 15cm X 15cm tiles, referenced the architecture of old ground floor areas. The signs for both businesses, as well as the workers' uniforms, were made by traditional workshops at the Market. Glasses, plates, cutlery, objects, materials, colors and textures reveal the careful design work that innovates while in conversation with existing heritage, with the old, adding value to a lot that was in disuse. The subsequent occupations followed the same logic of reappropriation of references, furniture and objects. Additionally, they all maintained a certain roughness of the space.

Figure 5 – The beginning of Velho Mercado Novo



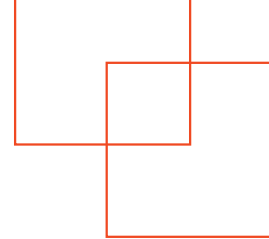
Source: Cozinha Tupis

Figure 6 – Detail of Cozinha Tupis.



Source: Cozinha Tupis

The Velho Mercado Novo movement was expanded in 2019, with the creation of a council that acts alongside the Market's administration and of the statute that guides the use and conformity of the spaces in a respectful way that is in tune with old vendors. Today, in 2023, the Market is almost entirely occupied and holds many Brazilian products, especially those from Minas Gerais, such as wine, cachaça, cheese and coffee. There are many artisanal workshops, such as a natural tincture shop, a cutlery shop and a carpentry shop. There are art galleries, local fashion and design producers' stores, bookstores and a bag factory. There are also artisans who sell and exhibit their work in old stands on the third floor. The diversity and life remain in the Market. There are plants and cats on every floor. Today, there is a curatorship of occupation that seems to follow Quick and his partners'



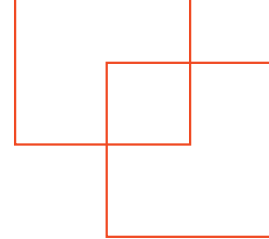
design approach (Gomes, 2022).

The Velho Mercado Novo movement's highlighting of the old, the precarious and the traditional vendors spread a way of doing design with a focus on the existing space and life. The opportunities discovered in daily life by Quick were developed from his technical know-how as a designer and broadened by the capacity for invention of everyone involved. Bonds and a work routine committed to the space were created. This design approach is very close to Manzini (2017)'s ideas, that see a solution for the world in communities like this, where everyone does design.

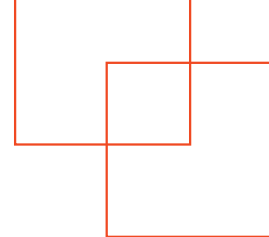
The collectively built design approach was able to weave bonds between people, spaces and memories in the city of Belo Horizonte. Even if there are simulacrum or initiatives focused only on consumerism, the Velho Mercado Novo movement teaches coexistence, significant labor and the collective management of a possible future. While not necessarily aiming for environmental sustainability, the initiative certainly speaks of a new form of production that is more attentive to life and the space. Its success seems to come from this connection full of stories and bonds, including those with things and spaces. What was old or forgotten becomes valued and gains new uses and meanings. The future is designed with multiple temporalities with smells, colors, shapes and tastes that speak of a new world and, at the same time, of tradition. Today, Mercado Novo can be considered an important supply, leisure, commerce and tourism location in the city.

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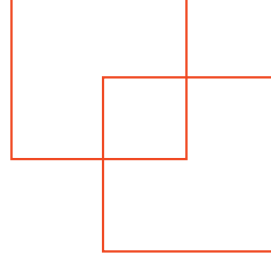
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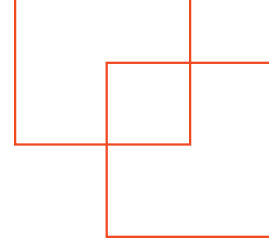
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