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*STUDY ON CO-CREATION IN COLLABORATIVE FAIRS: THE CASE OF EVA
FEIRA CRIATIVA¹*

**ESTUDO SOBRE COCRIAÇÃO EM FEIRAS COLABORATIVAS: O CASO
DA EVA FEIRA CRIATIVA**

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ABSTRACT

Fairs are places where the commercialization of products from different segments takes place. Its concept has evolved from a traditional context focused only on the sale of basic supplies, to also involve cultural and creative products produced in the creative economy segment. The study aims to understand which aspects of co-creation are present in the context of the operation of the collaborative fair in the creative economy sector located in the city of Sobral in Ceará. Therefore, research with a qualitative-descriptive framework was used through semi-structured interviews carried out with directors responsible for the fair, known as Eva Feira Criativa, based on a script adapted from Jesus (2021). There are aspects of co-creation in the entire process of organizing the fair, from before it is held to its post-event, which enable improvements in its future editions. The importance of collaborative work between the social actors involved was verified, from customers to exhibiting entrepreneurs.

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RESUMO

As feiras são locais onde acontece a comercialização de produtos de diversos segmentos. Seu conceito evoluiu de um contexto tradicional voltado apenas para a venda de suprimentos básicos, para também envolver produtos culturais e criativos produzidos no segmento da economia criativa. O estudo tem como objetivo compreender que aspectos da cocriação estão presentes no contexto de funcionamento da feira colaborativa no setor de economia criativa localizada na cidade de Sobral no Ceará. Logo, utilizou-se de pesquisa com arcabouço qualitativo-descritivo por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas realizadas com diretores responsáveis pela feira, conhecida como Eva Feira Criativa, a partir de roteiro adaptado de Jesus (2021). Tem-se aspectos de cocriação em todo o processo de organização da feira, desde antes da sua realização até o seu pós, que possibilitam melhorias em suas edições futuras. Constatou-se a importância do trabalho colaborativo existente entre os atores sociais envolvidos, desde os clientes até os empreendedores expositores.

Palavras-chave: cocriação, colaboração, economia criativa, feiras.



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INTRODUCTION

The creative economy stands out among Brazil's economic activities, given the country's plurality of identities and cultural richness. The first discussions on the national creative economy or creative industries took place around 2004, aiming to contribute to economic development, social inclusion, and the generation of employment and income (Silva et al., 2018; Targino, 2019). The creative economy sector shows potential for economic growth, as its activities have a positive impact on the innovation segment, which in turn affects other economic sectors. Brazil's capacity for economic growth is supported by a market that is receptive to the introduction of new products and services related to its rich cultural heritage (Nyko & Zendron, 2018).

One business segment that fosters the creative economy is fairs. Creative economy fairs occupy spaces such as museums, squares, and public centers, aiming to promote local transformation by attracting small producers with multiple talents. They enable exchanges with the visiting public and the community, providing interactions related to leisure, entertainment, and experiences (Vigueles & Marques, 2021). They can also encourage business initiatives to be developed in the digital era (Masseti et al., 2024). Collaborative work is present in fairs, enabling the combination of skills and knowledge and reducing the time spent on problem-solving and/or project execution (Medeiros Filho, 2020). Fairs create a social setting for co-creation, collaboration, and consumption. They allow for mutual knowledge exchange, which in turn adds value to the production process. Thus, the creative class and consumers benefit from co-creation in the development of products and services (Alencar et al., 2021).

The discussion about co-creation in the intellectually diverse environment of collaborative creative fairs — such as the Eva Creative Fair in Sobral, Ceará — reveals a source of income for people involved in local work. In the creative



economy, the process of co-creation is fundamental for fairs, as it enables stakeholder involvement in the creation of engagement platforms (Payne et al., 2008; Borrelli et al., 2018). The creative economy can contribute to the three main dimensions of sustainable development (social, economic, and environmental) and to achieving the goals proposed by the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda (D'Avila & Alperstedt, 2020), particularly concerning inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development that encourages innovation and increases job and work opportunities for women, youth, and the elderly (UN, 2021).

This research seeks to answer the following question: “What aspects of co-creation are present in the Eva Creative Fair in Sobral, Ceará?” The study aims to understand which aspects of co-creation are present in the operational context of the collaborative fair in the creative economy sector located in the city of Sobral, Ceará. The case was chosen due to the fair’s particular characteristics in fostering collective work among various actors, such as customers, suppliers, managers, and exhibiting entrepreneurs. The study contributes to the literature by addressing the relationship between creative labor in fairs and the collaborative work process permeated by co-creation. It also offers practical contributions to the development of future public policies in the creative economy sector and to the operational processes of the fairs themselves. As a social contribution, it supports the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN 2030 Agenda by creating opportunities for disadvantaged groups in society.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The theoretical framework is divided into three parts that address different aspects of the central theme. The first subsection explores the concept and evolution of the creative economy, highlighting its origins, areas of activity, and impact on local development and social inclusion. The second subsection



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discusses the importance of fairs as spaces for sociability and promotion of small producers, with an emphasis on collaborative dynamics. Finally, the third subsection analyzes how the co-creation process can generate value for companies and consumers through collaborative innovation.

Creative economy

The concept of the creative economy emerged from the notion of creative industries, driven by globalization and the inability of traditional economic models to provide employment for minority groups, in which knowledge is valued as the main economic asset. It originated in Australia in 1994 with the Creative Nation project, which aimed to establish the importance of creative work and its contribution to the economy, highlighting the role of technology as an ally of cultural policy (Silva & Ashton, 2018). In Brazil, the first discussions on the creative economy appeared in 2004 but only gained strength in 2011 with the creation of the Secretariat of the Creative Economy and the publication of its Creative Economy Plan. The establishment of the Secretariat opened new horizons for public policies that promote culture and aim at fostering the country's economic development (Silva, 2017).

The creative economy encompasses various activities that share the common characteristic of producing and offering goods and services derived from creativity. In Brazil, the sectors and areas that make up the creative economy were mapped by FIRJAN (Federation of Industries of the State of Rio de Janeiro), which identified four major creative areas: consumption, media, culture, and technology (FIRJAN, 2019).

The mapping published in 2019 shows that these four areas are subdivided into thirteen creative segments. The Consumption area represents the largest sector in terms of the number of formal workers and includes the segments of Advertising and Marketing, Architecture, Design, and Fashion. The



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Technology area is the second largest in formal employment and includes Research and Development, Biotechnology, and Information and Communication Technology. Next is Media, which covers Publishing and Audiovisual segments; and finally, the Culture area, which according to the mapping, has the lowest rate of formal workers and includes segments such as Cultural Expressions, Heritage and Arts, Music, and Performing Arts (FIRJAN, 2019).

A popular activity within this context is handicraft, which holds great cultural value as it reflects the unique characteristics of each locality and region. Through handicrafts, the creative economy promotes local development, income generation, and social inclusion, as art has the power to unite minorities. It generates creative employment opportunities for marginalized youth and for women who, through the artisanal production of clothing and fashion accessories, foster gender balance and female empowerment (Santos-Duisenberg, 2008; Morais & Lacerda, 2021). Handicrafts can also contribute to sustainability (Ramalho et al., 2024). In the context of craftsmanship, it is common to see products from this type of production displayed at fairs, which play an important role in cultural appreciation. The creative economy, as seen in fairs, primarily promotes collaborative work.

Collaborative fairs

Popular or open-air markets emerged in Europe in the 9th century, initially with the purpose of organizing places for the exchange of goods to supply the population of a given region. In Brazil, fairs have Iberian origins, brought by the Portuguese during the colonial period (Almeida, 2009; Silva, 2017). At first, open-air markets in their traditional concept referred mainly to the sale of food products. Later, they also came to be seen as spaces for social interaction, offering visitors alternative products beyond traditional supplies, such as local cuisine, handicrafts, and artistic and cultural expressions (Silva, 2017).



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They are characterized as hubs that can be used to organize activities in the realms of the economy, social well-being, and environmental preservation. Their existence is grounded in principles of participation and association, forming territorial environments of cooperation, knowledge exchange, and unique experiential practices specific to those locations (Grimm et al., 2018). According to Silva and Ashton (2018), they can be classified as collaborative fairs because they embody the notion of a shared space for small producers to offer their products. Fairs are held occasionally and therefore do not have a fixed location for daily product exhibitions. They are typically organized in open or outdoor spaces on specific chosen days.

Products offered at these fairs are usually produced by micro and small entrepreneurs who seek to sell or exchange their goods. Creative fairs focus on promoting the creativity of local residents and other interested communities by providing a space to showcase their creations — such as handicrafts, accessories, gastronomy, and various arts — thus encouraging both the creative economy and conscious consumption within cities (Silva & Ashton, 2018). Collaborative fairs also open opportunities for co-creative activities that result from the collaboration and joint efforts of various social actors.

Cocreation

The term co-creation gained prominence for its focus on generating value for companies and consumers by involving collective decision-making, which enables the construction of effective solutions. Thus, it results from the mutual interaction among various social agents (Alencar et al., 2021). Toda et al. (2022) state that, in the context of business organizations, co-creation has gained relevance as a means of fostering innovation within companies, as it drives the creation of processes from multiple perspectives, thereby encouraging innovative proposals.



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For organizations to achieve competitive differentiation in the market, they must invest in improving their product offerings. Therefore, co-creation represents a shift from a product-centered view to one focused on innovative experiences, as customers seek not only to acquire products but also to obtain added value from them (Morais et al., 2017).

The involvement of customers and employees in value creation contributes to achieving competitive advantage in the market, meeting customer needs and desires, and generating new possibilities for innovation, entering new markets, and forming new businesses. Co-creating value involves a network-based approach and therefore constitutes an interactional and socially constructed process arising from the experiences exchanged among customers, the company, and other actors indirectly connected to the exchange process, including private markets and public agents (Dantas et al., 2020).

Co-creation can be understood as the act of collective creativity that generates value, fosters forms of collaborative learning, shared efforts, and the creation of environments conducive to development, creativity, and innovation. The practice of co-creation depends on the individuals involved, who collaborate in designing creative solutions for a product through diverse ideas (Telo & Pinto, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

Based on its purpose and objectives, this research is characterized as qualitative, as it seeks to understand the proposed objective according to the established research problem — namely, to comprehend, within the real environment of the Eva Creative Fair, the aspects related to co-creation in order to understand how collaboration relationships among social actors are established. According to Godoy (1995), in qualitative research, a phenomenon is understood within the environment in which it occurs and of which it is a part,



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with the researcher serving as the main research instrument. The study has a descriptive nature, since the researchers merely recorded and described the observed facts without interfering with them. It described the characteristics of the phenomenon by establishing relationships among variables, involving the use of standardized data collection techniques through interviews (Prodanov & Freitas, 2013).

It is proposed as a single case study to obtain a holistic and real-world perspective of group behavior and organizational processes (Yin, 2015). Pereira et al. (2018) point out that a case study involves a detailed analysis and description of the case in order to understand the specific features or characteristics that make it unique.

A field study was conducted. According to Gil (2002), field studies seek to deepen questions related to the proposed topic and allow flexibility regarding the reformulation of objectives throughout the process. Semi-structured interviews were conducted both in person and online via the Zoom application, with the participation of the directors of the Eva Creative Fair in Sobral, Ceará, between November and December 2022. The semi-structured format allowed interviewers to follow a guide without adhering rigidly to a specific sequence of questions (Oliveira & Leão, 2023; Zanella, 2013).

The questions were designed to address the research's guiding question and to meet the proposed objective. To this end, the interview script was adapted from the study by Jesus (2021), which addresses the co-creation experience, as shown in Chart 1:



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Chart 1 - Questions from interviews conducted with the management of Eva Creative Fair

Pre-fair
How do most consumers become aware of the Eva Creative Fair? Where do consumers look for information about the Eva Creative Fair? What are the main reasons or motivations for consumers to attend the Eva Creative Fair? What are the particular features or attributes that visitors consider before choosing to attend this fair instead of other fairs in the city? Which organizations, partners, or actors are considered essential to the Eva Creative Fair?
During the fair
What are the first impressions and sensations of consumers as they enter the fair? Do consumers appreciate the structures, conditions, design, and services of the event? How do consumers experience the fair? Do you believe that the interaction between exhibitors and consumers adds value to the consumers' experience? Which main organizations, actors, or partnerships contribute to providing visitors with a better experience during the fair?
Post-fair
In your opinion, what happens after consumers attend the Eva Creative Fair? And for entrepreneurs, what happens after the fair? Why do consumers, especially on social media, share their experiences at the Eva Creative Fair? Do you believe that consumers or regular attendees of the Eva Creative Fair are willing to cooperate with the organization to help improve what the fair has to offer?

Source: Adapted from Jesus (2021).

The interviews were fully recorded and later transcribed verbatim. For the interpretation and understanding of the data and materials collected in the interviews, a thematic content analysis was conducted. According to Silva and Fossá (2015), this technique analyzes communications by examining and interpreting what was gathered from the interviewees' responses and the researcher's observations in order to construct categories of analysis.

The research locus is the Eva Creative Fair, a privately initiated fair created in 2019 based on the concept of the creative economy. It is located in Sobral, a city in the northern region of the state of Ceará, approximately 235 kilometers from the state capital, Fortaleza. As an itinerant fair, it seeks to generate small businesses and enterprises that occupy public spaces through commerce, culture, and social activities.

Its editions are held bimonthly, over two consecutive days, featuring a variety of business segments such as handicrafts, fashion (from children's to adult), cosmetics, accessories, gastronomy, stationery, toys, and home décor.



The fair also offers various attractions for leisure and entertainment during the event. In addition, it organizes the Eva Creative Fair Pocket, which is a smaller version of the main fair, with a more compact structure and a smaller number of exhibiting entrepreneurs.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Important information for understanding the functioning of Eva Creative Fair was obtained in the interviews, such as the resources it uses, the agents involved in the fair, and each director's point of view on the perceived experiences of consumers and fair attendees. This information contributes to structuring what is characterized as the basis for identifying aspects related to co-creation at the fair. Six directors were interviewed (five women and one man); the women are members of the board and entrepreneurial exhibitors at the fair. Although not explicitly stated, the directors hold positions and roles that contribute to the functioning of the fair, as each is willing to assume roles within the board.

Subsequently, the analyses are divided into three subtopics, following the results of the interviews, which are configured in three phases: "Pre-fair," "During the fair," and "Post-fair."

Category I - pre-fair

Similar to the operational structure of organizations and companies, prior planning is carried out for the fair's editions, which take place bimonthly. The way the organizers promote and prepare the public for the event demonstrates the management's organizational capability. During a specific period, registrations are opened for entrepreneurs who wish to participate in the fair's edition. Once registrations are closed, the directors create a WhatsApp group with the registered entrepreneurs to share guidance and instructions.



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According to the directors, most consumers learn about the Eva Creative Fair through promotional activities conducted via communication channels such as the social network Instagram and the local radio station. Instagram serves as the main communication tool between the fair and its audience over the internet. As it is the Eva Creative Fair's primary means of communication, the increase in internet users is essential for brands to invest in the digital world, as it serves as a medium to contact and engage more closely with customers (Andrade, 2019; Marques, 2022). It also enables channels for social communication and value co-creation (Rashid et al., 2019; Sousa, 2022).

For the directors, the main reasons consumers attend the Eva Creative Fair lie in its unique concept, even though it is not yet widely known by the local population. The fair's operational model arouses curiosity among the public to get to know it. Each edition features attractive elements — whether in the traditional edition, which is more elaborate in its themes and attractions, or in the smaller version, which also offers some form of entertainment. The aim is to provide a distinct and positive experience for the public — one that is memorable and capable of evoking strong emotions in consumers, whose participation can occur at different levels: rational, emotional, sensory, physical, and even spiritual (Jesus, 2021).

Regarding the particularities and attributes of the Eva Creative Fair that can influence consumers' decisions to visit the event, the directors highlight that it is a comprehensive fair compared to others in the city of Sobral, as it encompasses a wide variety of segments and entrepreneurs. One of the directors emphasizes that it is not merely a fair, but rather an event that occupies public spaces and venues through entertainment and culture for the local community. Events play a significant role in shaping the communities in which they take place, promoting cultural development and reinforcing national identities (Queiroz, 2018).



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Partnerships with local institutions or entities, whether public or private, are essential to the Eva Creative Fair. Collaborative work with other organizations fosters the growth of both the fair and its partners, even in the pre-fair phase, as social actors cooperate in promoting the fair's editions. In terms of co-creation aspects observed during this phase, key activities include planning, seeking partners and agents to support the pre-event stage, and working together to make the fair happen according to its proposal of continuously diversifying and introducing something new in each edition. Queiroz (2018) notes that, due to the complexity of managing events and the managers' pursuit of competitive advantages, there has been a growing interest in understanding the roles and co-creation relationships experienced by key stakeholder groups in such events.

Category II – during the fair

This phase is characterized by the fair taking place itself. At first contact with the fair, the directors observed that the public's initial impressions and sensations were those of curiosity, surprise, and enchantment. Curiosity arises among first-time visitors who, upon seeing the fair's distinctive structural design, experience something new and different; surprise and enchantment are felt by those who previously knew the fair only through images and videos on social media, as they become impressed and amazed by its format and features. Regarding the structure and design of the Eva Creative Fair, the directors state that it is one of the main characteristics noticed by the public. This is a distinguishing feature that sets it apart from other fairs in the city of Sobral. The furniture, lighting, and overall setup are strategically planned and designed to create its distinct identity and personalization.

The way consumers experience the fair varies from person to person. One of the directors points out that some people attend to buy or consume products, while others go to explore or enjoy the event, socializing with others



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and enjoying the attractions. There are both new visitors and regular attendees who always participate in the fair's editions — either because they enjoy it, are familiar with it, consume products offered by the exhibitors, and/or have built friendly relationships with the exhibiting entrepreneurs.

The relationship between exhibitors and customers strongly influences the overall experience. Although the structure, attractions, and entertainment impact the event, the interaction and approach of entrepreneurs toward the public are key to creating a positive experience. Exhibitors make a conscious effort to serve customers in a way that leaves them with a favorable impression of both the fair and the business. To enhance customer experience, exhibitors are encouraged to think innovatively when engaging clients — offering gifts or souvenirs and distributing business cards. These strategies are shared and discussed among exhibitors and directors, fostering mutual support.

The Eva Creative Fair has partners who work collaboratively, which is essential for its operation. It maintains a partnership with a local internet provider, which offers free internet access to both the public and exhibitors. In return, the provider sets up a stand at the event to promote its services to visitors. An important aspect of co-creation lies in the fair's structure, particularly in its organization and setup. The environment of the Eva Creative Fair is designed to provide a welcoming experience that encourages participant interaction. Moraes et al. (2017) highlight that the more customers notice the physical elements of the setting — such as lighting, scent, and spatial organization — the greater the likelihood they will develop a sense of loyalty to the service provided.

Another co-creation aspect present in this phase is the relationship between exhibitors and customers, which involves ongoing exchanges and interactions between entrepreneurs and attendees, whether new or returning visitors. These interactions foster relationships in which customers share knowledge, information, and ideas with the entrepreneurs, who in turn seek better



ways to engage with them to create a positive experience and add value to their products. Companies also seek validation for what they are developing through direct contact with customers. The interaction between company and customer is a defining feature of the creative industries, as professionals in this sector possess the skills and creativity to make adjustments and modifications requested by clients. Therefore, the customer plays an active role in the co-creation process (Alencar et al., 2021).

Category III – post-fair

For the directors, the audience that attends the fair shows a strong desire to return, as many inquire about the next edition. The customers' sense of enchantment can turn them into regular visitors, which results from a positive experience fostered by exhibitors through attentive service and hospitality. For the entrepreneurs, the post-fair period can also be positive — something the directors, who are themselves exhibiting entrepreneurs, emphasized. This happens through good customer service, distributing business cards with store information, and offering gifts even when no sale is made. The key factor is high-quality service so that customers will seek out the entrepreneur after the fair. The directors mentioned that some customers who made no purchases during the event later contacted them to buy products because they enjoyed the interaction that took place at the fair.

The reasons why the public shares content about the Eva Creative Fair on social media are mainly to inform or express — directly or indirectly — their impressions and experiences. One of the directors pointed out that the fair's attractions draw the public's attention, prompting them to share moments from the event on their social media and/or with friends through other means of sharing.



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Regarding audience cooperation through feedback, suggestions and tips for improving the fair's operations are often provided — either during the event or through the fair's Instagram page. Social interaction platforms can be seen as technological tools conducive to co-creation for two main reasons: they make it easier for organizations and individuals to produce content, and they allow real-time reach, as well as personalized and collaborative interactions between brands and customers (Queiroz, 2018). The interaction between the fair's social media and the public enables operational improvements and helps design more positive and value-adding experiences for future editions.

The co-creation aspects in this phase are evident in the feedback provided by the public on the fair's social media pages or on the personal accounts of the entrepreneurs. Rodrigues et al. (2021) note that customer feedback, suggestions, opinions, and criticisms make the co-creation process more accurate in generating value-added results. The fact that customers reach out to exhibitors after the event allows the fair's organizers to support small entrepreneurs who participate or have participated in the fair. Part of the fair's mission is to encourage exhibitors to participate regularly in its editions, highlighting the strong relationship between the fair's organizers and exhibitors — an interaction that brings positive outcomes for both sides through collaboration and shared effort.



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CONCLUSION

From the discussions in this study, it becomes evident that co-creation serves as a driving force for the development of commercial activities in creative fairs, as it enables integration among suppliers, partners, customers, product exhibitors, and the fair's directors. Relationships can be established that contribute positively to all parties involved through the exchange of financial and promotional resources, knowledge, and feedback.

Regarding the co-creation aspects identified in the fair, during the pre-fair phase, the collaborative planning process stands out. This phase involves the joint search for partners and social actors who can support pre-event activities. Efforts are directed toward securing resources to ensure that the fair takes place in alignment with its proposal to remain diverse and innovative for the audience, making the co-creative collaboration between the fair's organizers and partners essential.

During the fair itself, co-creation is reflected in its structure, organization, and setup, all of which are designed to foster a welcoming and engaging experience. The environment allows for interaction between the public and the fair's commercial establishments. Another important co-creation aspect at this stage is the relationship between exhibitors and customers. Customers exchange knowledge, information, and ideas with entrepreneurs, who seek to develop positive experiences and improve their practices based on these interactions.

The post-fair phase also reveals co-creation through the feedback and comments provided by customers on the fair's social media accounts and/or on the personal profiles of the exhibiting entrepreneurs. Customers often reach out to exhibitors after the event to make purchases, which helps support the development of small entrepreneurs who participate in the fair through the relationships built during and after the event.

The limitations of this study lie in the fact that it analyzed only one case



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of a collaborative fair and relied exclusively on semi-structured interviews with the fair's directors. As a suggestion for future research, it is recommended to study additional cases of collaborative fairs, employing other qualitative and quantitative research techniques, as well as incorporating the perspectives of other social actors involved in the co-creation process — such as customers, suppliers, sponsors, and exhibiting entrepreneurs.

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