

Fofão from Maranhão and Social Innovation: an initial approach via the Method of Stories Design

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a research project in social innovation aimed at retrieving, valuing, and safeguarding the memory of the Fofão, a unique masked character from Maranhão's Carnival. It demonstrates how the Method of Stories Design, grounded in communicational sustainability, contributes to the generation of memory products through multisensory communication projects and physical or digital artifacts. It highlights that the hegemonic narrative regarding the origins and characterization of the Fofão is fragmented and dispersed, leaving gaps that can be filled through research actions, especially by valuing collective oral history. Next, data from the initial phase of the investigation are presented, proving that this cultural manifestation remains alive and in constant transformation. Finally, it discusses the next steps of the research, which intends to develop a system for the memory, dissemination, and sustainability of the manifestation that is not only innovative but also collaborative, updatable, and sustainable, based on the contribution of design. It concludes that this approach not only preserves tradition but also accepts cultural transformations by designing for the future in an innovative and updatable manner.

Keywords: Carnival; Memory; Cultural identity; Social innovation.

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the research project "Design in network projects for memory and diffusion of local culture: the *Fofão* from Maranhão's carnival" (in the original Portuguese: *O design no projeto de rede para memória e difusão de cultura local: o Fofão do carnaval do Maranhão*), initiated in 2024 under the coordination of the research group DiCA (Design, Interactivity, Culture, and Art) from the Design Department at the Federal University of Maranhão (UFMA), which identified the opportunity to work with this character. The *Fofão* is one of the oldest masked performers (cultural practitioners) of the state's Carnival. Its origin is estimated to have occurred at the beginning of the 20th century. It is linked to other ritualistic traditions that the project seeks to identify, and it has previously been threatened with extinction. Over time, its costume and performance have undergone various configurations. With certainly more than a century of existence, the *Fofão* resists, but it is not yet valued as cultural heritage, a broad objective that this research proposal aims to achieve through social innovation (Manzini, 2008), benefiting those involved in the production of this manifestation.

Despite the importance of the *Fofão* to the cultural identity of São Luís, literature on the subject is scarce and dispersed, relying on few references and only one undergraduate thesis exclusively dedicated to the character (Chagas, 2022). In addition to the lack of studies on the theme, visual records are rare and of low technical quality, which validates the importance of this research, as it aims to retrieve this narrative in favor of the collective memory of the ritual. At the same time, we identified that a movement to strengthen the manifestation has recently begun through the initiative of the “Blocão do Fofão”, created in 2018, which promotes processions in the Historic Center and the Madre Deus neighborhood of the city of São Luís. In parallel, a group of performers from peripheral areas, residing and performing in the municipality of São José de Ribamar (Metropolitan Region of Greater São Luís), in addition to attending events in other locations, organized the “Arrastão do Fofão” from 2023 to 2025. These groups differ from each other in their costume and performance, as observed by this project, which followed both collectives during the 2025 Carnival.

This text presents the results of the project's first research phase, which demonstrate the actions taken to retrieve the memory of this character's life trajectory over time, mapping its variations in aesthetics, performance, and symbolic meanings. In this way, it is possible to generate memory artifacts aimed at developing a system for the diffusion and sustainability of the cultural manifestation of the *Fofões*. Through the contribution of design research and its application in multisensory communication projects and innovative physical or digital products, this system is designed to be not only innovative but also collaborative, updatable, and sustainable. The entire project is guided by the Method of Stories Design and through the responsible conduct of "communicational sustainability."

1. THE PROJECT AND METHODOLOGY

Because it is situated within the comprehensive field of popular and mass culture in Maranhão, which is linked to the region's material and immaterial cultural productions, such as traditions, craftsmanship, spatial experiences, festivities, and costumes, the project can pioneer a sequence of design actions that work with data collection and analysis in a collaborative manner. The intent is to enable the production and diffusion of tangible and intangible memory artifacts and, thus, expand the network of memory and local cultural diffusion through the lens of sustainability.

The project follows the Method of Stories Design (Gamba et al., 2023), developed by the Stories Design Laboratory, Dhis, from the Graduate Program at PUC-Rio. This approach uses the act of storytelling as a central research and design process, allowing immersion into diverse cultures through the recording of oral memories and local production processes, which comprise the initial stages of the research, respectively termed "Life Stories" and "Step-by-Step."

The designer's approximation with this new cultural scenario does not solely serve the project's objective of providing a foundation for the research, but it also fosters a broader set of shared uses through intermediary memory products. Since mapping the state of the art on the topic revealed that the recorded history is incomplete, dispersed, and fragmented, this research seeks to value the manifestation's agents, fill existing gaps, and produce a more comprehensive, updated, and equitable history through active listening and the recording of oral history. Thus, in addition to recording the "Life Stories" of the artisans and producers of this cultural manifestation, the study documents and analyzes manufacturing processes,

which we term "Step-by-Step." Raw materials, inspirations, processes, techniques, and diffusion can then be integrated into the producer's subjectivity, generating a more specific collection regarding the role of design in shaping social memory. Consequently, the life stories of the artisans benefit from the contribution of design in mapping manufacturing processes and analyzing the aesthetic and symbolic outcomes of production, and vice versa. Beyond the artisans, the life stories of other individuals who participate in the manifestation as performers are also collected. They share a rich oral memory regarding the character's performance and appearance, which will be useful for retrieving formal and material characteristics, as well as analyzing symbolic meanings over time. In addition to their oral memory, the performers contribute their personal collections, photographs, and costumes, including old masks that will be recorded and analyzed to integrate into the project's archive.

In parallel, other research actions take place, such as field immersions, participant observations by the group members, both with and without costumes, and audiovisual recordings at multiple events. This includes the "Mobile Studio," a street studio using a white seamless backdrop that allows for the recording of performers individually, aiming to map the richness and creativity of these ritual agents' individual expressions.

The third and final stage, termed "Crossed Materialization," is when exchanges occur between the designer-researcher and the field. Both parties share their expertise within a framework of social responsibility and partnership, built throughout the previous stages, aimed at reframing their practices through the interaction of diversity. Within this broader scope of the designer's socially ethical role, this work emphasizes actions regarding cultural sustainability and, within it, the relevance of visual communication studies, a subfield of design. The Method of Stories Design also addresses the concept of "communicational sustainability" (Gamba Jr.; Sarmento, 2019) as a guide, ensuring that issues such as memory, visibility, and the development of local language are determinant in the creation and valuation of the developed "memory products." According to Gamba and Sarmento (2019), communicational sustainability is the practice of communicating responsibly by considering social, environmental, and economic impacts. This involves creating artifacts, messages, and content that promote cultural justice and responsibility, avoiding harm to society and the environment.

Communicational sustainability steers the conduct of actions involving interlocutors, which should be established horizontally, as advocated by Farbiarz and Ripper (2011) on design partnership, a principle that underpins "Crossed Materialization". Regarding our research, we aim to establish a horizontal relationship between researchers and participants in the social group linked to the *Fofão* cultural manifestation. At each stage, the participation of both parties in the elaboration and validation phases is fundamental to achieving interactive and customized results, establishing the exchange of knowledge between academia and "informants" of the local culture.

2. FOFÃO IN ITS ORIGIN

The brief description presented below, regarding the character's origin and the characteristics of its costume and performance, was developed by crossing existing sources prior to this research, which were compiled and confronted with narratives obtained during the first interviews; however, it remains incomplete and imprecise.

The *Fofão* is one of the oldest and most traditional characters of the Carnival in the city of São Luís. Its costume, as well as its performance, has been undergoing changes over time. The characterization that we conventionally call traditional is composed of a loose-fitting jumpsuit made of *chita* (smaller floral pattern) or *chitão* (larger floral pattern) printed cotton fabric, although it can also be made with other textiles, even without prints. At the extremities of the jumpsuit, around the wrists, neck, and sometimes the ankles, there are star-shaped ruffles with small bells attached to their tips. As accessories, the *Fofão* carries a wooden rod in one hand, which may be adorned with ribbons, and a padded plastic or cloth doll in the other. The mask is made using a technique called *papier collé*, which consists of layering pieces of paper and glue over a positive mold of clay (cement or plaster) modeled with a long nose and grotesque features to form a rigid structure. The manual painting of the mask has a glossy, highly colorful finish with many details. The hair can be made of sisal, nylon raffia, or fabric scraps. Additionally, a characteristic that is currently rare is the presence of a handkerchief tied around the mask, signifying that the *Fofão* suffers from a toothache.



Figure 1. The Traditional *Fofão*.

This type of handcrafted mask has unique characteristics; they are made by a few artisans who, in the pre-Carnival period, make their offerings available in their workshops. The masks can also be made to order; in this case, the performers demand specific characteristics. Some participants make their own masks individually, or in mask-making workshops that take place before Carnival. Some artisans who make masks in São Luís have already been identified and interviewed for the research, including José Alencar, Nill Muniz, Dalton Chagas, and Marlene Barros. Each of them presents a unique, recognizable style.

The *Fofão*'s performance takes place on the street and consists of jumping, making antics, and dancing in an exaggerated manner, causing the small bells to jingle. To ensure complete anonymity, the performers avoid speaking or disguise their voices so as not to be recognized. In interviews, the performers narrated that the rod is used either to ward off dogs that attack them along the way or to scare onlookers. The dolls are used to attract unsuspecting spectators who, upon touching the doll, are requested to give a token in return, commonly the payment of some pocket change. The dolls are also used to delight and attract children. We observe that the material aspects of the items comprising the costume are produced through unique processes with specific aesthetic and symbolic results, which are fundamental to the

ritual and present a rich field for design research. The origins or motivations for using dolls are yet to be elucidated throughout the project's ongoing research.

With this brief description, it becomes clear that this character can provoke either fear or laughter, a dynamic typical of carnivalesque performances, as Bakhtin (1987) states regarding European origins dating back to the Middle Ages. The exact "birth" of this character remains uncertain, but Borralho and Silva (2022, pp. 126-127) cite a poetic speculation by journalist Américo Azevedo Neto. The popular fable attributes its origin to a "disastrous" attempt by a poor reveler who, while trying to make a Pierrot, resorted to highly colorful, large-patterned *chita* fabric to create his loose-fitting jumpsuit with a collar full of points.

This narrative is a fictional chronicle that functions as an origin myth. It attempts to address the lack of minimally concrete data regarding the emergence of this character. However, as will be discussed below, we have yet to find any mention regarding the origin of the mask made with *papier collé*, as it is known today. Nor are there early records concerning the adoption of *chita* fabric for making the jumpsuit.

According to Chagas (2022), by the 1910s, the *Fofão* was already a prominent figure in the Carnival of São Luís. Newspaper reports covering the carnival frequently mentioned this reveler. Below, we present an excerpt from O Jornal, dated February 19, 1917:

Light gushed from the great spotlights, and in the magnificent clarity of the salons, amidst that raw orgiastic display of stunning hues, one could truly witness the strident and communicative jingling of the plump and puffy dominós, plump and restless dancers, sweet and gentle gypsies, and performers of every kind (...) (A canção de pierrot, 1917, our translation¹).

It is observed that describing them as "plump and puffy dominós" makes no mention of *papier collé* masks, and that the adjective "puffy" (in the original Portuguese, *fofos*) seems to characterize the oversized patterning of the jumpsuit rather than referring specifically to a distinct character. In the context of Brazilian Portuguese, this morphological characteristic of the garment—being wide, loose, and volume-heavy—is precisely what generated the name of the character, *Fofão*, which is the augmentative form of the word "fofo." Therefore, these historical accounts capture the very transition where a descriptive attribute of the clothing's silhouette eventually crystallized into the proper noun of the manifestation's main agent.

In 1925, the sale of *Fofão* costumes was identified in bazaars that advertised their products in local newspapers. O Diário de São Luiz, in 1925, published an advertisement for the shop "Ao Reino de Momo" (In the Kingdom of King Momo):

Masks of all qualities and types, in cardboard, satin, mesh, celluloid, wire, wax with moustaches, with wigs; black, white, and colored gloves, hats, costume fancies in various tastes, small bells, confetti—both colored and gilded—serpentine, rodós from various manufacturers; *fofões*, *dominós*, pierrots, crepe and silk paper in all colors, and an infinity of other articles proper for the carnival season (Carnaval, 1925, our translation²).

This excerpt describes the variety of materials used in mask-making, yet it remains unknown whether those made of "cardboard" are of the same type known today, handcrafted through *papier collé*. Here, the *Fofão* is already explicitly mentioned as a character alongside other *Dominós* and *Pierrots*, all of which share the common feature of using a similar jumpsuit.

According to historian Ananias Martins (2001), the figure of *Fofão* emerged during the period when the Carnival of São Luís was considered the third largest in Brazil, when it shared the space with other groups of characters such as Bears, Monkeys, "cruz-diabos" (in loose

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translation: cross-devils), Pierrots, Playing Cards, and Dominoes. This phase began at the end of the 19th century and continued until approximately the beginning of the 1970s, and, as Martins calls it, it was the Carnival of the Cordões (2001, p. 81).

According to Prof. Dr. Tácito Borralho (Cunha, 2024), the *Fofão* is an authentic character from Maranhão, and its origin is linked to other universal characters, such as the jester and the Italian clown. Martins (2001, p. 85) also comments on the proximity of this manifestation to the circus and theater, stating that "the fools became *Fofões*".

Characters that emerged in the 20th-century Carnival, such as Pierrots, Columbines, Dominoes, "Cruz-Diabos", and *Fofões*, remained as individual groups or costumes, and, in addition to occupying the streets, were frequently seen at Carnival balls (Martins, 2001, p. 96). In an interview with the newspaper Jornal Imparcial (Cunha, 2024), Professor Dr. Euclides Moreira stated that the *Fofão* has its origins linked to Portuguese colonization. Moreira states that it was a very present character in São Luís since the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, when there were many dances and parties on the streets and people used loose overalls and masks to disguise themselves while participating in the festivities.



Figure 2. *Fofões* group, in 1976 (Instagram profile São Luís Memória: @slzmemoria - <https://www.instagram.com/p/C10UvdGpVya/>, unknown author).

Martins (2001) cites a text from 1931, which states: "[o]n Shrove Sunday, at dawn, sounding a long horn and beating a drum, the so-called *Bobos* (Fools) would come out, wearing horrendous masks, some with long noses, others bald (...)" (Sá Valle in Martins, 2001, pp. 83-84, our translation³). This citation, despite not using the term *Fofão*, describes a mask with characteristics matching the character. Furthermore, as the author states, the *Fofões* "were the carnival clowns" with their approaching cries: *ó lalaaaaá*.

According to Martins (1996, our translation), "[a]round 1935, the Maranhão carnival scene encompassed as much diversity as the creativity of the performers could imagine." There were many elite balls, with luxurious costumes, which took place in spaces such as the Cassino Maranhense, the old Cine Éden, or the Teatro União (now Arthur Azevedo Theater). These elite balls ended up giving rise to popular balls in the 1950s and 1960s, such as Cantareira, Jacarepaguá, Cabeção, and Gruta do Satã (Santos, 2003, pp. 144-145).

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Until the end of the 1950s, there were the "Carnival Raids," which were organized by groups from the elite of São Luís, dressed as Dominoes, Harlequins, or masked as *Fofões*.

The homeowner would be warned by a gossip that he was going to be "robbed," so he would buy food and drinks to welcome the group, who in turn would bring the orchestra. The group would arrive, knock on the door, and go inside, messing up the house to make room for the party. (Santos, 2003, p. 143, our translation⁴)

In the 1950s and 1960s, masked revelry at elite balls was strongly embraced by women. The concealment of their identities (Martins, 2001, p. 104) allowed members of different social classes to mingle and even reverse gender roles, which displeased some more conservative sectors of society and led Mayor Epitácio Cafeteira, in 1965 (Martins, 2001, pp. 106-107), to prohibit the use of fantasy masks, as narrated in the famous carnival song: 'Cafeteira doesn't want masks this carnival'. This act caused an initial decline in the number of *Fofões*, who were already beginning to share space with other carnival modalities, such as the carnival of the "turmas" (groups) and samba schools. Also, during this period, Carnival began to suffer greater intervention from public authorities, affecting its authenticity and spontaneity.

In São Luís, this type of street manifestation almost fell into oblivion during the 1970s (Assunção, 2000-2001) due to the influence of television media on local carnival traditions. The author states that samba schools modeled after Rio de Janeiro and trios elétricos inspired by Bahia emerged due to the impact of mass communication broadcasted on television. Consequently, between the 1970s and 1990s, the autochthonous street celebrations lost their momentum due to the growth of these two external models. This period directly relates to the era of the civil-military dictatorship from 1964 to 1985, during which public festive expressions were weakened in favor of private and official events.



Figure 3. Diversity of *Fofões* in two moments: in 2000 (by Bruno Soares, Centro de Cultura Popular Domingos Vieira Filho's collection) and in 2025 (DiCA Group collection) .

In the 1990s, according to Assunção (2000-2001), a revival of street carnival began. One of the initiatives was undertaken by the Laborarte theater group, which began to organize the annual "Carnaval de Segunda" ball, inviting all the traditional groups to celebrate on the street and on the square in front of the colonial mansion it occupies in the city center. To this day, this ball remains an important event of the São Luís carnival. Later, in 1997, Laborarte created and presented the carnival show "Te gruda no meu Fofão" (Stick to my *Fofão*), which shows a *Fofão* character encountering old street carnival games.

Prohibitions, as well as prejudices, did not remain in the past. In 2009, the municipality of São Luís, through the Municipal Secretariat of Citizen Security, restricted the use of masks due to

violence rates in the city. The restriction was implemented through an ordinance, which determined the prohibition of the "use of masks, costumes, adornments, or play that do not allow the identification of individuals or that offend family morals and decorum" (*in Alves, 2018, p. 29, our translation*⁵). This decision severely damaged the local economy and the retail trade, which recorded sharp declines in sales. Consequently, the entire productive ecosystem of the Maranhão Carnival was affected (Alves, 2018, p. 29).

Uimar Jr., artist and creator of "Blocão do Fofão", coordinates the group he formed in 2018 (Cunha, 2024). The group originated from a mask-making workshop offered by the Department of Cultural Affairs - DAC, at UFMA, aiming to teach how to make the *Fofão* mask using the traditional *papier collé* technique. Since then, the DAC has offered free workshops annually, on the weeks preceding Carnival. Uimar Jr. was a student in the first class of the workshop (when he conceived "Blocão do Fofão") and in other editions. Since 2019, every year, the group parades in the pre-Carnival festivities and on Carnival Mondays, accompanied by an acoustic band, attracting a larger number of *Fofão* fans each year.

Currently, the presence of *Fofão* groups on social media is frequent. For this reason, this study conducted a mapping on the Instagram platform and identified the account @fofaominhapaixao, coordinated by Adriano Melo and Flávio Rego. Both reside in São José de Ribamar, a municipality within the Greater São Luís area. Between 2022 and 2025, they produced the "Arrastão do Fofão" during the *Lava-Pratos* festival, which takes place on the weekend following Carnival. This event consists of a procession accompanied by a sound truck that moves along the main avenue of the municipality. However, due to a lack of support from public authorities and the threat of faction violence, the event was not held in 2026. Despite this, the coordinators maintain the practice of arranging a chartered bus to transport the *Fofões* from Ribamar to the street circuits of the Historic Center of São Luís and the *Madre Deus* neighborhood during the remaining days of Carnival.

The netnographic research also allowed for the mapping of the so-called Tropas de *Fofões* (*Fofão Troops*), a recent phenomenon that has not yet been analyzed in depth by this study. For the most part, these Troops organize themselves into groups named after countries; however, there are exceptions that adopt other designations, such as "Tropa do Pânico", "Tropa da Império", and "Tropa dos Palhaços". All members wear the same attire and mask, almost always utilizing the "evil clown" model. The jumpsuit is wide and features minimal tailoring, resembling a large rectangle with a hood and no small bells. Furthermore, based on what could be observed in the images, the members of these troops do not utilize the traditional doll or the stick.

3. FIRST IMPRESSIONS FROM THE CARNIVAL EVENTS

In 2025, the DiCA-UFMA group led two field research actions. The objective was to record and interact with two groups of *Fofões*: the "Blocão do Fofão", which held a parade in the Madre Deus neighborhood in São Luís (Carnival Saturday, March 3, 2025) and the "Arrastão do Fofão", an event that took place in São José de Ribamar (*Lava Pratos* Day, March 8, 2025), organized by the Instagram account @fofaominhapaixao.

Initially, the DiCA-UFMA group contacted the organizers of each event to ensure their support. The actions took place in two stages. The first stage was dedicated to registering the performers in a "mobile studio" set up on the street at each location during the gathering and approximately two hours before the procession. Each registered *Fofão* filled out a Free and

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Informed Consent Form, agreeing to participate in the research project. In addition to the registration, which included personal data, the team took the opportunity to ask two questions: "Who made your jumpsuit?" and "Who made your mask?".



Figure 4. Setting up the “mobile studio” for recording the “Blocão do Fofão”, in Madre Deus and the “Arrastão do Fofão”, in São José do Ribamar.



Figure 5. The team dressed as *Fofão*, at the “Arrastão do Fofão”, in São José de Ribamar.

In the second stage, the researchers dressed in *Fofão* costumes and joined the procession, experiencing the revelry through participant observation. Within the research group, only two members were responsible for capturing the imagery of the procession's performance, or "arrastão", as it is named by the Ribamar group. Consequently, the rest of the team was able to partake in the carnival spirit without further concerns.

Following these field actions during the 2025 Carnival, and after analyzing the registrations and the responses to the two questions, a comparative study of both situations was conducted. This analysis also contributed to the identification of interlocutors whom the study intends to interview in depth over the coming months, as it has already allowed for the mapping of subjects who possess rich memories to share in the "Life Stories" phase.

We noted that the “Blocão do Fofão” group is more gender-diverse, and the older age range predominates, with birth dates between 1960 and 1996. The vast majority of group members wore handmade masks and carried accessories: many carried the doll, but not all had the stick. Their jumpsuits were of the traditional star type, made of *chita* and *chitão*. Furthermore, some people wore jumpsuits, but did not necessarily wear a *Fofão* mask. And few wore industrially manufactured latex masks.

On the day of “Blocão do Fofão”, we met some performers from São José de Ribamar. They were recognized by their distinctive style, and at times they reached out to us, identifying themselves, as we had been at several events during the pre-Carnival period to conduct field

reconnaissance. These preliminary actions were unsystematic, but useful to initiate the formation of a network of interlocutors who can already be considered collaborators in the research.



Figure 6. On the left, traditional costumes with masks in the style of the artisan José Alencar from Madre Deus, and on the right, a traditional costume complete with *Fofão* accessories.

At the “Arrastão do Fofão” in Ribamar, a predominantly young and male presence was observed, with most participants born from the 2000s onward and, to a lesser extent, between the 1970s and 1990s. The majority of the members wore industrialized rubber masks depicting frightening characters. The jumpsuit for most participants is crafted from satin and features a wider patterning compared to the “star” style model. The sleeves are extremely long, forming a sort of “wing” that gives rise to the nomenclature of this style: *Morcego* (bat) or *Morcegão* (big bat). An important characteristic is the absence of accessories. *Fofões* considered traditional were in the minority. A large portion of the registered performers reported having acquired their masks and jumpsuits nearby, which demonstrates that the group fuels the local trade centered around this cultural manifestation.

Regarding the performance, the *Fofões* in Ribamar perform faster and more aggressive movements than the traditional ones, which deserves a deeper analysis in the future, yet it is noticeably related to the patterning of the jumpsuit and the style of music accompanying the procession. The “Blocão do Fofão” is accompanied by an acoustic band that plays typical carnival marches, whereas the “Arrastão do Fofão” is accompanied by a sound truck carrying a “wall” of loudspeakers (in the original Portuguese, *paredão de caixas de som*) with lighting that mostly plays carnival music, *axé*, and funk.



Figure 7. Handmade and traditional *Fofão* masks.



Figure 8. Industrially produced masks, used by *Fofões*.



Figure 9. Records of “Arrastão do Fofão”, at São José de Ribamar.

It is noticeable that the *Fofão* tradition persists, although fragmented and different from its original form of dress and play. We understand that some transformations in the tradition have occurred due to the city's own development, increased rates of violence, and a greater presence in the "virtual world." For example, the "Carnival Raids" of the past are unthinkable today. In Ribamar, the presence of criminal factions threatens peaceful celebrations, since the territory is divided amongst more than one faction, and the anonymity provided by the masks allows people to move into areas where they are not welcome, which can generate conflict.

The issue surrounding the types of masks is a point of tension, as many hold the view that only those who wear the handcrafted mask and the *chita* jumpsuit are authentic, the "true" *Fofão*. Among the reasons for using latex masks are their more affordable price compared to handcrafted ones, the ease of acquiring them, and the lack of knowledge required to produce one's own mask by hand, in addition to the popularity of the "frightening" style.

It is important to emphasize that these changes imply the continuity of the manifestation, albeit through other modes, as is typical in cultural processes; however, a clear rejection of the new forms of *Fofão* by the media and more traditional performers is noticeable. This hostility was perceived while we were in contact with the *Fofões* of Ribamar, who demonstrated a feeling of invisibility and discredit regarding their different way of participating, which they believe is not well received. In the “Blocão do Fofão”, there was a presence of television media, which conducted interviews and recordings. We also noted the presence of amateur photographers. In Ribamar, the DiCA-UFMA group was the only one to make recordings. We did not identify the presence of television media or amateur photographers. This finding dialogues with Oliveira (2007), who addresses the influence of the media in maintaining order and the obedience of the popular classes, as it is not within its interest to follow the transformations of the masked individuals and propagate the practice to new generations. The aesthetic and playful approach to the masked figures by the press does not do justice to their rebellion and transgression, but rather uniformizes the image of the performers.

Although the myth surrounding the origin of the *Fofão* frames the character as a poor person who found a way to celebrate like a Pierrot through the use of cheaper materials, today we witness the stigmatization of people who do the exact same thing. They improvise to dress as *Fofão*, yet they are discredited for their latex masks and alternative jumpsuit models that employ satin, a fabric that is more affordable than *chita* and lighter, which allows them to expand the dimensions of the patterning and perform an alternative bodily performance.

4. NEXT STEPS

Thus far, it is identified that the narrative of the *Fofão's* trajectory, recovered and presented in this study, remains divided due to the scarcity of traditional sources. As observed throughout this research, the fieldwork demonstrated that the manifestation has undergone

profound contemporary transformations, distancing itself from the few existing historical records. Despite being consolidated as an emblematic figure for the state of Maranhão, the character possesses little enduring photographic and textual documentation. For this reason, high scientific and cultural value is attributed to oral memory and the personal archives of the individuals who experienced the past and who continue to produce the manifestation today. In alignment with Pollak (1992), who positions oral history (which is also life history) as a privileged instrument of investigation, the interviews already conducted with artisans and popular culture researchers constitute the initial sample of the "Life Stories" collection. To complete this stage, the scope of the interviews was expanded to include the subjects identified during the Carnival fieldwork actions. This encompasses both the performers, who are active participants and provide their memories as well as access to private documentary archives, and the members of the Tropas, who were previously accessed only through digital media such as Instagram.

This focus on memory aims to mitigate gentrification processes that find one of their supporting pillars in the erasure or ignorance of the past. To ensure the responsible, ethical, and sensitive treatment of this material, the study relies on the expertise of the DiCA-UFMA group, articulating records and cross-referencing data from the perspective of communicational sustainability. Within the scope of Method of Stories Design, the contribution of documentation resides precisely in identifying and proposing alternatives for communication asymmetries, enabling the production of "memory artifacts" guided by social responsibility and equity.

By following the proposed methodological stages, this study seeks to complete the audiovisual collection of "Life Stories" and structure the "Step-by-Step" collection, which focuses on the manufacturing processes of artifacts, attire, and accessories made by the artisans already mapped. The edited material will be integrated into the communication channels of the project, consolidating a sustainable field action in both social and communicational terms. As Gamba (2024) points out, these memory collections constitute a product in themselves for society. Simultaneously, they configure themselves as fundamental stages for the designer's immersion into a heterogeneous universe, establishing the foundations for intervention-research and collaborative projects. Thus, the documentation of life stories, manufacturing praxis, and aesthetic and performative outcomes functions both as memory artifacts and as raw material for the "Crossed Materialization" phase.

As an outcome of the dialogue between different cultural matrices (researcher and interlocutor), the project has already initiated "Crossed Materialization" actions. Among the results made available for free on the Instagram profile (@dicapesquisa), the highlights include a collection of short videos based on oral accounts, a children's and youth Almanac, and a quali-quantitative Bulletin containing field data. These publications are in digital format and available for download. However, funding is currently being sought to enable the printed distribution of the Almanac in schools and the Bulletin to our interlocutors. The upcoming stages entail the development of infographics synthesizing transformations over time and presenting contemporary clothing styles. Furthermore, the publication of a book—for which funding has already been secured—is scheduled; it will present the history in a more comprehensive and collaborative manner, as described herein.

Faced with this scenario, design consolidates itself as a fundamental mediator of memory and culture. Far from being a purely technical-formal activity, design practice operates

strategically by safeguarding traditional knowledge and projecting new channels of dissemination. This process characterizes itself as an authentic social innovation, as it activates community networks and promotes the protagonism of the holders of this intangible heritage. This conscious and mediated transmission ensures that the character remains alive on the streets, adapting to new technologies and contemporary materials without losing its original essence.

Ultimately, the *Fofão* matters because it encapsulates the popular soul of Maranhão's Carnival. It personifies the creative irreverence of the streets and evokes multiple emotions that transition, plastically, from childhood fear to adult laughter, and from celebration to the collective memory belonging to all people from Maranhão. From fright to celebration, the character translates the deepest essence of the popular festival, revealing itself as a living form of cultural resistance. In this manner, this research positions itself as an active agent in the recovery and documentation of local memory, contributing directly to the configuration and consolidation of the collective identity of São Luís through its most iconic figure.

ENDNOTES

1. In the original Portuguese: “A luz jorrava dos grandes fôcos e, na claridade magnífica dos salões naquela orgia crua de matizes estonteantes, era mesmo de ver o guizalhar estridente e comunicativo dos dominós bojudos e fofos, dançarinas roliças e irrequietas, ciganas dulces e meigas, foliões de toda a casta” (...) (A canção de pierrot, 1917).
2. In the original Portuguese: “Máscaras de todas as qualidades e typos, em papelão, cetim, meia, celuloide, arame, cera com bigode, com cabelleira; luvas pretas, brancas e de cores, chapéus, phantasia em diversos gostos, guizos, confetti, de cores e dourados, serpentinas, rodós de diversos fabricantes; fofões, dominós, pierrots, papel crepon e de sêda em todas as cores, e uma infinidade de outros artigos próprios para a época carnavalesca” (Carnaval, 1925).
3. In the original Portuguese: “[n]o domingo gordo, pela madrugada, tocando uma buzina longa e rufando tambor, saíam os chamados Bobos, com máscaras horrendas, umas narigudas, outras carecas (...)” (Sá Valle in Martins, 2001, pp. 83-84).
4. In the original Portuguese: “O dono da casa era avisado por um linguarudo que seria “assaltado” e então comprava comida e bebida para receber o grupo, que por sua vez levava a orquestra. O grupo chegava, batia na porta e ia entrando e desarrumando a casa para criar espaço para a festa” (Santos, 2003, p. 143).
5. In the original Portuguese: “uso de máscaras, fantasias, adornos ou brincadeiras que não permitam a identificação de pessoas ou atentar contra a moral ou decore da família” (in Alves, 2018, p. 29).

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