

Short Communication ^{a)}

Poliversal-Plasteme: 50 Years of Commercial and Industrial Success in Quality and Innovation

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Abstract: Established 1966 in Luanda, Angola, by Portuguese businessman Armando Augusto Morais, the company *Ultramar Comercial* had already asserted its market position as the exclusive product distributor of the Italian petrochemical company *Montedison* in the Portuguese overseas provinces. Driven by political-historical forces to move, via Brazil, to its Lusitanian homeland, today's *Poliversal-Plasteme* plastics company has found its place among the producers and distributors of plastics masterbatches in Portugal in these five decades.

Keywords: *Poliversal-Plasteme*, company history, reprocessing of polymeric materials, masterbatches.

1. Introduction

Experience and success in the trading, distribution and production of plastics products over a long period make the Portuguese company *Poliversal-Plasteme* an interesting case to be studied.

We considered it appropriate to convey the history of the company and its products, its development and international expansion at the 2019 PHEA Plastics Heritage Congress within the scope of the subtheme - Plastics history - historic polymeric materials (Hipoms) - history of

companies, manufacturing and engineering.

A look at the archives and company lore allowed us to identify key moments for the growth of today's company. Relevant turning points mark the rapid evolution of the production of plastics materials.

2. History and Evolution.

Looking at the development of *Poliversal-Plasteme*, we can retrace the progression of growth and achievements but also how external events affected, marked and, changed its dynamics in

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different directions as a typical example of a company, embedded in Portuguese history

The company originally named *Ultramar Comercial* was established in 1966 in Luanda, Angola, by Portuguese businessman Armando Augusto Morais. The company was located in *Avenida dos Combatentes da Grande Guerra* in the economic and commercial centre of Luanda.^[1] At the beginning, it had just 6 employees. In 1966, its founder was able to negotiate a contract with the Italian petrochemical company *Montedison* to become its exclusive product distributor in the Portuguese overseas provinces.^[2] When he first bought and utilized 500 kg of polypropylene (PP) for raffia bags (instead of the traditional jute bags used in Africa), Morais received a telegram of congratulations from *Montedison*. This was one of the first steps in the use of large quantities of PP in industrial applications in this part of the world.

In 1967, reading the newspaper in the lobby of Hotel Polana in Mozambique, Morais saw a notice announcing the foundation of a factory for PVC window shutters. Discovering the owner of the company, that afternoon he arranged an appointment to discuss a one-year contract to supply equipment and raw material for the production of shutters for the whole territory. In two days, it was issued and signed. Indeed, Kairos, the Greek god of luck and opportunity had been taken by the forelock!

During that time in Angola, the company asserted its market position as the exclusive product distributor of *Montedison* in the Portuguese overseas provinces

The most remarkable moment in Portugal's recent history – the “Carnation Revolution” of 25 April 1974 – overthrew the authoritarian clerical-fascist regime controlled by a single party, António Salazar's *União Nacional* (National Union), known as *Estado Novo*, which had been in power since 1933. It was followed by a turbulent and convoluted two-year transition to democracy. This ‘PREC’ period (*Processo Revolucionário Em Curso, Ongoing Revolutionary Process*) led

to the independence of the overseas colonies.

In consequence, a relocation of the company from Angola to Brazil was enforced in 1975, leaving behind a whole factory structure and commercial contracts. Some exclusivity agreements, notably with *Montedison*, subsequently had to be renegotiated and maintained.

The company, now renamed *Plasteme*, was operating in the town of Belo Horizonte, the capital of the federal state of Minas Gerais.



Earlier, in 1963-67, Brazil had passed through a period of economic recession, provoked by the government policy of trying to control inflation.^[3] However, benefiting from the liquidity of resources of the international markets in 1968, the country went on to experience an expansion of economic activity stimulating the domestic market.^[4] In 1977, during the decline of this latter period, the management of the Brazilian *Plasteme* company, including Armando Morais, left the recessive economic framework of Brazil and moved to Portugal, venturing back into the homeland after its revolutionary period.

The headquarters were established in the centre of Lisbon, the factory in the nearby city of Aveiras (distance ~ 60 km, fast access and connected to the transport network).

In 1980, the polyurethane distributor *Poliversal* was founded.

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The amalgamated company *Poliversal-Plasteme* started a new attempt of rebranding as a byword in the national and international market. The company took advantage of the years of democratic transition and of a renewed-political stability post-PREC after the establishment of the Constitutional Platform and the voting in of the Portuguese Constitution on April 2 1976⁵, both determining the organization and the future of the Portuguese Republic and hence its economy.

During the 1980s, the company established its role as distributor of polyurethane in Portugal. In the 1990s, the manufacture of masterbatches began.

Since the late 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century, the family enterprise has been able to grow in a controlled manner, without changing its principles of trust and quality, increasingly encompassing the external market.

Operating over five decades largely in Europe but in the last ten years also entering the vastness of the Chinese market, *Poliversal-Plasteme* maintained its position as producer, purveyor and distributor of polymers and masterbatches in a world, where the plastics industry market is becoming more innovative and competitive every day.

Among Portugal's SMEs (Small and medium-sized enterprises), *Poliversal-Plasteme* has grown from initially six employees to about 50, including staff abroad. Commercial links have extended to Spain, Germany, China and many other countries, even involving the establishment of branches abroad.

Plastics producers like Unilever and Samsung Polymer co. cooperate with

Poliversal-Plasteme. In 2007, the company became the exclusive distributor of BASF styrenics in Portugal and Spain.

The plastics masterbatch producers *Ampacet* and *Kolon* as well as the customer companies, *Suzuki* and *Heineken* are examples for its wide range of partners. In 2008 the distribution agreement with *Ampacet* Europe came to an end. *Poliversal* immediately started producing masterbatches for the European market.^[2]

Currently, *Poliversal-Plasteme* maintains its exclusive relationships as a trading firm of distinguished petrochemical polymers, but it's focus lies on the production and distribution of colouring compounds and masterbatches. Furthermore, large investments have been made in modern laboratories and building up a team of specialized professionals.^[2] The laboratories are also the training place of many young people coming from universities.

Michel Pastoureau, a French historian, who devoted himself to the study of the history of colour, established the understanding of colour function and comprehension. Besides describing the chemistry of pigments and dyes, he pointed out the significance and symbolic value of colour in daily life, in material culture and in the creations of artists. The iconographic meaning of colour can only be analysed from a social and cultural point of view.^[6] With respect to Pastoureau's words that the Industrial Revolution made mankind capable of producing nuances of colours never seen before,^[7] the Aveiras laboratories of *Poliversal-Plasteme* with their infinite creation of colours for tailor-made solutions could be regarded as the technical fulfilling of these principles.



3. Conclusion

In its history, the plastics company *Poliversal-Plasteme* holds a mirror to the specific, rich history of Portugal. Today, it is embedded in the European and global imperative of economic development.

In an increasingly crosslinked world, the vast field of plastics production needs experience, expertise and mindfulness to environmental concerns, to persist in a present and future environment characterized by fulfilling the standard of

always ensuring efficiency: precision matters.

Nurturing trustful relationships with the aim of meeting customer needs, based on high-quality production and modern laboratories over the decades, the *Poliversal-Plasteme* brand is a paragon of internationally renowned expertise in plastics.

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