

Revisiting Memory and Heritage to a Common Future

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Abstract

The present communication presents a collaborative project founded in fostering interdisciplinary dialogue in contexts of formal, informal and culturally plural learning, on the road to educational practices and projectual alternatives to non-participatory model, centered in the classroom.

More specifically, by the gathering of artisans, designers, engineers and artists, we aim to present a project to be developed with the design students from the Visual Arts and Technologies Degree, from ESE-IPL in the present academic year (2015/2016), in partnership with engineer students from the Electronic, Telecommunications and Engineering Degree from ISEL-IPL, with two specific communities, the artisans and its community from the Nisa, in Alto Alentejo, Portugal and with the cork industry and its community from Coruche, in Ribatejo, Portugal.

Our purpose is to reflect on the application of collaborative and participative methodologies in the teaching of arts and design in polytechnic studies, in order to contribute for the research and development of new approaches in the active collaboration of learning, through the knowledge of real and practical problems in real life scenarios, between student designers and communities.

In this way, we hope to widen the perceptual field of the various participants, the reading levels of equity realities involved, the individual and collective memory, of scientific knowledge, techniques, technologies, thus contributing to the consideration of different levels of meaning.

The project is aimed to create, local and global collaborative platforms. Taking advantage of the uniqueness as a way to multiply the diverse and global dimension, to strengthen local identities or to create new identities, minorning the sense of loss of identity, acting for the benefit of present and future generations.

This work seeks to reflect about the added value of the use of participative methodologies in design education, as a contribution to put together the different actors involved.

Keywords: Social and Collaborative Design; Collaborative platforms; Identity; Educational Contexts; Inclusion

Introduction

The experience that we intend to present concerns the curricular unit Project II (that integrates Product and Interaction Design), which is a 2nd year curricular component of the Degree in Visual Arts and Technologies from ESELx. Given that “[...] traditional education techniques are not sufficient to cultivate [...] high potential, flexible and associative thinking.” and that “[...] competence-building and multidisciplinary approach allows to create new, sometimes even paradoxical relationships [...].” (Kirillov, Leontyeva & Moiseenko, 2014, 362-363), this experience reflects our desire to seek project alternatives to a non-participatory educational model, focused on the classroom.

Designed within a polytechnic educational institution, whose specificity is to built by affirming the identity of their featured action, among others: the importance given to experimentation, observation and integration of tangible and intangible culture, knowledge, techniques and regional deposited by technologies in productive activities; such experience takes on particular characteristics and objectives.

The mentioned facts will run the highest sensitivity to cyclical changes (Urban, 2008) and a predisposition to reflect upon them to find what characterizes us. From the look to our experience in the classroom and at school, as an effective training tool (Dreeben, 1976) and the subsequent observation of the student body, that preferentially seeks in a Degree in Visual Arts and Technologies, in the context of the Lisbon Polytechnic, ran the critical reflection that we propose.

The aforementioned reflection excelled from the need to overcome the blurring identity, and from the context that defines our identity, emerged the urgency to reframe, beyond the conventional isolation in the classroom, observing under inter-disciplinary and relational perspectives, the curricula and the problems that we face in teaching and in the research in design.

Experimenting through this approach is what Kirillov, Leontyeva & Moiseenko, 2014, calls the transition from standard to non-standard; from reproductive to productive knowledge replication; from report-performing mindset to creative thinking -thus revealing and developing students creative potentials.



In this context, and considering that design problems do not belong to the domain of a single discipline, arises the collaborative project that we designed for the current academic year (2015/2016). At the present congregating teachers and students from the Visual Arts and Technologies degree from ESELx, and from the Electronic Engineering, Telecommunications and Computers degree from ISEL, integrating them with two specific communities: the quartz inlaid pottery artisans and its resident community in Nisa, Alto Alentejo; and cork industry and its natural community in Coruche, Ribatejo, Portugal.

The choice of Nisa, for the development of this project, arises from the fact that only in Nisa exists a very particular cultural heritage at risk of extinction: Quartz Inlaid Pottery. Nowadays, quartz inlaid pottery is only produced, in Nisa, Alto Alentejo, and its main distinctive feature that distinguishes it from other traditional pottery, is the task performed by women, called "pedradeiras" which by the incrustation of small white quartz stones in the clay, draw motifs based on the local flora, fauna and mystical symbolism.

Today only three potters, with their wives, remain working. The finding that there are no interested apprentices in learning or developing this technique, confirms the risk of extinction of this very ancient material culture. We believe that new perspectives under Design disciplinary field, can positively contribute to an effort to safeguard this cultural heritage.



On the other hand, Coruche is not only one of the leading cork production regions, but also a region that has one of the biggest transformative cork industries.

"Harvested every nine years, without any tree being felled during the process, cork gives rise to an endless array of products, from the traditional to the most innovative and unexpected. The main product is the cork stopper, but not all cork qualifies to be transformed into that noble object."

It takes each cork oak 25 years before it can be stripped for the first time and it is only from the third stripping (at 43 years of age) that the cork, then known as «amadia», has the high standard of quality required for producing cork stoppers. The first two harvests – the «virgin» cork and «secundeira» cork –, as well as that removed from the base of the tree, becomes the raw material for insulation, flooring and products for areas as diverse as construction, fashion, design, health, energy production and the aerospace industry."



It is our goal, through this project, implement, observe and reflect on the application of collaborative and participatory methodologies in teaching and research in design, as part of polytechnic education, in order to contribute to the research and development of new project approaches, achieved through the interaction with problems and real practices, through the active involvement of the students with local communities, also in real scenarios.

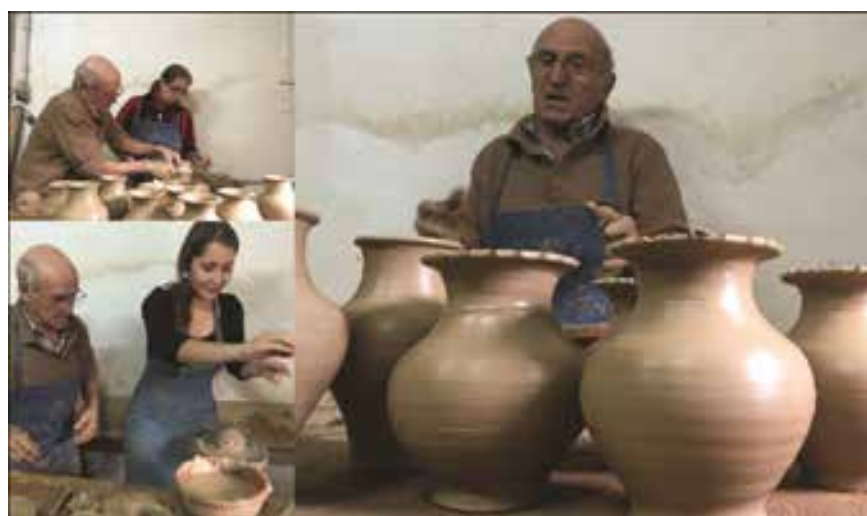
Methodology:

Bringing together artisans, engineers, designers and artists, it is our intention to develop a collaborative project founded in fostering interdisciplinary dialogue between learning contexts of formal, informal, cultural and generationally plural, seeking alternatives to the educational and projective practices to the non-participatory model, centered on the individual in the classroom, in the unambiguous communication and in the knowledge specialization.

A methodology that integrates the practice as part of the method, will feature our action - practice-based and practice-led (Candy, 2006) - considering: whether the practice and reflection about the results of practice, or the artifact created, as a source of new knowledge; whether a search capable of lead to new knowledge or to a new action on the practice. This will proceed to knowledge about the practice or within the practice. Practice-led, a research which Messer defines as inherently interdisciplinary; as engaging with qualitative and quantitative forms of research and practice; as being able to illuminate the creativity inherent in interdisciplinary Messer (2012); a research which Messer claims, rooting in the cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz essay on 'thick description', to be able to engage in research that is 'public, discursive and archaeological' (Geertz apud Messer, 2012,8).

A methodology that is intended to be immersive in real context, given the relevance that such methods of investigation and creation take in the design and validation of a design project as in the training of the designer as a consequent professional, agent of a new reflective action

whether from the material or immaterial scope, notably through capital gains conferred by the observation and interaction in the field and from the student's direct contact with the know-know and the know-being in loco and in the 1st person. In this area, we intend to use some of the research tools or principles from the social sciences and humanities field, including from the scope of sociology and anthropology, especially through the use of ethnographic tools.



The local diversity (natural and cultural), and the integration of teaching and student disciplinary collaborative platforms, culturally and generationally plural, thus assumes a leading role in this process by providing the opportunity to reframe theoretical issues and real problems, offering a consequent understanding of their various degrees of complexity.

By the use of immersive practices, not isolating the study object from its context, and the objective science of cultural environment, considering the articulations between disciplinary fields, and the complexity of reality in presence, shall be considered unpredictability and uncertainty in this approach to the problems that should arise.

Resigning with Morin [1990] to the parceled knowledge, since simplifying thought disintegrates the complexity of the real, complex thinking integrates as much as possible simplifying ways of thinking, refusing although the crippling consequences, reduction, one-dimensional and illusory of a simplification that can be taken by the reflection of what is real in reality, not confusing though complexity with completeness - as "Surely the ambition of complex thought is to account for articulations between disciplinary fields, which are broken by the disjunctive thinking (which is one of the main aspects of simplifying thought); this

isolates what it separates and hides everything that connects, interacts and interfere. In this sense the plexus thought aspires to the multidimensional knowledge.” (Morin, [1990] 2001: 9)

Through our action, we intend to bring together students and artisans; at first in a design, social responsible and sustainable project. Progressively we will aspire to integrate in subsequent projects, the various schools from the Lisbon Polytechnic Institute.

It is our purpose to identify, characterize and contextualize the cultural and technique identities that defines the contexts of action in question, in order to understand the people and the agents that most contribute to this identity construction, i.e. who composes it, who consumes it and who appropriates it. By the knowledge of a set of processes and transactions which characterizes it, we can (re)learn the shared culture of the society in which it operates and identify the diversity of singularities that constitutes it, by using specific methods of various disciplines in the field. Through the sharing of experiences and interdisciplinary questions about the design focused on social causes, designers, engineers and artists will line up by practice and reflection on the design of new materials, new uses for time-honored practices, new products or its alternatively dematerialization, consequently, new orders for consumption or to be conscious.



Expected Results

Looking for alternatives to educational models focused in the classroom, in addition to superior polytechnic research, it will be promoted mediation, interaction and social intervention. By the same route, widens the perceptual field of the various participants, their reading levels of cultural heritage, material and immaterial realities, in the presence, of

individual and collective memory, of scientific knowledge, techniques and technologies, also contributing to the consideration of different levels of meaning, providing and encouraging the development of a new action.



Materializing the results obtained by means of our work, in the short term we intend to create an open source library, designed as a database, to nourish with the information collected in the aforementioned, for future work contexts.

Conclusion

According to the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2002): cultural diversity contributes to the intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual satisfactory and constitutes one of the essential elements in the transformation of urban and social reality. It is to recognize that culture and knowledge takes diverse forms across time and space, being the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations.

To achieve this, the designer must assess the differentiating features in order to obtain an identity representation of the site and that it develop an emotional relationship with the receiver, that is, the designer must create a visual image based on the differentiating attributes of the site with the aim of strengthening the identity of the same.

The designer, as a project professional, contributes to this cultural diversity that is perceived by the consumers, therefore by a large audience, preserving it to an intangible level.

The Arts and Humanities Research Council, a British funding agency that finances academic

research in the humanities and the arts, adopts a definition that considers primary research in terms of its processes rather than in terms of its results (AHRC, 2006 apud Büchler, Biggs, Sandin & Ståhl, 2008, 2). Focusing on the process allows the researcher to ask about the appropriateness of a certain method, instead of the appropriateness of the format in which the results are communicated (Biggs, 2005 apud Büchler et al., 2008, 3), therefore enabling also the understanding of the knowledge concept with benefits not only to the researcher, but also to the community as a whole (Büchler et al., 2008, 4).

In accordance with these guidelines, this project methodology and practice proposed reinforces the above basic principles, expanding the scope of the concept and project practice of teaching and research in design. A reality that leads us to defend the methodological proposal presented here: founded in practice and integrated on the collaborative platforms in design teaching and researching. By this approach we intend to contribute to the creation of a facilitating tool of acquisition, transmission, mobilization and future implementation of research and collaborative work skills, which can be fundamental to the designer as a responsible and competent agent.

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