

CRAFT-DESIGN COLLABORATION BETWEEN DESIGN EDUCATION AND THE LOCAL CONTEXT: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This proposal aims to investigate and validate the design action by interpreting a culture of making (La Pietra, 1997) applied to the case of the development of straw articles, typical from Fafe region (Northern Portugal), supported by the concept of design experience (Brown, 2005). The first part explores the technique of straw utilization in order to understand their leverage on design method. The second part presents arguments that sustain that the technique can reach a new existence, if framed in connection with Academy and business reality. To support this idea, the authors present a project, initiated with the participation of 30 undergraduate design students. As a result, the projects scope is focused on the exploitation of the straw concept, moving towards its application in different scenarios. Methodologically the authors use the logic of meta-design (Mendini, 1969), connecting the Academy to the community. In educational terms it is intended to guide design student learn by design, questioning certainties and promoting connections with other actors of the reality. In terms of application the authors intend to validate the topic addressed by the students, analyzing and presenting four projects representing the four thematic areas. The authors intent to prove that the role of design can be the key in defining new product typologies, crossing design knowledge with the know-how of the artisan. This means that the academic world can be the catalyst for innovation in a sector worn and stopped in time, looking for new stimuli and renewed connotations.

Keywords: Craft-design collaboration, Culture of Making, System of Signification, Meta-design, Experience Design.

1 INTRODUCTION

In Europe, the connection between designers and the artisans has been visible in different contexts and in distinct historical moments. This collaboration was the result of the reflection considering the action of the new technological capabilities in industrial production, leading designers and entrepreneurs to consider the design as a mediator between industry and handicrafts. However, not all contexts lived this debate during the Industrial Revolution. Some countries, such as Italy or Portugal, create a basis economic and artisan system of equipment. In Portugal the design is assumed as a stimulator of old processes and techniques typical of craftsmanship, transforming them into new material cultural identities of a people. Today, the context continues to be characterized by the presence of these old jobs, although some activities run serious risk of extinction.

2 THE BASIS

2.1 The designer as an interpreter of the culture of a place

In the process of reinvention of identity, Bruno Latour (2008) highlights the role of semiotics, while the design competence as a qualification to be the logical consequence of a way of thinking and not the image of a social or historical reference. It is Interesting look at the past as an element of support that exists to guide us in the present, crossing it with the culture and in time to be able to interpret the reality of this with an updated identity. In this sense, the disappearance of cultures make could mean

the demise of the Portuguese genius loci, so the design must take responsibility to ensure the continuity of this knowledge. There is therefore interest in studying how the old processes and techniques of an ancestral place today can be appreciated and judged by consumers today. That is, reasons that lead the individual to choose a product connoted by a craft revisited? And finally, who can interpret these cultures do?

2.2 Design Culture vs Culture of Making

The craft can be understood as a 'culture of doing', as the craftsman knows how to do it because of the generational legacy, but does not even know what it does and why does it (John 1994). It is here that one can justify the designer's role as interpreter of the culture of the place. However, and as mentioned by Ugo La Pietra (1997) the craft is still poorly understood by some designers that consider production as an important element in product development, neglecting the impact of artisanal production. John Chris John (1994) explains this fact by writing that designers are probably more knowledgeable of production than reasonable users. That is, the production of a product refers not only to the application of materials and technological capabilities, but also the product concept, the experience and the values that the product adds to people's lives. As evidenced by Lina Bo Bardi, means "look carefully the cultural foundations of a country (whatever: poor, wretched, popular) while real, does not mean keep the forms and materials, means assessing the unique creative possibilities" (Bo Bardi 1980). It is this thread that the authors of this study justify the action of design as a discipline carrier of culture and interpretation. The designer should act as a gauge, an interpreter that lets conquer by territory of intervention, trying to understand what the context, refusing to operate as the classic author projecting oriented product. Nowadays, the designer acts for a market-oriented to ensure individual experience moments. "Today's consumer is no longer in the situation many times to ask yourself whether or not wish to have this or that object that doesn't have, the question that ultimately occupy it before is this: 'What do I want new experience to live?'" (Rifkin 2000). Since it is not projecting production cycles, but for the experience. In this process, the consumer seeks the unity, the right to be individual, which may be guaranteed by the product detail, as an element that ensures product quality. It is basically a product system that causes an "abductive reasoning" (Cross 2006), prompting the user for a process labyrinthine association. This process gives semantic meaning to consumer purchasing, relating it with either the values of the product with either the values of the company that stands behind the product. "The product system is also a system of signification: the consumer does not buy a product because it has quality, but because they share a value system that the company, through product system, managed to communicate to him" (Zurlo 2003). Companies, associating their image to quality values of the product as the Genius Loci of a place, ensuring a quality factor both in manual labour supplied by craft, both in significance of the place to which it relates. "When the designer works in a particular context culturally qualified, proposes a vision that should not change the identity, but interpret the essence, projecting it to a new contextual framework" (Aparo, Soares 2012). It is in this scope that the project is born - Palea Mate: design culture vs. culture of making.

3 DISCUSSION

3.1 Method and material: the northern region of Portugal

The city of Viana do Castelo is part of the Minho region, in northern Portugal, involving two districts - Viana do Castelo and Braga - and encompassing 24 municipalities, including the municipality of Fafe. In an analysis of the region shows that, in relation to the behaviour of the national economy, economic growth in the region of Minho has differed and that the level of unemployment has increase . Another important thing to remember is to characterize the region's business, consisting of small businesses with fewer than 10 people, targeting the secondary sector. In some cases, there are municipalities in the secondary sector has the same weight as the primary sector as municipalities Melgaço or Monção. The strong presence of agriculture and small industries is complemented by the existence of different craft activities. In the district of Viana do Castelo and according Francisco Sampaio in the interior municipalities, the craft activities that prevailing in the construction of objects of everyday use are: carpentry, cooperage, tin, light, weaving, basketry, pottery, the pyrotechnics. In the littoral artefacts stand out for its feature-sign, prevailing the tin, the hardware, the ceramics, the decorative pottery, statuary in stone, the woodwork, the regional embroidery, weaving, lace, networks, cordage, basketry and tapestries. In the district of Braga, where is the municipality of Fafe, the crafts are characterized

by various activities such as embroidery, musical instruments, pottery, tin, leather, wrought iron, horn, objects in linen, wrought iron, ceramics, filigree, the straw. This diversity of activities defines a cultural complexity that can contribute to the self-sustainability of the place. The sustainable development of the region depends on the sustainability of companies that preserve their products on time and progress in the region and therefore the country. The “liquid modernity” (Bauman 2000) challenges the formulation of proposals to challenge the monopoly of the global market, legitimizing the right of the individual to acquire new values, new experiences. Ampelio Bucci writes that “(...) seems strategic bet on products that have their own identity and that also allow to individual expresses better their identity.” (Bucci 2003). The connection between cultures of make and the design culture through academic projects and research, may be the key to sustainability and thus to the region's competitiveness. When the project is developed, based on the reading of the local factors that define the reality that the designer intends to interpret the link between the intrinsic values of a place, forms and materials, can provide a more comprehensive perception of the product. For Tim Brown, the design can improve the lives of people, acting with values and emotions involved. “We can use our empathy and understanding of people to design experiences that create opportunities for active engagement and participation” (Brown 2009). In this case, the design involves himself directly in the context, projecting with actors from the local community and creating offerings able to arouse the emotions of not only the wearer, but also of who performs them.

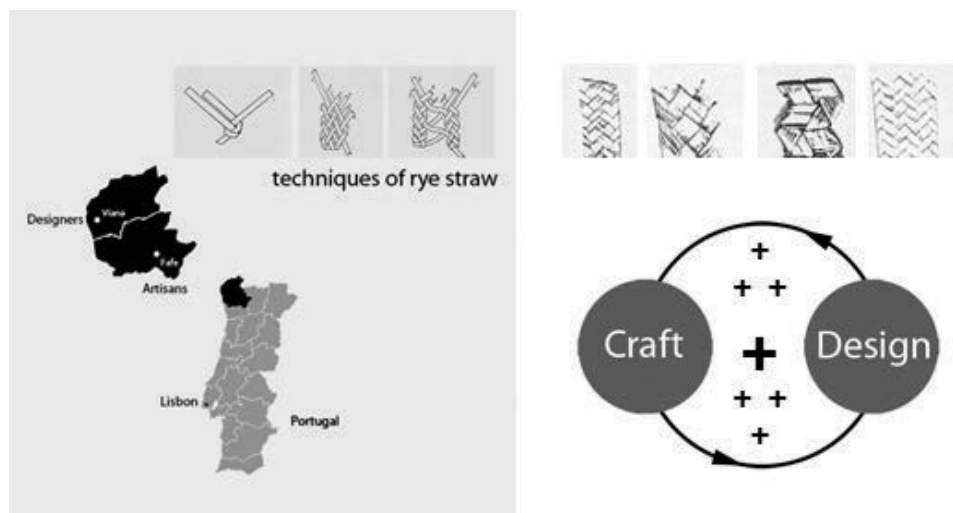


Figure 1. Portugal and the region of Minho. The techniques of rye straw and the craft-design alliance. Image from the authors

3.2. The Meta-design as a project methodology

The project Palea Mater is developed between the academic world and the business environment, in order to renew a productive process characteristic of the region Fafe: a rye straw. The project Palea Mater is characterized by the intersection between academia and the business world. On one side, there are 30 design students and 4 teachers. On the other hand, there are the artisans of rye straw, familiarized to knowing how to do the typical traditional products such as straw hats, but without the power to propose new solutions. In this scenario, the role of design can be the key in defining new product typologies, crossing design knowledge of students with the know-how of the artisan. As regards Medardo Chiapponi “often the strong innovation in a sector can be determined by the transfer of ideas and solutions coming from another field in which the same ideas and solutions are no longer innovative, but so are fully acquired long ago” (Chiapponi 1999). This means that the academic world can be the catalyst for innovation in a sector worn and stopped in time, looking for new stimuli and renewed connotations. “Today, the design research is built around a specific reading instrument such as those from studies of innovation processes promoted by companies in collaboration with the designers and the world of creativity.” (Verganti 2001). Applying a modus operandi refusing certainties and based on the technical definition of meta-design. As regards Alessandro Mendini “meta-project is a projectual behaviour of indirectly formalization, where the projection develops in more stages, and where the real and fundamental problem is, first the reproducibility program after the drawing.” (Mendini cit in Ferrari 2005).



Figure 2. The artisan working the straw. Traditional Fafe's product of rye straw. Source: Images from Sílvia Fernandes

4 DIALECTIC PROCESS

Students worked in teams of 3 elements. The sectors of the projects proposed were: Accessories, the Home Accessories, Packaging for gourmet cuisine and Toys for children. While departing from a common analytical basis, the projects were aimed at generating different solutions. The first step was the visit to Fafe. This moment was very important because it was the first contact between students and artisans. The next stage was characterized by the research phase, the fieldwork, the collection and analysis of data. Throughout the process, and depending on the interpretation of the working groups, it was necessary to return more often to Fafe. In some cases projects requiring other materials, other techniques other artisans, providing that new partners enter the project. These new contacts stand out, for example, the crafts such as embroidery linen, leatherwork or filigree, and were based on geographic proximity. The projects were presented at the city in December 2012.



Figure 3. Artisans, students and professors at the beginning of the project in Fafe. Students working at the School in Viana do Castelo. Students, artisans and professors in submitting proposals in Fafe. Source: Image 1 from student João Rodrigo. Images 2 and 3 from Liliana Soares

5 THE PROPOSES

In fashion accessories thematic it was created a relationship with embroiderers, seamstresses, shoemakers, involving different materials. Some groups chose for family contacts or by proximity to neighbour's artisans. Other groups of students have opted for the hybrid case, between self-production and artisan production. For instance, the project 'Metis' designed by students Isa Neves, João Mimoso and Nuno Valentino consists of a suitcase, a fanny pack and a headband that intended to serve as a support message, alluding to the fauna and flora of Fafe. So, after they learned how to sewed straw, student's chose self-produce this part. The straw was designed to form the body of a finch (suitcase), the body of an acorn (fanny pack) and the body of a branch with a nest of finch (headband). This choice allowed later, the group relates to a craftsman (tanning) of Ponte de Lima, experimenting with different materials able of qualifying products semantically with knowledge of the artisan.

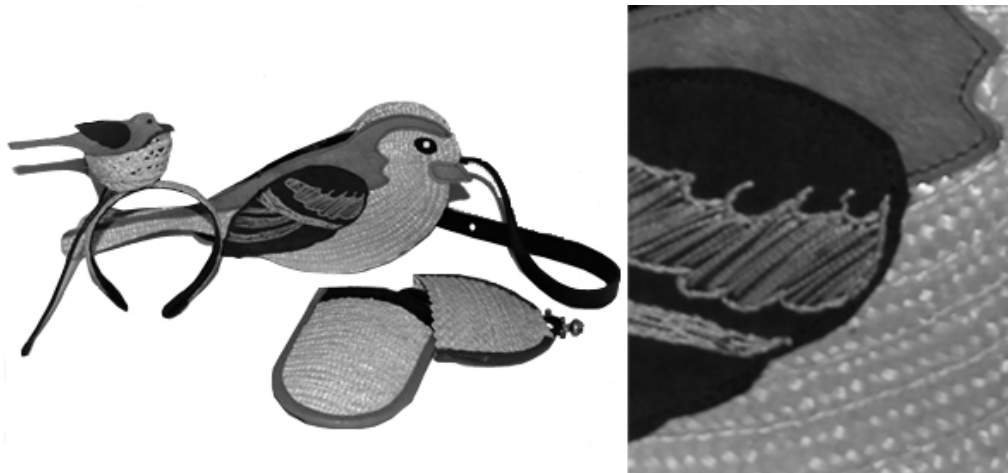


Figure 4. Project 'Metis'. Project developed by the students Isa Neves, João Mimoso and Nuno Valentino. The rye straw and other local materials alliance. A pattern with different materials and techniques. Source: photo from student Joana Abreu Ferreira

In toy's theme, students Barbara Costa, Celia Costa and Patricia Azevedo, who developed the project 'Met'. This project is a toy based on the “jogo da malha” - game mesh, present in the Portuguese and Fafe oral tradition, and it wants to enhance the fauna of Fafe, particularly the horse ponies, a Barrosã cow and boar. The game is oriented for children and adults over 65 years and wanted to promote the bond between grandparents and grandchildren, focusing on the theme of inclusive design. In the construction process, the students were involved with either the artisans of rye straw Fafe either with a cork industry of Santa Maria da Feira (Greater Metropolitan Area of Porto). This factor is extremely important because the project became semi-industrial.

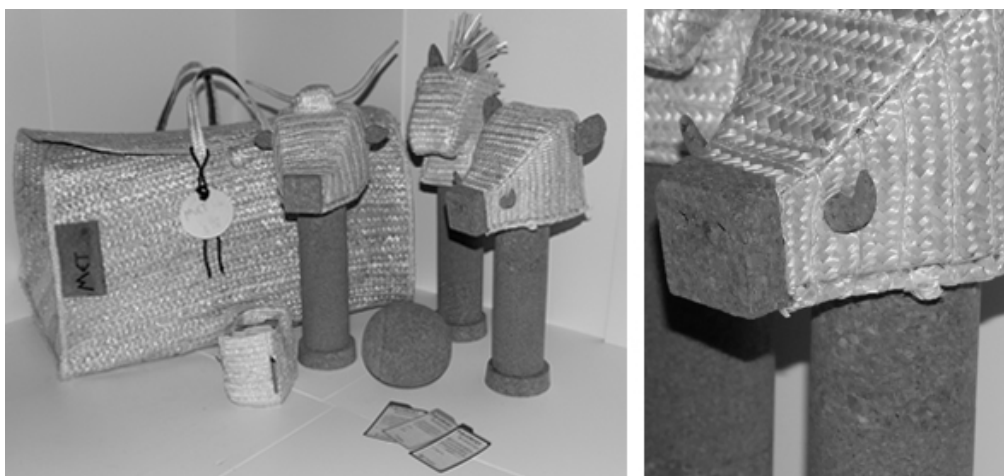


Figure 5. Project 'Met'. Project developed by the students Bárbara Costa, Célia Barbosa and Patrícia Azevedo. The rye straw and cork alliance creates a semi-industrial project. Source: photo from student Joana Abreu Ferreira

6 CONCLUSION

In scope of the Palea Mater project the authors intended to validate the manufacturing processes of rye straw Fafe, in northern Portugal, fostering new types of product to new markets. Much more than just creating new products targeted at new markets, the value of Palea Mater Project is the ability to generate connections, sometimes improbable, between actors belonging geographically to the same genius loci. In this open process, it was found that the viability of renew the rye straw of Fafe was in the ability of artisans and students wanting to create (or not) links. Some artisans demonstrated distrust of the project, as they feared that this product questioned the traditional product. However, the Palea Mater product intended for a high segment and, mostly, to the foreign market, it is not directed to or compete with the traditional product, or with the national product. On the hand of students, and in

some cases, there was a resistance to change in order to take that knowledge to learn from the artisans should be understood as an asset. On the other hand, the project leaders and the teachers had mediated the problem, introducing an awareness campaign for the nature of the Palea Mater project. Palea Mater is a project carrier of meaning, promoting the Genius Loci of a region and therefore, contributing to create products with identity. Coupled with the entrepreneurial factor, it could facilitate the formation of future creative enterprises for future designers. To design education Palea Mater project becomes an excellent example of how academic research can provide actions in the territory able to consolidate links between the territory and the values that they represent. The demand for continuity between the shape of a product and the values it represents can be seen as the result of a thought in design. To become a project shall begin to interpret the place and its values, transporting them to a new market context. In the future, the methodology and the applied dynamics in this project can serve as a basis for projects in the developing world or, as in this case, to local production can find in this type of processes a stimulus to the creation of new production scenarios. The design becomes the concrete possibility to create links between places, material / immaterial heritage and people who are part of this territory. Through the design this values can be transferred to the products, using a production process as a support to tell the history of a place. The well done becomes the disseminator of the identity of a place that takes the status of the singular object and unforgettable to those who visit or who inhabits it. A product carrier of culture that becomes also a catalyst of experiences and meanings, reaching scenarios and users that, hypothetically, knows neither the referent, but they imagine their sense in semiotic while design competence.

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