The Creativity Emancipation Atlas
Participatory machine design for the development of degraded urban neighbourhoods

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ABSTRACT
The current paper is based on three social engaged art and design projects, which were developed in two degraded neighbourhoods located in the Portuguese city of Amadora.

The first part addresses the idea of an immaterial machine designed to improve the education levels of the resident participants, as well as the fundamental concepts that inform it, such as the theories of machine, creativity and emancipation.

The following section is a precise description of the processes and methodologies used within every project.

Then the focus goes to the definition of an archive of audiovisual elements, which is being conceived to represent the activities done within each project. In this context, it is explored the notion of atlas, which is the media used to reproduce and communicate the artistic projects.

The last part is a reflection on the type of design practice that is implicit in the projects in focus.

Keywords: Atlas, Machine, Creativity, Emancipation and Participation.
THE CREATIVITY EMANCIPATION ATLAS

The purpose of *The Creativity Emancipation Atlas* is the representation of social engaged art and design projects developed in specific neighbourhoods. Up to the present moment the actions occurred in two Amadora neighbourhoods, which is a Portuguese city inside the Lisbon district. The first intervention occurred in the Bairro da Estrada Militar do Alto da Damaia and the second one in the Bairro do Alto da Cova da Moura. The latter project is currently under development also in the Bairro do Alto da Cova da Moura.

The idea is that each social project, which are based on some learning activities, such as computer literacy and visual communication, can stimulate the creativity of the participants. The main goal is to support and promote the cultural development of the resident participants and, consequently, leverage the qualification of the place.

The achievement of the expected results is made possible through the design of a *participatory machine* (Figure 1), whose functioning is informed by a specific program concerning a philosophy of education around the concept of *emancipation* and an aesthetics thinking sensitive to the development of society’s social awareness.

It is also important to emphasize that *The Creativity Emancipation Atlas* dissemination intends to promote a reflection about socially more sustainable ways to decrease the problematic situations that occur in this kind of urban areas with greatest needs.
MACHINE

So far the technology skills implied in the objects invented by the human being were capable of creating and transforming several functionalities, as well as generating various intellectual developments that contributed to the intelligence evolution. This notion of technique, which considers the transformation of something tangible, as well as how it influences the human thinking, is fundamental to the immaterial *machine* in question. In this sense, the design of the *participatory machine* is based on a set of "artificial automatisms" to develop the education levels of the resident participants, to qualify the places where they live and, above all, to boost the human thought in order to reflect on his social actions (Vengeon 2009).

CREATIVITY

The creativity’s universality is a fundamental principle to the concerned social engaged art and design concept. This powerful feature common to all human beings with creative sensitivity is a more logical value of exchange than capital and profit, which are both responsible for the development of the recent culture.

Thus, in accordance with the logic that creativity is an essential good in society, and not a privilege of artists, the *participatory machine* aims at engaging the
local people in particular activities to stimulate them for their own benefit, namely the learning of skills that can enable their social inclusion.

It is expected that the *machine* has the effect of, somehow, emancipate the participants and, consequently, that they can actively contribute for the evolution of their own urban community, in a resonance effect, throughout a freer society (Beuys *apud* Gomes 2010).

**EMANCIPATION**

The idea of emancipation is particularly important to the learning process implemented on the *participatory machine*, which is based on guessing and experimenting after some orientation given by the author. The latter has the role of a teacher advising every participant whenever required. It is important to emphasize that this type of interaction between the author and the locals in the participatory activities is not the resignation of one intelligence to another, but a form of relation that reinforces the contact of wills. The collaboration of participants with one another, in which are suggested other sources of knowledge and shared their own cultural backgrounds, are also crucial to give confidence on learning new skills.

In this sense, this social engaged art and design project enhances the equality among participants “according to the principle that all men have equal intelligence”, contrary to the objective of eliminating the pre-existent social disadvantages. In contrast, it is essential to focus the equality among participants since the beginning of the participatory activities and not as the main goal (Rancière 2002).

**THREE ART PROJECTS IN TWO AMADORA NEIGHBOURHOODS**

Two of the social art projects already occurred in two neighbourhoods from the city of Amadora - the Bairro da Estrada Militar do Alto da Damaia and the Bairro do Alto da Cova da Moura. A third one is currently being developed in the Bairro do Alto da Cova da Moura. The city of Amadora is part of the Lisbon metropolitan area and the neighbourhoods in question have several known problems, such as illegal construction and the lack of adequate support from the
Government and the City Hall to resolve potential problems, like poverty, low education levels, crime, among others. The local population are mostly immigrants and their descendants from Portuguese-speaking African countries.

The first two interventions were important to delineate the methodology to be repeated in the third and future projects. The process starts with an approach to a local association that has some routines implemented in the neighbourhood. From this first step, the author in collaboration with each association, begins planning the works to do, such as the skills to teach, the required space and materials, the activities' diffusion, between other details. In the course of the first talks it is crucial to find out the cultural needs of the locals as well as to think on some learning activities that could stimulate their creative energy - the core of the interventions. The first two actions, that already occurred, were from the author's initiative, and the on-going project is part of a proposal that came from a local association.

The first project, at the Bairro da Estrada Militar do Alto da Damaia, had two parts, a first phase dedicated to computer literacy with adults (Figure 2), and a second phase about visual communication for youngsters (Figure 3). The following project, at the Bairro do Alto da Cova da Moura, was only about computer literacy. The current intervention, also at the Bairro do Alto da Cova da Moura (Figure 4), is being developed in a different association with the collaboration of other design researchers. As mentioned above, in the latter project the local association asked for the FAUL collaboration that, by its turn, constituted a group of researchers, to which the author belongs.

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In every case the methodology is the same, being completed by two different stages. The first one is composed by a participatory learning system that is developed with the purpose of later forming a symbolic piece that encourages the thought about the place and the community where the projects occurred.

Over the course of every participatory work, some video footage, photographs and audio recordings, as well as other kind of elements, were collected to later incorporate the projects’ archive.
MAPPING THE FIELDWORK

The second stage is concerned with the archive examination and selection of audiovisual elements to represent the socially engaged art project. Each neighbourhood, and its respective set of participatory activities, will have an atlas titled *The Creativity Emancipation Atlas*.

This form of reproducing the social interventions will be exhibited in a place nearby the neighborhoods. The objectives are (1) to commend the culture of the locals who inhabit these problematic neighbourhoods, (2) to inform the remaining urban community about the mutual concern to develop these type of locations and the government entities about their responsibility in the social and cultural inclusion of every citizen, and (3) to question the disciplines of design, visual arts, as well as other art forms, about their vocation to the consciousness surrounding this and other social weaknesses.

The difference between the archive of all the collected elements, from the three projects, and each neighbourhood’s atlas is the fact of the first being a dense set of all the audiovisual elements representing the art project, while the atlas is a selection of the most significant reproductions. This way of mapping the participatory fieldwork is organized by a set of panels, composed by videos, enlarged video frames and sounds, that have the objective of revealing particular realities, as well as unveiling traces to other thoughts. Starting from
an understandable observation of selected audiovisual elements, where it is
given particular emphasis to the "interstitial" spaces between the selected items,
this way of communicating every social project develops the heterogeneity of
thoughts and brings the viewer other alternative perspectives (Didi-Huberman

ETHICAL AND AESTHETIC KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS
A relevant issue of this creative practice for “social innovation” is its critical
base, whose objective is to stimulate the user/observer as a conscious actor
with respect to the evolution of the world. It is a matter of activism that is made
possible through visual art and design forms. In other words, this is a
sociopolitical approach to urgent social issues, which is simultaneously useful
and symbolic to society.

One of the most important characteristics of the projects in question is the
coexistence of designers with scientific knowledge and also empirical designers,
in order to both participate in the creation of objects, as well as functions that
best contribute to society. This relationship between "diffuse design" and
"expert design" is a synergy that will be critical to the social body’s future
development. An innovation not only focused on concrete problem solving as
also in building social values and qualities (Manzini, 2015, pp. 1-3).

The cooperation between empirical and specialist artists and designers is based
on crosscutting issues, which are crucial to define the world social and
environmental values. Among these problems are the redistribution of water,
food and other essential needs due to world population growth; the social and
medical assistance to elders due to population ageing; the society’s combat and
adaptation to climate changes; the sustainable use of natural resources; the
transformation of the contemporary unsustainable financial system; the
paradigm shift concerning the reduction of the difference between rich and poor
people, countries and hemispheres; the increase in productivity based on
human labor combined with robotics and high technology to reverse the trend
of rising unemployment; and finally, the development of a positive religious
intersubjectivity which is one of the major reasons of war and social injustices
(Margolin, 2014, p. 92).
In this sense, *The Creativity Emancipation Atlas*, as a whole, is a case of "design as activism", in which are included cultural activists, community organizations and other social actors who develop a participatory practice characterized by the disclosure of problematic social issues, as well as alternatives for their resolution. On the one hand it is a collaboration for the design and implementation of new ideas addressing society's needs, on the other hand it is a demonstration of the vitality and ability to act that exists in this type of synergy (Manzini, 2015, p. 11-12, 46).

**CONCLUSION**

The two projects already developed and the on-going third one are part of a transdisciplinary practice that is informed by various types of knowledge, which aim being, at the same time, symbolic and useful to society. Thus, through the design of a *participatory machine*, is possible to give social support to a specific community and communicate this kind of altruistic work to the remaining society. The intention of developing some of the participants' skills, such as computer literacy and visual culture, and through this process promote their creativity, is a way of reducing the difference to other citizens with better education levels.

A key objective of this socially engaged visual art and design research is to underline the potentiality of the disciplines of design, visual arts, as well as other art forms, for the creation of alternative points of view over the various issues that interest the common good, and therefore communicate other thoughts that can effectively contribute to a sustainable evolution of society. This kind of practice, in addition to being an aesthetic form of knowledge, develops an ethical sensitivity, and the interaction between both is a powerful way to reflect and act over the weakest socio-cultural realities.

**REFERENCES**


