

Intervention, development and communication design

A proposal of design typologies towards sustainability and new paradigm of performance

Ana Thudichum Vasconcelos
Fine Art Faculty, Lisbon University

Design towards sustainability is ruled by a sense of social and environmental responsibility, which translates into an effort towards the improvement of the standard of living of the communities and a contribution towards education for citizenship.

Based on several design projects towards sustainability, we have identified common features, which help classify the project clusters of this design tendency: intervention, development, and communication.

Amongst the projects studied, we can find a model of performance transversal to the collaboration between partners, involving both participation and co-design. A collaborative project establishes a direct relation between the intervening parties: creators and local community. This work methodology also uses the support provided by social networks, which emphasize the quality of interpersonal relationships, and help spread information and knowledge. This way of acting, contributes to the promotion of the social sphere and to civic and environmental education.

Introduction

In this article, we wish to highlight the several ways of promoting sustainability by means of design, i.e., we will describe in what ways design can contribute towards a better world. What we will discuss in this article “is not about the world of design, but about the design of the world” (Bruce Mau, 2004)

One of the current aspects of design is, undoubtedly, design towards social sustainability. This area of intervention has been through a considerable impulse, recently. This tendency of design expresses the need for a new intervention paradigm in design. Given the end of industrial production, design now turns to a new field of intervention, set in the current social and environmental contexts. The solutions of design towards sustainability promote the de-materialization and value social responsibility. But, how can we define design towards sustainability? What methodologies and instruments does it use? In addition, what project typologies are there within design towards sustainability?

The inheritance of project culture: design for...

Design is increasingly aware of its capacity of giving a positive contribution, thus, breaking the hegemony of globalization, searching for solutions to people’s real needs in co-operation with the environment that surrounds them. The culture of responsible design is founded on Papanek’s (1992) visionary perspectives, in “Design for the Real World” (first edition 1971), and in Buckminster Fuller’s [1895-1983] work, which was more recently emphasized and developed by Whiteley (1993) in “Design for Society”. Design for all, promotes non-discrimination, everyone’s right to benefit from infrastructures and services. However, we believe that design towards sustainability can go much further by understanding sustainability

projects, in the areas of **intervention, development, and communication** with place solutions, which are, for this reason, simply ignored. Whiteley (1993),

Design towards social innovation includes all social backgrounds, and thinks the community as a whole in which everyone has the right to aspire to a proper life.

A new paradigm of performance: design with

Design towards sustainability, and particularly, towards social innovation, requires a new paradigm of performance. The design methodology for social innovation requires a collaborative process, where dialogue, sharing of knowledge, interaction, and creation of group dynamics, are fundamental to the project. This method of performance is one of the key-tools to carry out social design projects. For Battle (2001), “the only way to achieve a sustainable future is to involve the public in the design and decisions making process, in the most fundamental way. We need to make people become more familiar with the macro environmental and social issue (...) if the challenges and problems could be understood in this way then everyone would become inevitable, as well as, processes together”.

The issue of collaboration makes the projects feasible and effective. This way of performing favours co-operation between partners, involving all the parties interested in the project. This collaboration is a factor of strength for institutions, promoting solutions oriented to the construction of a better community. The emergence of the participation impulse stimulates the construction of innovative solutions. By working together and improving relational qualities, people can act and solve their specific problems. The pattern of sustainable community is structured on the establishment of group dynamics and its functioning depends on the capacity of integration of the individual diversity around a common goal (Vasconcelos, 2008)

In this process of collaborative work, we have to differentiate participation and co-projection. Both presuppose joint work and sharing of knowledge, life experience, and interests. However, participation is linked to the involvement of people in a general way, where everyone is invited to feel inserted in the project, to get involved in the issues that concern them and, sometimes, to contribute to its construction. The term co-projection implies a deeper, and more rooted involvement in the creation of the project. It refers to a joint work, in which the ownership of the project is shared amongst the intervenient partners. Both methodologies make up for a new paradigm of performance, as opposed to the traditional model of the paint-room designer. Going outside, working with people, understanding and interpreting their real needs are the initial presuppositions that form an attitude of differentiated project. Projecting for people implies knowing to work with them. According to Howard Rheingold, cited by Thackara (2005) “we don’t have to reinventing the concept of collaboration: it’s in our nature as humans to collaborate, and this existing social characteristic is being amplified and accelerated by new communication tools”.

“All spaces, places, and communities that foster complex experiences and processes are potential sites of learning” (Thackara, 2005)

People’s involvement in the processes of participation and co-projection opens doors to reach other sustainability levels: social inclusion and environmental co-operation. In order to **intervene** and **develop**, it is necessary to create critical knowledge, to promote the capacity for continuous learning, and to create the conditions for people’s empowerment.

Personal involvement in the process of creation and development of a common good is determinant and it promotes the inclusion of learning capacity. The sustainable community should incorporate the learning process (Manzini, 2006 c, pg. 1) i.e., being available to, jointly, integrate an attitude of continuous learning. In other words, the community should promote co-learning and the capacity of building amongst all patterns involved (Reyes, 2005)

“Communities of all kinds need to work together, thinking about the problems they are face in holistic ways, strengthen the fabric that binds them together” (Steffen, 2007). Emphasizing the intra and inter is a presupposition of the social innovation projects.

In this sense, the creation of networks in the development project can be determinant. These, promote access to information and knowledge, and are regarded as facilitators for personal relations. Networks are the platforms that establish connectivity between people. It promises to be good for equality by breaking down barriers, de-centralizing and democratizing the system. If, on the one hand, networks work as a way of spreading vital inputs for education (Leadbeater, 2008), on the other hand, they actively contribute towards the development of a sense of community. The network enables the establishment of partner-

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ships, the creation of dynamics, the stimulus, and deepening of solidarity, and is an invitation to integration and culture of participation.

Finally, it is useful to understand that the construction of networks does not invalidate the need for special contextualization of interventions. This setting emerges from the specificity of the social and natural environments, favoring identification and local identity, as strong territorial referrals. This delimitation is the stage of social inclusion, and as mentioned by Clifford (1997) “a location (...) is an itinerary, rather than a bounded site”

Intervening, developing and communicating

In short, several case studies will be presented. These, enable the illustration and comprehension of the types of performance that design can have in the scope of social and environmental responsibility, in view of the benefits it brings to the community.

Intervention design

Planting a tree: a means of education towards citizenship, through the requalification of public green spaces

The initiative started with a group of friends who organized themselves to plant one thousand trees in Monsanto (a “lung” park in Lisbon). This was followed by the planting of another one thousand trees in Sintra (national park in Lisbon’s surroundings), and another one thousand in the city of Lisbon. The next intervention will take place on the 23rd November, on the day of the native forest, when 250.000 trees will be planted all over the country.

Environmental education and promotion of the civic act are the main goals of this event, where everyone is invited to participate in the improvement of public spaces. A small gesture – planting two trees – multiplied by many people, creating a movement, a network that is transformed into new plantations in several places.

Design is necessary: Volunteer designers develop projects aimed at social solidarity institutions

This initiative started with a female entrepreneurial designer, in co-operation with Entreaajuda, an organization that aims at improving the life of solidarity institutions. Entreaajuda makes the bridge between institutions and those who want to contribute with their knowledge and volunteering. This initiative is inspired in the project “design 21: social design network”. Design is necessary is a platform where several briefings, created according to the needs of several institutions, are made available. Designers make their applications online, proposing solutions to institutions.

Projects of intervention have the specific objective of creating an object that can assume the form of product, space, service, or event. This project typology follows Papanek’s line of thought, in which the intervention of design is still executed in a physical way. Intervention design takes place in a certain time and physical space is its referral. Intervention projects are essentially solutions of occasional intervention. They always intend to benefit the community, but their expression is limited to an object which is in some way executable.

Development design

Wine from the west produced by small producers: The recovery of the wine-growing work of small producers from the Western region of Portugal

These wine-growers work small parcels of familiar land, lost in the slopes. Throughout the years, they looked after wine-yards to produce wine for domestic use. This is an agriculture practiced by people, harvested and cared for by the knowledge of traditions, which were transmitted from generation to generation. The small productions are produced by the elderly and is frankly decadent. It all began when a couple of oenologists rehabilitated this culture by buying grapes to the small farmers, for local production and distribution of wine.

The result goes much beyond the quality of the wine. It recreates the farmers' enthusiasm/ liven up/, knowing of the possibility that others may savour their flavours and share their know-how. This project protects the environment and landscape heritage, it values people with traditional culture and it requalifies the financial lives of these small farmers, creating a market circuit.

Trás di Munti: Beyond art – gender equality, environment and sustainable development. This is a Project of recovery of the traditional pottery of Cape Verde, Trás di Munti, Tarrafal, and Santiago

In Cape Verde, there are several pottery centerpieces, made by women, according to ancestral techniques of African origin. These pottery centerpieces are endangered due to globalization. Some are dying out, while others keep changing the original aspect of pottery in favour of bigger productions, but lacking quality criteria. Trás di Munti is an almost inactive centre. Formerly, it had excellent quality, comprising a significant number of families. The decadence of this activity represents a factor of devaluation and impoverishment of the community. Besides the art, this project is based on an anthropologic study and on the improvement of local ceramic techniques. It intends to increment the development of traditional culture and, most importantly, empower the women within the community. This means that the methodology applied to the project intertwines cultural, economic, and social developments.

Projects of social development refer to a continuous action, based on an evolutionary accompaniment of the situation.

This project viewpoint surpasses the boundaries of the executed creation. The project is conceptual and organizes itself based on service and system design, in which design's fundamental objective is to create the conditions for empowerment of the community involved. Development has a complex dimension, an holistic amplitude of economic, social and environmental growth, as well as, of cultural and patrimonial valuation. In short, this typology is characterized by the complexity of the holistic vision of problems, the de-materialization, the request of multidisciplinary team in action, and for long term sustenance.

Communication design

Creative communities and Collaborative services: 2 editions gathered from the case studies carried out by European university students

Both documents intertwine respect for the environment and the construction of a socially healthier community: an "anti-trend to consumerism and individualism in European and more industrialized countries where people find their own solutions in a close connection with the others" (Jégou and Manzini, 2008)

The first book *Creative communities: people inventing sustainable ways of living*, Meroni (focuses on an example-giving communication of bottom-up initiatives, which stimulate community development. These initiatives are related to issues of daily organization: housing, eating, commuting, working, learning, and socializing.

In the second book *Collaborative services: Social innovation and design for sustainability*, Jégou and Manzini (2008), suggest a disassembly of several services based on mutual support, self-organization, trust and interaction. This way, the need for changing social behaviours is emphasized. The end objective is to improve daily quality of life.

Educating for citizenship – a support tool for transmission of universal values that improve each, and everyone's, lives

Educating for citizenship is a mediation instrument composed of a set of educational games. Each school is made the proposal of a session plan to be carried out in class. The instrument supports the creation of sharing and socializing dynamics, between teachers and students, and amongst peers. In this setting, the construction of intra and interpersonal relations is privileged. Each game corresponds to a session, to a creative and leisurely activity. Similarly to the Unesco program of *living values*, educating for citizenship is a Project that is based on the sharing and transmission of values, such as: truth, freedom, tolerance, sharing and solidarity, human rights, justice, accordance, participation and civic intervention, and respect for the environment. It is the existence of these values, which enables a better living in community.

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Communication projects contribute towards the promotion of the communities' cultural and social values, and play a determining role in the reduction of distance between people of very different social backgrounds. Communication is also a means of letting people know of design solution towards social sustainability. The projects can also focus on the systematization and organization of information in a way as to make it more easily transmitted and learnt. Sustainable development needs to promote and give visibility to messages and positive solutions related to the natural and social environment. The communication project can also create instruments that facilitate interpersonal relations.

In short, communication projects may have to be distinguished between 4 sub-categories, which contribute to the:

- Promotion and divulgence of messages and contents, by sensitizing and transmitting cultural and social values of a certain community;
- Development of projects that promotes the systematization of information, thus, making it more accessible.
- Letting know of design solutions for social sustainability, as a means to divulge and disseminate projects and ideas.
- Creation of facilitating instruments, of support to interaction, and interpersonal communication.

The design new dimension: development

Design's new performance paradigm towards social and environmental sustainability, is based on a collaborative work which means design with people, supported by the creation of social networks, and is executed in projects of intervention, development, and communication.

The typologies named *intervention* and *communication* benefit from a Project culture heritage in reference to the studied object. This means that, in the scope of responsible design, solutions appear with some spontaneity, making it relatively easy for the designer to identify a problem and come up with a solution to a certain need that is delimited, identified and has an execution based on an object: product, space, service, or event.

However, in the scope of design for social innovation, new challenges are placed, namely, the need to contribute to the elaboration of projects of sustainable development: *development*. Development projects are deep interventions, therefore, more comprising and having a multi-disciplinary perspective, which necessarily extends in time. Creating the grounds for sustainable development implies acting in a holistic manner at several levels, to be specific, in the construction of a civic behavior and education towards sustainability. However, educational and civic training presuppositions require time to mature and need the construction of critical capacity to support it. To sum up, design towards sustainable development is still giving its first steps.

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