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Abstract

Higher education institutions favor the creation of crucial environments for the development of local ecosystems, reinvigorating the interconnection between the agents of different environments (academic, business, governmental and social) and their abilities to foster creativity and creative knowledge environments.

The Inclusive School of the Polytechnic Institute of Viana do Castelo emerged in this context. It aims to collaborate in the training of students, combining technical-scientific knowledge, of an academic nature, with the appreciation of human skills, increasingly necessary in the formation of individuals capable of responding to the challenges of a more demanding society.

This article discusses the process of creation and development of the Xmas Paper Toys and Graphic Poetry projects, within the scope of the Inclusive School of the Polytechnic Institute of Viana do Castelo mission, for the Patronato Nossa Senhora da Bonança, a private institution of social solidarity located in north of Portugal.

The adopted methodology crosses the design process with the operative principles of social design and a service-learning approach, simultaneously responding to the learning needs of the subject in which the projects were inserted, as well as to the "client" expectations.

The Patronato Nossa Senhora da Bonança intended to market the products to raise funds that would contribute to the subsistence and continuity of its formation and solidarity activities, within the community in which it is inserted. Considering that, the final result of both projects is easy and economically reproducible, making the most of the resources used.

Keywords: communication design, social design, social solidarity, inclusive school, client centered design.

1. Introduction

Currently the academy's mission extends beyond technical-scientific training, and should be oriented towards Education for Global Citizenship and contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Due to the wide range of interrelated topics, which aim to address the most pressing social, economic and environmental challenges in response to the 2030 Agenda, the SDGs cannot be exclusively managed by central or local governments and can only be achieved with the contribution of academia, the business community and the various members of civil society, each of these actors being an essential part of the change process (BCSD, 2022).

The Inclusive School of the Polytechnic Institute of Viana do Castelo (IS-IPVC) has the mission to integrate the social responsibility practices, inherent to the SDGs, into the organizational culture of the institution, which “[...] has an impact on the formation of human capital, social capital and sustainable local development.” (EI-IPVC, 2022).

Supported by the Learning-Service teaching methodology, IS-IPVC is responsible for identifying needs in the local community, allowing students to collaborate directly with partners in the social sector. Interaction takes place within the scope of subjects of the most diverse courses offered at IPVC, providing students with the development of knowledge and skills through the implementation of projects that respond to previously identified needs. This methodology promotes socially responsible education, forming individuals and future professionals who are more aware and sympathetic towards social problems. At the same time, this training should allow for the construction of “[...] an educational and cultural identity of its own, oriented towards the development of human, scientific and technical skills of people capable of responding to the new challenges posed by a new, more modern and demanding society.” (EI-IPVC, 2022).

In this context, the IS-IPVC presents an organization that enhances the link between the agents of academia, local administration, the business community, social institutions and society, promoting clustering and eco-innovation, that is, promoting the transition from the quadruple to the quintuple helix, as proposed by Carayannis and Campbell (2012).

It was in a scenario like this, which fosters the emergence of environments of creative knowledge, which are born from the exchange of knowledge as well as the understanding and adaptation of needs, that the two projects presented in this article emerged - the Xmas Paper Toys project and the Graphic Poetry project - carried out within the scope of the Product Design and Communication subject, of the 3rd year of the degree in Product Design at IPVC, for the Patronato Nossa Senhora da Bonança (PNSB), a social institution located in the north of Portugal.

2. Background

2.1. Design as activity, process and purpose

Design, in general, has always been an activity in search of the next thing to produce, needed or not so needed. Traditional design, whose origins date back to the Industrial Revolution, has been since its beginnings “[...] propelled by the need to develop a product or service that solves a problem or leads to financial gains [...]” (Heller, 2018, p. 15).

As a technical activity, design arises from a sequence of simple and incomplete ideas, from a set of sketches and studies that require improvement, which, after the involvement of different methods and strategies, result in original, appropriate products, services or processes. to respond to the needs of Man in the context of contemporaneity. Therefore, responsibility towards the human being can be understood as a general purpose of design, that is, by definition it could be considered that all design is social.

At the same time, as a discipline, design needs the support of different areas of knowledge (from arts and humanities to sciences) to explore, sustain and support the final solution, all of them contributing to improve it.

In this context, it is understood that the design process is based on a planning and patterning that allows reaching a predictable end, which depends on a conscious intention (Papanek, 1973) that meets the current and future needs and expectations of a user/consumer, of a community or society.

However, the solution has to be meaningful and this occurs through the perception of the function that is inherent to it. Nevertheless, the interpretation of the meaning of the different layers that allow the construction and understanding of the function (fig. 1) varies from individual to individual, which enables the creation of multiple solutions and interpretations, some “righter” and others “wronger”, something intrinsic to design as a problem-solving activity (Papanek, 1973).

The current user/consumer wants solutions that correspond to their expectations, not only in terms of the use and/or aesthetics of the product, but increasingly focused on its symbolic value.

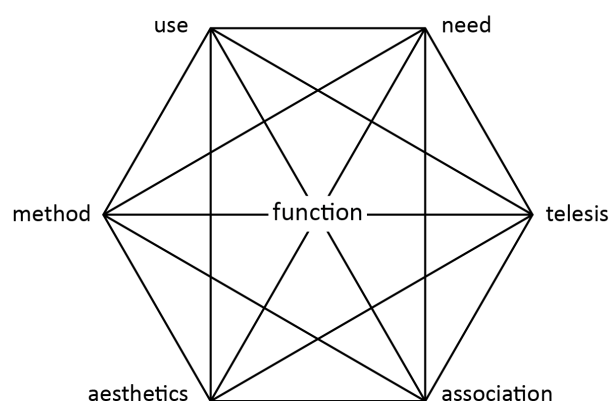


Fig. 1 - The function complex: interrelationships and dynamic actions (Papanek, 1973, p.26)

2.2. Social Design as an approach to social innovation

Social innovation, as described in the Guide to Social Innovation (E.C., 2013, p. 6), “[...] can be defined as the development and implementation of new ideas to meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations. [...]”, with the main goal of improving human well-being through products and services that better satisfy individual as well as collective demands, leading to the creation of social changes. Many of the innovations refer to service innovation, with social design being one of the terms used in this particular approach.

Social design can thus be understood as something that aims “[...] to empower people at local level to invent together solutions to economic and social problems. It contributes to offer new values to guide public administrations’ actions through collaborative working, experimentations and prototyping.” (E.C., 2013, p. 7)

The term “social design” emerged around 2006 as a manifestation against the more harmful effects of evolution and with a purpose that goes beyond the commercial value that the final product can acquire, that is, going beyond the objectives and inquiry of traditional design (Heller, 2018).

“[...] Almost nothing about it [social design] is new [if compared with traditional design] except its organization into a system and its application to human relationships instead of only artifacts. [...]” (Heller, 2018, p. 2)

Tab. 1 - The objectives and inquiry of traditional and social design (adapted from Heller, 2018, p.14 and MeasureD, n.d.)

TRADITIONAL DESIGN APPROACH	SOCIAL DESIGN APPROACH
Top down Decision-based Working on parts Expert-led Following strategic plans Creating artifacts and interactions Creating desire Silver-bullet solutions Measured only by numbers, transactions	Inside out Inquiry-based Working on systems Collaborative co-creation De-risked with prototypes and feedback loops Strengthening relationships Uncovering needs Creating conditions for success Measured in human capacity
What do we have? What do we need? How will we do it? What will it cost? When can we have it?	Who needs to participate? What is the context or system? How can we cocreate? What products or innovations will we need? How can we prototype, iterate, and learn?

Although the projects presented in this article were developed on a nano scale, that is, developed and executed for the particular situation of a single institution, it is considered that

they circumscribe what is defined as social design, specifically within the scope of the service products. Service products are understood to be, on the one hand, the service, which is an intangible process, which, on the other hand, results in a tangible product that is a consequence of the phased implementation of this design process. The interaction between the different actors (the “who”) can occur throughout the entire process, which in essence corresponds to a process of co-creation and/or co-production, in which different individuals are involved in defining the “what”, “why” and “how” of the products to be developed, so that needs and expectations, as well as technical considerations, are analyzed and anticipated in a timely manner.

Acting within these social and human design criteria should still be something to be shared and encouraged among students, as “[...] For in showing new areas of engagement, we may set up alternate patterns of thinking about design problems. We may help them to develop the kind of social and moral responsibility that is needed in design.” (Papanek, 1973, p. 81).

2.3. The Patronato Nossa Senhora da Bonança and the “client” centered design

The PNSB is a private social solidarity institution founded in 1951. It provides nursery and kindergarten services to a total of 85 children, from 3 months to 6 years old. Its mission is to satisfy the basic, affective, cognitive and psychomotor needs, as well as to stimulate and contribute to the development of the human, social, cultural and spiritual dimensions of the children it welcomes. Its activity includes: the education of children in collaboration with parents and guardians, support for people/families in situations of vulnerability or risk, and the promotion of training and solidarity initiatives. With the vision of improving the quality of its services and creating innovative alternatives for the institution's subsistence, it fulfills its mission based on values of solidarity, social responsibility, honesty, teamwork, tolerance, inclusion, respect, dedication and dialogue (PNSB, n.d.).

Given the age and social diversity, both the direct “client” (educators, children, their parents and relatives) and the indirect “client” (the “client” who would contribute financially to the institution through the purchase of products), the parties involved in this social design project agreed that it was in the interests of both to create products that were easy and low-cost to produce, environmentally friendly, and with a visual culture that conveyed the institution's values. In summary, these were the main intentions discussed at first, which led to the development of the projects here presented.

3. Projects scope, main problem and objectives

The proposal initially presented by PNSB consisted of the design of a three-dimensional mascot, whose institution intended to sell at Christmas time with the aim of raising funds for its educational and social project. However, because this proposal did not fit the objectives of the Product Design and Communication discipline, of the 3rd year of the IPVC Product Design course, alternative proposals were discussed.

Thus, instead of a mascot whose image would be exclusively associated with the PNSB, a broader approach was defined. Instead of limiting the interest in the artefacts by buyers more directly related to the institution, the defined approach allows the products to be of interest to a larger universe of users, which enhances commercialization.

It was in this scenario that the Xmas Paper Toys and Graphic Poetry projects emerged.

3.1. Xmas Paper Toys Project

Paper toys, as the name implies, are small three-dimensional toys created in paper. They can assume configurations and approach different themes but tend to be of simple construction and assembly and their illustration expresses the author's creativity. Based on this typology of project, students were invited to create a set of three-dimensional characters or props (which will henceforth be identified as models) alluding to the Christmas season.

The models were designed in their flat form, in a format not exceeding A3, taking into account the following:

- 1) Optimized graphic production, that is, with the smallest possible surface of unused paper. This, in addition to allowing the associated printing cost not to compete with its commercialization, is also a factor of environmental sustainability;
- 2) Diversity of models, enabling the purchase of more than one model and for a wider universe of potential buyers;
- 3) Two versions for each model, that is, a color version (with filling and for immediate assembly) and another in black and white (b&w, only contour line without filling, for personal decoration and subsequent assembly);
- 4) Height of the models, after assembled, be between 7cm (min.) and 12cm (max.), to better adapt to the places where they are usually displayed (placement on a Christmas tree, creation of a Christmas crib or decoration of a space);
- 5) Intuitive assembly, allowing it to be performed by a child or adult family member accompanying she/he in this playful activity.

On the one hand, and since there are no costs associated with assembling the models, the flattened version reduces production costs and makes it possible to create a greater diversity of characters and props. On the other hand, it allows for intergenerational cooperation, both in its

decoration (b&w version) and in its assembly (b&w or color version), with the capacity to further stimulate the spirit of sharing and conviviality typical of that festive season.

3.2. Graphic Poetry Project

Graphic poetry is a form of artistic expression characterized, generally but not necessarily, by the combination of word and image. Based on some elements and minimum requirements, it is an artistic genre that values the ability to produce compositions with great visual impact.

Likely to manifest itself in multiple ways and to allow the expression of experiences, ideas or emotions, graphic poetry is a valuable resource in the field of artistic language as a method that makes it possible to highlight previously defined values.

The proposal consisted in the creation of illustrations that symbolized a keyword associated with the training and solidarity activities of the PNSB. These words were provided by the institution. The PNSB suggested later creating wall and desk calendars with a set of these illustrations.

For the realization of the project, the Product Design students were challenged to capture the essence of the word in an illustration that conveyed a strong visual message. However, as the interpretation of the message should be easy and intuitive, the representation should be distinguished by the simplicity of the graphics. Furthermore, the composition was limited to the use of a single color and its tones, in order to establish a connotation with the symbology of the color previously researched and selected.

4. Project methodology

The Xmas Paper Toys and Graphic Poetry projects lasted 9 and 5 weeks, respectively, with face-to-face classes once a week.

Following the principles of the design project process and the operatives of social design, crossed with the service learning methodology, both projects were divided into 4 phases. The guiding principles and respective objectives were presented and discussed before the start of each project.

4.1. Xmas Paper Toys Project

At first, as a preliminary phase, the class was divided into working groups with the aim of each group define the set of models to be developed (for example: central figures of the Nativity scene, Three Kings, Father Christmas workshop, characters from Christmas tales, etc.).

This division was carried out so that the students of each group articulated considerations about graphics, color, size and typology of the volume, so that each set of models had a similar visual language.

The first phase of development of the project, which lasted a week, corresponded to the research of paper toys. With this investigation, it was intended that the student had a first contact with this typology of project, analyzing the technical considerations for its execution, among them the planning of volumes and the definition of criteria for the construction of assembly schemes, taking into account the scope and potential limitations of the target audience for which the final solution was intended.

After this phase, the conceptualization phase began. This lasted three weeks and was characterized by the graphic exploration, in the form of a sketch, of the visual appearance of the model to be developed. This phase also included the development of study volumes, through which the necessary components/subdivisions for the integral and optimized construction of the final volume could be identified.

The next developmental phase lasted 3 weeks. This phase consisted of carrying out the detailed planning of the selected idea, in the form of a digital drawing, starting with the b&w version. At that moment, new volumes of study were produced, carried out by printing the b&w version and analyzing its assembly process. This phase ended with the planning of the color version.

The last phase, of execution and lasting two weeks, coincided with the improvement of the final solution and realization of the assembly scheme. For better resource management, this layout had to be included in the area of the sheet where the planning was located. With this concluded, digital printing was carried out on paper, with a weight of ≈ 250 g/m², and the final model of the color version was assembled.

4.2. Graphic Poetry Project

The beginning of the development of the Graphic Poetry project was preceded by the raffling of keywords provided by the PNSB.

The first phase of this project lasted one week and corresponded to the analysis and definition of the meaning to be attributed to the word raffled. A bibliographic study was also carried out on the symbology of colors, which made it possible to select, in a sustained and justified way, the color to be used in the project.

In the next phase, conceptualization, a graphic exploration of the meanings associated with the word was carried out, in the form of a sketch. During the two weeks that this phase took place,

the students were challenged to execute a large number of visual hypotheses, both in terms of the message presentation and the graphic expression to be used. The end of this phase was concluded with the selection of the idea to be implemented.

The development phase, lasting one week, was dedicated to the digital illustration of the selected idea. At the same time, it was necessary to test the potential color pallets, duly adapted to printing, in order to verify and validate the color and tones chosen, particularly the chromatic contrast between them.

The last phase, of execution and lasting one week, served to perfect the final solution, making the necessary chromatic corrections. This phase concludes with the digital printing on paper, with a weight of ≈ 250 g/m², of the illustrations in A3 format.

5. Projects results

5.1. Xmas Paper Toys Project

In total, 39 models were executed by 36 students. They can be grouped into 5 large groups: Nativity scene figures, Santa Claus factory characters, Nutcracker characters, gingerbread figures and a Christmas mix.

Both in the way of building the volumes and in graphic and color details, there are small details that identify the different sets of models (10 sets that vary between two and four models per set), although there are some models that do not fit into any set (10 models), as specified in the table below (tab. 2).

Although the range of typologies was not creatively very ambitious, the final results were surprising due to the visual and assembly quality of the models. In addition, most of them managed to integrate all the objectives defined for this project.

It is believed that many of the final results have visual interest with the potential to attract a wide universe of customers, despite the fact that the assembly process always requires some manual skill.

Tab. 2 - Typology/quantity of models executed by students

SETS		nº		
		sets	models/set	total models
Nativity	central figures	2	4	8
	shepherd and sheep	1	3	3
	three kings	1	3	3
Santa's Factory	mother and father christmas	1	2	2
	elf and teddy bear	1	2	2
	santa and elf	1	2	2
The Nutcracker	soldiers and squirrel	1	3	3
Gingerbread	house and man	1	4	4
Mix	angel Gabriel and reindeer	1	2	2
total		10		29

NOT A SET		total models
	musian	1
	rooster	1
	santa's	3
	christmas star	1
	penguin	1
	elf	1
	snow man	1
	ox	1
total		10



Fig. 2 - Nativity set (central figures): designed by Ana Tavares, Ennio Feliziola, Giulia Patellaro and Matilde Silva, respectively



Fig. 3 - Nativity set: designed by Márcia Silva (sheep) and Giulia Sperandeo (shepherd)



Fig. 4 - Santa's Factory set: designed by Ana Faria and Marco Silva, respectively



Fig. 5 - Santa's Factory set: designed by Patrícia Vasques and Joana Miranda, respectively





Fig. 6 - Mix set: designed by Daniela Pimentel and Fátima Costa, respectively

Fig. 7 - The Nutcracker set (partial): designed by João Brito and António Campos, respectively



Fig. 8 - Gingerbread set: designed by Hélder Correia (male and female round), Emanuela Crapa and Tatiana Machado, respectively

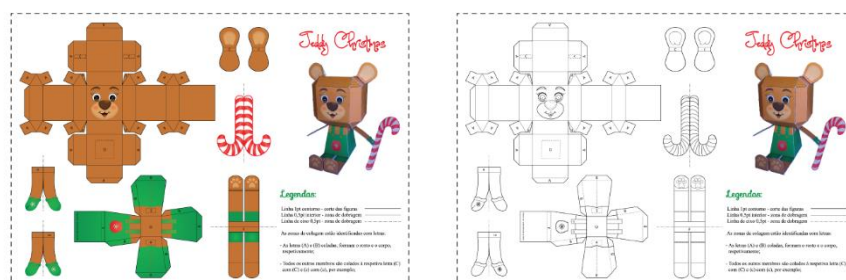


Fig. 9 - Model in its flat form, color and b&w

5.2. Graphic Poetry Project

In the thirty-eight proposals made by an equal number of students, simple line graphics dominate visually, through which the visual message is both presented directly and approached metaphorically. Despite the defined objectives, there are also some more elaborate proposals.

Chromatically, as each word was worked by the student in a certain direction and the color was selected taking into account its meaning, the results run across the spectrum.

For a project carried out within 5 weeks, most of the final results were satisfactory. It is considered, however, that two more weeks of the project, divided between the conceptualization and development phases, would have been important to define and fine-tune

details of graphic and chromatic style, more appealing to the children's imagination for which this product is intended.



Fig. 10 - Graphic Poetry Project: designed by João Mendes, Tatiana Machado, Anaís Rolo, Marcia Silva, Rafael Rocha, Ana Taveres, Steven Fernandes, João Couto, Paulo Meneses (from left to right and top to bottom)

6. Conclusion

The presentation and discussion of social design principles demonstrated that it is possible to create empathy and raise students' awareness towards social problems, both visible in public spaces and restricted to more private domains, in this case communicated/shared through EI-IPVC. This, in itself, reflects one of the opinions expressed by Papanek (1973, p.83) on the moral and social responsibility of the designer, who, if he/she contributes with a little of his/her time, talent and skills, can solidarily help to solve problems, and thus collaborate towards a fairer and more equitable social economy.

The results of the Xmas Paper Toys and Graphic Poetry projects, by responding favorably to most of the objectives defined for each of the proposals, are presented as easily and economically reproducible, making the material resources used more profitable and not competing with the monetary value that the PNSB assigned to them for marketing purposes.

At the same time, the results demonstrate a commitment to sustainability, particularly at a time of great social, humanitarian, environmental, political and economic trials. This scenario

highlights the importance of design's role as an interpreter of the emerging needs of a society increasingly aware of the problems that surround it and more demanding in relation to the solutions presented.

As a final note, and considering that the initial goal of the PNSB was to raise funds to continue to subsidize its educational and solidarity activities in the community in which it is inserted, it should be renowned that the Christmas spirit conquered the board of directors and educators of the institution, and the models of the Xmas Paper Toys project were solidarily offered to the children of the institution and their families, having been part of the typical season decorations of this care setting. The illustrations of the Graphic Poetry project, on the other hand, were used in two different situations: as sensitizing posters, displayed in different places of the institution, and as table calendars, which were produced outside the institution and marketed by the same.

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