Participative Methodologies in Teaching Design

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The technique of quartz inlaid pottery consists in the incrustation of quartz in the clay in order to make it more resilient and increase its porosity, providing greater resistance to different temperatures and higher cooling capacity, particularly in water storage.

In Portugal this technique was frankly rooted in the national territory and throughout the Portuguese Diaspora, particularly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Today, Nisa’s quartz inlaid pottery remains only in Nisa, Portugal.
Its main distinguishing feature is performed by “pedradeiras”, women that when embedding small white quartz stones in clay, draw motives based on flora, fauna and local mystical symbology.
Today only three potters and their respective women, with ages from 65 to 73 years, remain active.

The lack of new interested to learn or develop this technique, confirms its risk of extinction.
Although knowledge of this heritage is at risk of extinction, we believe it is possible -by the use of participatory methodologies within the community, craftsmen and design students- to find new opportunities for the future of quartz inlaid pottery, by using collaborative and cooperative tools.
“A designer, in the broadest sense of the term, is a human being who successfully runs the narrow bridge that connects what has been left in by the past to the future possibilities” (Papanek, 1993)
In February 2013 the Specialization Course in Design and Product Development of FEUP was challenged to collaborate in the initiative. In March Nisa’s quartz inlaid pottery was presented to these students along with the workshop’s briefing, at first through a class lectured at FEUP and later through several doubts clarification classes and project presentations via skype.
From 13th to 15th June of 2013 took place a summer workshop with the artisans, integrating design students from FEUP, product and communication designers from different backgrounds, design professors and engineering professors, with the motto of a collaborative and social design principle.
This interaction aimed to enable a study about the feasibility of implementation of new products in the market - by analyzing its inclusion in everyday potential consumers - and to try boost the artisans products in order to meet the current market demands.
Currently globalization is connecting distant areas but at the same time can disconnect past and present everywhere. It is up to the designer to play the role of key mediator allowing these different realities to link.
Four projects were selected to be developed during the workshop, each to be implemented by a single team aiming to use it only has a starting point, as the main goal was to add to each one new perspectives and critical analysis brought by other members (designers/students) through interaction with the artisans. From the workshop resulted 9 pieces, where new forms, uses, colors and finishes were experimented.
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The following issues were taken in consideration for collaborative approach:

1. Constitute the knowledge of pottery in sharing, allowing to reduce the gap between the stakeholders and thus give rise to the construction of a relationship of trust.

2. The project practice as joint activity is done continuously in order to achieve the purpose of sharing information in the projectual activities and in production.

3. Projects were developed while appealing to the intervention and criticism of all participants as far as possible in order to minimize the need for corrections at a later stage of production as well as confrontation with objects that are not feasible.

5. The joint activities must be accurately planned like any other activity in the process, in order to reduce wasted time and loss of motivation. Thus we can ensure that the roles defined for the work done in collaboration is the most productive and rich as possible.
During the workshop the students were welcomed into families of the community. The purpose was to allow students to have a global and transversal knowledge of this unique craft as a whole since only through the knowledge and experience of the contexts is possible to know the material and immaterial cultural heritage formed by quartz inlaid pottery.
Typically, academic projects are developed inside the laboratory, in collaboration with companies, but the development is all held inside the classroom. The participation of EDDP students on this experience in which were faced with interference from other designers in their projects, as well as the changes in place requires a project-opening reaction and ability to solve new problems that can only result in the development and progress in terms of learning. It was a new approach, never before used in previous editions of this course and the balance is very positive.

We found that although it was a small experience, it showed us that it is possible to open paths towards new products and communications of pottery in to contemporaneity and into the future. Based on our concrete field experience we believe that this is a first step to draw new and fruitful interactions (and not interventions) between designers and artisans.
Thank You! :)

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