

Education and participatory design

Prof. Dr. Maria Carolina Garcia¹

Loeb Fellow 2019 Michael Smith Masis²

Prof. Dr. Alexandra Cabral³

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez describes a plague that emerges and spirals out of control. In this novel, the strange epidemic spreads absurdly until it infects all the residents of Macondo, a village that had been so sleepy in the far reaches of Latin America (GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ, 2005, p. 47-54). Its citizens mobilize as a team to face the crisis resulting from the prolonged situation, until a new stage of civilization is ushered in, but not before shaking up both individual daily life and the social atmosphere in a destabilizing way. Mere coincidence or a lesson to be learned?

In nature, all elements are connected. Unequivocally, this premise echoes in the slow and contemplative time resulting from the novel coronavirus pandemic. This, in turn, introduces the idea of a post-present, guided by the concept of *Multiverse*. Without spatial boundaries, the *Multiverse* opposes the totalitarian and sovereign idea of the Universe, choosing instead to ratify the importance of global citizenship, without borders, guided by harmony between human nature and its surroundings and the multiple lives that overlap in physical and digital environments. Distances are no longer measured in kilometers, but in time zones. Live actions, mediated by technology, are proliferating around the world, allowing people to find new ways of interacting and other possibilities for connection.

On March 31, 2020, *e-books* began circulating online, bringing together reflections from great thinkers, such as *Wuhan Soup*, led by scholars such as Giorgio Agamben and Slavov Zizek. On April 2 of the same year, *Deezen* magazine,

¹ Fine Arts University Center of São Paulo - Graduate Program in Architecture, Urbanism, and Design - Design and Convergence Study Group

² Harvard University - Graduate School of Design

³ University of Lisbon - Faculty of Architecture

one of the most important publications in the world of architecture and design, announced its first *Virtual Design Festival*. In the world of music and entertainment, Lady Gaga became curator of the *One World - Together at Home* initiative, which, on April 18, 2020, under the initiative of the World Health Organization and the *Global Citizen* movement, promoted a globally broadcast music festival in support of healthcare professionals. In *A Cruel Pedagogy of the Virus*, another work that emerged during the pandemic and went viral on social media, Portuguese scholar Boaventura Sousa Santos observes:

“The conservative idea that there is no alternative to the way of life imposed by hyper-capitalism in which we live falls apart. It shows that there are no alternatives because the democratic political system has been forced to stop discussing alternatives” (SANTOS, 2020).

The dossier you have in your hands seeks precisely to discuss alternatives that envision collective participation in addressing community issues. We understand participatory design as a mechanism with far-reaching and scalable impact on education, becoming a sustainable practice for social, technological, and political change. Faced with an event as unexpected and devastating as the global pandemic of the novel coronavirus, cooperation is urgently needed in this learning journey.

If Meadows (2008) considers language to be a fundamental *soft skill* for design to become an instrument of social transformation, in this particular context, understanding is a *sine qua non* condition, as discussed by Tadeu Rodrigues Luama and Jorge Miklos in *Design of a participatory communication proposal*, an article that elucidates the theoretical framework that encompasses this dossier. It is through language that we build understanding and allow the empathy necessary for designers to focus on each project briefing to be established, as the authors highlight in their proposal. The researchers' approach also assesses the technological context and strategies generated by the novel coronavirus pandemic in terms of communication, teaching, and culture, taking into account the premises of participatory design.

For Santos (2020), the pandemic creates “(...) *an awareness of planetary communion, which is in some ways democratic. The etymology of the term pandemic says exactly that: “all the people.”* If engagement and participation become an indispensable tool for breaking the effects of social isolation, especially with regard to physical and mental health, as well as social and economic development, sharing and openness to collective spheres become inseparable companions. In this sense, the experience reported by architects Oscar Aceves, Oscar Rodríguez, Gustavo Sosa, Jesús Belmonte, Karlys Pulido, and Enrique Girán in *Caracas linked, city hospital* presents the potential of urban space to promote connections and encounters, through the observation of existing connections between citizens, the city, and the nature of the popular neighborhood of Santa Rosa, in Caracas, Venezuela. We understand precisely that professionals who are aware of their role as connectors can play a key role in the development of processes centered on human interaction, co-creating comprehensive and inclusive education strategies and actions: once imperceptible, and now

eagerly desired. This relationship becomes palpable in the authors' account of the streets of the Venezuelan capital, when they are re-designed to promote this potential, considering above all that urban space offers itself as a suitable setting for this premise and that different actors must be mobilized for the changes to take place. As explained in the article in question, instant-action urban acupuncture, based on promoting community empowerment, involves long-term educational engagement, including heterogeneous communities and broader systems of transformation.

Research in education and participatory design guided by shared learning processes, whose continuous stimulation suggests a movement toward *lifelong learning*, contrary to Cartesian and preconfigured teaching, especially highlights educational practices in design aimed at understanding, analysis, and even appropriation and adaptation to other contexts. These activities are not always restricted to the classroom, using the body and the layers that overlap it as a starting point for understanding, also in workshops and short courses in different formats, for physical and digital spaces. Collaborative and transdisciplinary work is at the heart of design, particularly in the field of fashion, understood as a way of life. Successful projects consolidate over time when they enable a process of intense collaboration and community learning, guided by principles of sharing. This includes the ways in which users evaluate, adapt, and integrate knowledge shared by other actors into their context and daily practices, as reported by Maira Pereira Gouveia Coelho and Juliana Rocha Franco in *Marx's Coat Workshop*, an article based on an activity of the same name conceived by the first author based on the work of Peter Stalybrass (2012), a theoretical reference that is very present in the Brazilian fashion studies scene. The researchers promote a cosmopolitan educational vision that begins with knowledge of one's own environment and is built on local, everyday, and family practices in dialogue with the journey of fashion products, with promising results in terms of the application of participatory design as an engagement strategy. Conducting the workshop in different contexts leads us to reflect on the immense potential of collaborative learning.

Especially for those who design educational experiences, the design of participatory experiences of this nature proves to be an ally in the collective construction of different means of disseminating knowledge and minimizing exclusion. Understanding Others and interacting with them, despite any differences in time zones, geolocation, or social navigation, is a powerful way to recreate the post-present we desire. What can we learn from previous actions in which collective participation played a leading role? Luisa Mendes Tavares talks about this latent potential in the article *The other in the design project*, when she analyzes subjects in the Bachelor's Degree in Fashion Design, whose project is based on encounters with people who are not from the field, within the scope of the perception that design is an interdisciplinary field in which the representation of multiple voices is vital.

Along the same lines, the application of co-design methods to encourage the development of sustainable practices in fashion design education is precisely the focus of “Co-designing with sustainable practices in fashion design teaching,” an article that discusses the process of product design and development through the involvement of various actors and social organizations. Despite the unprecedented events we experienced in 2020, it is clear that humanity finds strength in art, creativity, and nature to overcome and recover. Precisely, when facing the physical and mental challenges of an entirely new environment, communities around the world are feeling the need to maintain and improve connections and bonds between themselves. There is much to discover when we observe how nature has innovated over time to support communities of all sizes and shapes, connecting their members with individuals with complementary skills to divide labor and share knowledge in different models of leadership, cooperation, and structuring.

This dossier invites you to reflect on life-centered design focused on responsible innovation, capable of engaging different audiences to contribute to collective well-being projects. We hope that it will foster new educational initiatives within the network and that these will also multiply, marking an era of full coexistence and conscious exercise of design, to promote the convergence of efforts around a better life in this *Multiverse* of possibilities.

References:

MEADOWS, Donella. **Thinking in Systems**. London: Sustainability Institute, 2008.

SANTOS, Boaventura de Sousa. **A Cruel Pedagogia do Vírus**. Coimbra: Edições Almedina., 2020 (e-book).