

## *The Learning of the Photograph in the Young People*

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### **Abstract**

In this paper we will explain how a group of young people of three communities in Lisbon (Bairro Padre Cruz, Bairro Alta de Lisboa and Bairro da Boavista), learned about photography and how they used their knowledge's in practice. All communities had the same orientations and the same lessons with various professionals' photographers, and they explained their concept of photography and taught basics concepts.

This project had period of three months; the sessions had the duration of one hour for week, with two parts of thirty minutes, one theoretic and the other practice. With this sessions we propose study the association with learning a new art, in this case, photography, and to see how the youth applied what they listened of the photographers, this is, what they really had learned and understand.

This project finished with an urban exhibition, in the garden of Electricity Museum, in Lisbon, where they could see their work and shown to everyone how they see their community, because the theme of exhibition was the representation of their district.

Keywords: Social Inclusion, Young People, Photograph, Learn, Teach and Community.

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## **Introduction**

This paper aims to present a project of social inclusion through the learning and its artistic expression of photography. The project came into being as a PhD study in Design, currently in progress at the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Lisbon, entitled: Design for an Inclusive Museography: Photography in Context of an Urban Exhibit.

This project intended to use a theoretical/practical approach of three communities (Bairro Padre Cruz, Bairro Alta de Lisboa Centro and Bairro Alto da Boavista) considered as characteristic social examples of problematic social communities within the universe of the Lisbon metropolitan area. We also had the collaboration of associations and local authorities to make possible the establishment of a good interaction with the population of each community and artists/photographers. With this support it was possible to produce a collection of photographs that represented their respective communities. It also promoted the acquisition of some knowledge of photography by young people aged between 12 and 15 years old, that is the portrayer of the mentioned communities.

Art can be a way to include people in society, so this can be achieved through the acquisition of more knowledge than the data immediately accessible. The education through art contributes to the cognitive development of young people, widens the possibilities of better understanding the world in general, and of other fields of knowledge, such as mathematics, languages, history and geography. This broader awareness of these boys' and girls' environment constitutes a major factor of their inclusion in society.

## **Social Inclusion**

Since the 80s of the twentieth century we are witnessing an increase in social disparities in all major cities of Europe. For Isabel Guerra (2001), this is due to a variety of economic and social phenomena, including: changings in the economic system; the transformation of public structures; migratory phenomena; changes in social structures and forms of family organization; and the deeper material and symbolic gap between the poorest stratum and the upper middle class. Of course, all transformations involve both opportunities and risks, benefits and uncertainties, and on the whole, this affects in various ways the different social groups living in the cities.

Much of the economic and financial resources of Portugal are concentrated in the metropolitan area of Lisbon because of the privileged contexts of infrastructure and services available. However, it is also an area of social contrasts in terms of living conditions, "opposing populations with living standards well above the national average to populations whose poverty and social exclusion are of significant impact" (Pegado et al, 1999:9).

Social inclusion is not only about breaking barriers, but also about the well-being of individuals of making investments to enhance the conditions necessary to an effective inclusion relying on the efforts of the whole society. "The processes and social

inclusion strategies are inseparable from the dynamics of information, knowledge and innovation in our society" (Guerra, P., 2012:256).

The inclusion values diversity and cooperation among individuals; it falls on society the need to adapt itself in order to include all its individuals for them to be able to play their respective roles.

The recreation through music, arts, and the attendance of shows and exhibitions should be noted as an important form of social inclusion. The sports and physical exercise practice, as well as recreational enjoyment of public space should also be considered. (Guerra, P., 2012).

Nowadays social cohesion benefits from the existence of cultural networks. The use of cultural practices have direct and indirect effects in terms of social integration, and therefore contribute positively to their psychological and social well-being, and increase the entrepreneurial and creative sensibility (Kinder and Harland, 2004). They also give motive and consistency to a collective memory of the community, serving as a reservoir of intellectual and creative ideas for future generations.

The sharp privatization of social and material resources of society expels those who do not participate in the dominant culture and values, leading to their exclusion. The excluded is outside the sphere and outside the dominant social and symbolic universe and he or she incorporates the feelings of social-exclusion and rejection (Fernandes, 1995).

So we can infer that exclusion is the product of a global deficit of social cohesion, not reducible to an individual isolated phenomenon or certain specific situations. Moreover, the exclusion may exist in relation to the other, to a group or to a society.

The concept of social exclusion is opposed to the concept of social integration i.e. a negative relationship. Integration implies that the excluded or impoverished groups should actually have an active participation in the functioning of organized social groups; this will be a necessary condition to observe an effective integration (Dias, 2010).

## **Communities**

In most communities of social housing their residents live actual situations of social degradation. Bad housing conditions, overcrowding and subletting are indicators that represent a larger population exposure to vulnerabilities. These are some of the characteristic indicators of social housing (Labandeiro, 2004).

The concept of community is a bit ambiguous, because the image of what is a community is firmly ingrained in common sense, "at least the inhabitants of urban universes think they know very well what is" (Contumélias, 2008:230). The concept of community will have a rhetorical existence and construction of an image of the real, i.e., each inhabitant has his/her concept of community according to his/her own. However Labandeiro (2004) considers the community as "a housing unit, which does not exhaust the concept of neighbourhood, because it goes beyond the field of basic and informal relationships, its boundaries are not necessarily geographic or

administratives. Its limits are the collective identity that brings together the inhabitants of that housing unit"(Labandeiro, 2004:22).

Social housing bears a negative connotation of social and cultural inferiority that is assimilated by the population living there, causing the segregation and marginalization. This inferiority aggravates identity indefiniteness associated with it, promotes strategies for isolation and demarcation over the territory. The perception and evaluation of space-community depend not so much on matters of taste about getting use to the community, good neighbourly relations, but rather assimilation of a negative and stigmatizing image, inducing widespread feelings of insecurity. Such negativity in the space representation of obviously affects the forms of appropriation of this space, as well as the possibilities of taking root, and local identities (Pinto, 1994).

The negative image as seen from the outside, ultimately influences the cultural identity of a social housing, which is related to its internal and external dynamics resulting from conflicting social networks.

The communities of social housing are seen as a territory of exclusion because they are there most vulnerable groups, associated with several social problems. The population that inhabits them have experiences and social practices strongly conditioned by the stigma that is attributed to this particular space.

### **Participatory Design**

Participatory Design is the direct involvement of people in the co-design of something they use. Their main concern is how collaborative design processes can be conducted with the participation of people related to the product/service.

Participatory design encompasses a diverse set of principles and practices aimed at making technologies, tools, environments, companies and social institutions more responsive to human needs. It can bring together a multidisciplinary and international group of software developers, researchers, social scientists, managers, designers, professionals, users, activists and citizens who advocate and adopt distinctively participatory approaches in the development of information and communication products, systems, services and technology. The definite commitment to ensure the active participation and genuine offers an approach to design principles and practice for those who wish to take advantage of these benefits in the offspring of human beings as well.

“Participatory design can be defined as a process of investigating, understanding, reflecting upon, establishing, developing, and supporting mutual learning between multiple participants in collective 'reflection-in-action'. The participants typically undertake the two roles of users and designers where the designers strive to learn the realities of the users' situation while the users strive to articulate their desired aims and learn appropriate technological means to obtain them” (Simonsen et al., 2013:2). These rules reflect two fundamental aspects of Participatory Design. The first is that it allows the use of design technology, without the need to speak the language of professional design. That is, through interactions with prototypes, models and other tools it can represent the development of future systems and practices. The second

aspect is that people who are not professional designers, without having knowledge of what is possible, may not be able to define what they want. Therefore, it is a process of mutual learning for designers and users that can use all the abilities of participants to predict future practices and technologies.

### **Project I Live Next Door**

The purpose of the current artistic project named "I Live Next Door" consisted in the photographic works done by teenagers of specific communities of social housing with the purpose of exposing them to a larger public. These works depict not only a community, but also a culture and a dynamic reflecting process about the youths' own identities.

By privileging particular social aspects, rather than just highlighting the aesthetic condition of the works to be exhibited, what emerges as the hegemonic feature is the process that occurs with the collective experience and not properly the resulting work: "What seems to be important, in addition to the consequences of the project is to understand how this can stimulate the creation of new forms of dialogue and interaction between individuals" (Regatão, 2007:117).

The project had a three months duration, beginning in April and ending in June 2013. It was developed for a group of 15 young people, residing in the chosen communities. Once a week, a workshop took place, directed by the researcher and/or experts on photography in order to teach its basic notions.

It was necessary to outline how the main planning proposals would be developed in every community, including the schedule of workshops and the whole guiding lines that provided the theme of work over three months with a view to draw up the final exhibition. The agreed program was applied to the three communities in the same way in order to analyse options/paths chosen by each one, without the researcher interfering in a categorical and/or intrusive manner, thus assuming the aesthetic creation as a collective work and fundamental for social inclusion.

As the primary means of communication of this project was the camera and the image, it was important throughout all sessions, to explain the concept of photography, providing these young people with a better understanding of the object of study. By learning how to use a camera and how to shoot these young people got involved in the activities we set out to develop.

The procedure applied in this project that we thought could be interesting, was to take several people to workshops so the participants could listen to different communicators, each one with a theme of particular interest. Therefore, the lecturers taught photography from different perspectives and, depending on the themes they dominated better and/or considered more relevant, they achieved a higher degree of involvement on the part of the young photographers. The planning sessions took into account the experience of the guests, as well as the project-task and knowledge that we wanted that our young participants would obtain.

The main tool used in this project was the camera which throughout the sessions that took place during the three months has demystified. To complement their preparation

the use of other tools, was also required, such as: photographic paper, analogic cameras, chemicals and all the other revelation materials, computers to present images and explanatory notes. As perception facilitators some models were created to show how in the end the photos would be exhibit.

In this project all sessions lasted about an hour, in which the first thirty minutes were dedicated to an explanatory introduction and in the next thirty minutes, the young people put into practice what they had just learned. We tried that all speakers involved in these sessions followed this method so as not to become too exhausting for our students.

In order to be understand what happened in each session, and how they were structured, a very brief description of the sessions is here described:

The first session took place in early April 2013 with the presentation of the project, its purpose and learning contents for the next three months. Foreseeing the absence or lack of interest that could arise among some of the teenagers, we developed a badge, each one painted and with a space to put the name. It also functioned as an useful aid for the other lectures who participated in some the sessions since it became easier for the speaker of the day to know the name of each boy or girl. The use of the ID badge was therefore required.

In the second and third sessions the photographer Ana Sofia Santos gave an explanation about analogue photography. The young people had the opportunity to shoot with analogue cameras and make the development of photographs.

The fourth session was about the theme of the portrait and was conducted by photographer Filipe Inteiro. It consisted of a brief presentation on the picture and lights that can be used; then the youths photographed each other.

The fifth session was presented by the photographer Adalberto Santos, who decided that the session should last 90 minutes instead of the usual 60 minutes. He showed some photographs of his own and other artists and invited the young people to analyse and say what they saw. The fundamental concept that Adalberto Santos wanted to convey was that photography always transmits some information.

The sixth session was dedicated to the photographer Carlos Reveles who brought his pictures to illustrate some concepts of composition in photography: balance, perspective, background, symmetry, depth and framing.

I was responsible for the seventh and eighth sessions. I gave some explanations about concepts relevant to the act of shooting, namely: the plan, the point of view, the contrast, the focus, the aperture, the shutter speed and ISO sensitivity (photographic sensitivity).

In the following two sessions, photographers Magda Fernandes and José Domingos of Imagerie - House of Images, taught the technique of Pinhole. At first, the young people built their camera with a can, which I had previously arranged. In the second session they went shooting at the can and then revealed their pictures in a makeshift darkroom.

The following week (eleventh session), the youths saw all their photos captured over the workshops and chose the ones they considered the best and would like to expose at the final exhibit. They also began to think how they would like the images to be placed on a poster with dimensions 1185 mm x 1750 mm, which was to be shown on a mupi (urban furniture for information).

In the last week they finished drafting the layout of the elements incorporated in poster (font, colour, layout of images, captions, etc.).

In these last two weeks of workshops, after the students chose the photographs they considered better represented their community, giving them a title, the author's name and his or her age on it. They began creating another kind of relationship with the chosen photographs since instead of visualising them at the computer screen they were able to see them printed in size 10cmx15cm and so attributing a title to which one, a task which was not always easy. These process gave these photographers-to be an idea of accomplishment, of having in their possession photographs taken by themselves, feeling proud of what they did and of the final result.

Since the beginning of the workshops it was explained to them how would the final exhibit would be, i.e. in which media would they be developed. However it is very different to tell from to show. Therefore, in these last two weeks we had the opportunity to use papers with the original dimensions of billboards and sketch how they wanted each poster. Thus, it was possible in each study sheet to draw the location and extent that each the photograph occupy. All communities they made a study of the first poster, (considered the presentation of their community and interventions), choosing the elements they wanted to put, as well as the respective arrangement. Thus, the choices of the background (a solid colour or a picture), font, images, were options made by the young people who together decided what they wanted to present. In the following posters there was also the same possibility of choice. Based on the decisions made by group I created in a vector program what they had proposed and in the next session I took the posters printed in several A4 sheets, so as to be possible, in order assemble us and see them in real size, having another perspective how their work would be if they wanted to make any changes.

In addition to these sessions, this young group was also encouraging to see a photography exhibition "World Press Photo", which took place during the month of May 2013, at Electricity Museum in Lisbon.

Their photo exhibition was from July 11 to August 4 2013, in the garden in front of the Museum of Electricity, in Lisbon, with ten mupis. Each district was represented with three mupis, i.e., six posters.

### **Final Considerations**

Throughout these three months we tried to create a guideline, which had as its aim the development of an urban photography exhibition. However, for this to happen it was necessary to equip young people with some knowledge of photography, or give them a chance to understand what it could be possible to do and how they could represent their district, so that they could developed similar projects in a more intuitive and creative way. For us the main aim was to equip young people with some artistic skills

and create a relationship with all the speakers involved, i.e., the final work was not as important as the bounds forged and all the knowledge that these young people could acquire for their future life. That was what interested most: the creation process until you reach the final object.

The theoretical support of this project still in progress comprehends the exploration of concepts such as: design, photography, exhibition design and inclusion according to a broad perspective based on urban sociology assumptions.



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