

## *Up Start: Community-Based Creative Industries*

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### **Abstract**

The article focuses on the Up Start – Creative Industries project, an initiative by the Aga Khan Foundation Portugal in partnership with the University of Évora, under the scope of the Partnerships for Impact Programme and Portugal Social Innovation. The interaction between the two institutions focused on design for social innovation, heritage and management with the primary objective of creating a model of creative and cultural entrepreneurship for vulnerable communities to integrate these people economically, socially and culturally through co-creation practices at a local level. The project also aimed to test an Acceleration and Incubation Programme, including the strengthening of craft technical skills, production opportunities, personalised mentoring, and the creation of funding for the development of micro-enterprises that value design methods, craft and artistic techniques and knowledge, and cultural heritage as factors for innovation. To improve the living conditions of the communities involved in the project, namely the migrant populations in the Lisbon metropolitan area, the techniques, arts and crafts developed by migrants from their cultural heritage were identified and mapped. As part of the project's results, surveys involving all participants were carried out to understand the impact that this action had on their lives.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Participation, Arts and Crafts, Social Design, Heritage, Creative Conservation

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## **Introduction**

Up Start is a project of the Aga Khan Foundation (FAK), supported by the Portugal Social Innovation initiative and in collaboration with the University of Évora (UÉ).

Through its investigation area of arts and social design, the UÉ Center for Art History and Artistic Research (CHAIA), and the Department of Management, along with FAK sustained a successful partnership for society that has been going on since 2017 during which CHAIA performed critical reflection and research on the connection between art and identity, particularly how art may be utilized to express, configure, or reconfigure collective or personal identities. It was meant to establish a collaborative approach through social art and co-design, bringing migrants and art and design experts together to empower people to develop new commercial products anchored on their empirical knowledge and the unique cultural characteristics of their communities.

The synergy sustained by these entities aims to develop a transdisciplinary methodology to support the social and cultural sustainability of the involved immigrant communities. This is done through participatory design processes, alternative economic strategies, and creative conservation logic.

## **Integrating Immigrants Into Society and Challenging Them to Entrepreneurship**

Portugal's demography evolved during the 1970s as the nation switched from being an area of emigration to one of immigration (Peixoto 2010). Despite the recent reversal of this trend, Portugal continues to be a multicultural country with a sizable population of residents of African or Asian ancestry as well as more recent immigrants from China, Russia, and other EU nations (Oliveira 2006). Numerous immigrants of African and Asian descent reside in certain neighbourhoods where there are few opportunities for them to interact with residents of other cities or even other communities within the same neighbourhood. People with African and Asian ancestry have disproportionately struggled to make ends meet during the economic downturn. In general, achieving social and economic inclusion is difficult.

For many immigrants, integrating into society is challenging, especially when trying to find work. In these situations, entrepreneurship can be a solution because the host communities have access to resources and possibilities that can help with integration. Age, family, experience, language ability, and cultural impacts from ethnic opportunities and the immigration flow are some of the most valuable advantages that immigrants possess. In this situation, the cultural and creative sectors are well-positioned to promote the business endeavours of immigrant entrepreneurs (Oliveira 2006). By integrating migrants and refugees through cultural and creative activities, it is possible to promote the welfare and remove obstacles to employment and inclusion. The cultural and creative industries promote innovation and increase economic and social value through cultural variation, creativity, and skills (Gustafson, Lazzaro 2021). Usually, creative and cultural industries function in adaptable environments where people's participation in diverse events enhances their capacity to change their points of view, which might be significant to recognizing their citizenship (Gustafson, Lazzaro 2021).

The UpStart project is based on the diversity context of the Greater Lisbon Area. It involved immigrants from Afghanistan, Angola, South Africa, Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cape Verde, Cameroon, China, Congo, Cuba, Spain, France, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, India,

Indonesia, Iraq, Iran, Italy, Japan, Lebanon, Macau, Malawi, Mexico, Mozambique, Nepal, Pakistan, Portugal, Russia, Sao Tome and Principe, Syria, Sri Lanka, East Timor, Thailand, Ukraine and Zambia (Fundação Aga Khan Portugal 2020).

Recognising the need to create solutions that mainly promote the economic inclusion of people in situations of greater vulnerability, based on social cohesion dynamics, UpStart - Creative Entrepreneurship Programme was created.

The UpStart program is a cutting-edge model of creative and cultural entrepreneurship for vulnerable groups that aims to raise income and enhance the living standards of disadvantaged communities by relying on artistic and craft practices and the business opportunities of the creative industries. It intends to evaluate an Acceleration and Incubation Program, that includes 220 people to create microbusinesses and the value-adding of skills, craft expertise, and cultural heritage as innovation-boosting elements. With the UpStart proposal, we will be working on three levels of social integration that intersect and complement each other, making the process more sustainable for the individual: work, through the economic inclusion of these communities; creating belonging and valuing identity, through the recognition and enhancement of craft techniques and cultural heritages; and generating support networks, through the promotion of social relations and the creation of a sustainable and credible brand (Fundação Aga Khan Portugal 2020).

### **Enhancing Craft Practices and Business Opportunities Through Participatory Workshops**

The creation of a brand with a strong identity that certifies local artistic production is important for foreign citizens and other migrant citizens seeking social and economic integration in a new place. In this regard, immigrant artisans joined the initiative to create their own brand with a distinctive visual identity. The project's original beneficiaries helped create the mother brand, Bandim, which represents a network of craftsmen and a multi-brand platform where people from different nationalities can work, receive ongoing training, and support with marketing and commercialization of their products, and earn a living.

The co-creation of the brand Bandim was designed based on the identity, knowledge and diversity of the partners and participants in the project through an online brainstorming methodology (Figure 1). The expression *bandim* is associated with the idea of a market - the Bandim Market, or "Fera di Bande", in Guinea Bissau, which is more than a market. It is also an expression used in India, whose meaning is related to a portion of territory that is given to the farmer for his production. This idea of multiculturalism, diversity, creativity and production was later used for the creation of the logo and visual identity. Several artists, designers, and stakeholders have collaborated with Bandim in workshops and exhibitions, including the designers and artisans Renato Imbroisi and Cristina Barretto, artists and designers from the UÉ, and the A Vida Portuguesa more-than-a-shop project.



Figure 1 - Bandim logotype.

The artists, designers and researchers established a participatory design workshop methodology to better understand the participants' artistic and intellectual abilities and how they integrate, restore, and regenerate their own cultural, social, and economic resources into Portuguese society. In this regard, a series of meetings and interviews were held in the beginning. By leveraging the traditional arts and knowledge of these people as a resource for sustainability, it is possible to transform cultural differences – which could otherwise be a source of prejudice – into a source of integration. Inequality leads to diversity.

An empathic approach is used in the workshops as a co-designing and engagement methodology. In order to recognize the diversity among participants as an advantage that contributes to the sustainability of the community, this methodology enables the development of dialogue, listening, and exchange of ideas (Gablik 1992, Manzini 2019). Based on these presumptions, collaboration toward a common objective creates a society that is more ecological, fosters member recognition, and encourages the equity of diverse cultures and knowledge (Manzini 2019). Consensus is essential for participatory art and design projects, as this practice only makes sense if it is inclusive and ethical, leading to effective solutions to existing problems (Gablik 1992, Lacy 1995, Manzini 2019).

In the communities that emerge from the workshops, each participant's personality is complemented by the desire to build something together. These interactions are characterized by a relational component that is emotionally charged and characterized by interpersonal collaboration.

Within the six participatory design workshops led by designers and artisans, Renato Imbroisi and Cristiana Barreto, the collection of textile crafts *Um Mar de Bacalhaus – Cá e Lá* (A Sea of Codfish – Here and There) was born (Figure 2). Using the technique of embroidery, work began on making pieces for the pantry and kitchen based on the theme that is rich on the Portuguese table: codfish. And other fish also appeared in embroidery, brought from far away, in the memory and knowledge of each artisan participating in the Bandim project, as well as other pieces for the home and fashion accessories – pendants, cushions, scarves, purses, suitcases, among others. These functional and exclusive objects tell stories of migration from various places to the city of Lisbon, a place that welcomes everyone.



Figure 2 - *Um Mar de Bacalhaus – Cá e Lá* (A Sea of Codfish – Here and There).

Another set of workshops that was developed was the *Shifting Ground*, whose intervention in Lisbon was developed by artists and designers of the University of Évora. To begin, at Espaço Arroios Activa, in Lisbon, we explained how ideas may be embodied into ceramic sculptures with varying degrees of abstraction (Figure 3). Following that, we presented the playful activity: M.O.T., an abbreviation for Memory, Object, and Talent, whose goal is to elicit spontaneous involvement and provide voice to the immigrants participating. The game begins by asking participants to think about a life story, a meaningful object, and their dominating talent. Based on their self-representation, this technique establishes a special commitment between immigrants and the host community. Ideas for ceramic reliefs occur as a result. Following two-dimensional studies, cardboard replicas of the embossed clay sculptures were created. The second session took place at the Ceramics Research Centre in Montemor-o-Novo to develop the final ceramic sculptures.



Figure 3 - *Shifting Ground*.

### **An Equation With Social Art and Design, Heritage, and Creative Conservation**

The purpose of the participatory workshops developed in the context of the Up Start project was to foster a broader awareness of the potential of social art and design, aiming to empower participants through creative thinking. It is essential to continue artistic experimentation and an educational approach in participatory co-creation projects, where we play the role of initiators and observe and moderate participants. This relationship encourages engagement, autonomy, and equity, which is essential for fostering initiative and creativity. These collective initiatives have proven essential in creating favourable circumstances for migrants' integration and activating their creativity to conceive and develop products that they can make and sell.

In this participatory process, participants improved their technical and entrepreneurial skills through a real experience of design, creation, production and collective sale at fairs, author stores and online sales. This connection has made it possible to promote, immediately, the increase in income of the participants in a dignified way, resulting from their direct work.

In the UpStart project, heritage works as a means of realizing the idea of creative and cultural entrepreneurship, doing so in two ways. It does so as a competence since the co-creation process seeks to develop traditional craft techniques from the migrants' places of origin and mastered by them. The purpose is to enable individuals to apply traditional craft techniques to the creation of new products or the use of new materials. Or as a device of imagination, since the process of co-creation can also be directed to the use of individual memories, life stories or personal cultural heritages as a motive or theme for artistic creation. The goal is to make

heritage a means of economic sustainability for migrant individuals and, in parallel, also of social integration, but of an integration that is fair. That is a social interaction that does not imply the dilution of the identities of migrant individuals in the cultural values of the host communities. On the contrary, considering that social values have no meaning in themselves, existing only in the ever-changing relativity of social relations and exchanges (Arendt, 2006, p. 46), it is intended that the interactions with the cultural heritages and memories of migrants will contribute to the cultural enrichment of the host communities, broadening their plurality.

In this way, it is intentional to avoid the potential tension and conflict that always exists between transnational migration and the feelings of national identity of the populations of the migratory destination places, between the ideas of cultural diversity and social cohesion (Eichenhofer, 2019). To achieve this, it is necessary to overcome the paradigm that conceives heritage as a set of tangible and intangible resources inherited from the past that are irreplaceable and guarantee temporal continuity. We must take into consideration that the historical processes of change and transformation are the drivers of human civilization and that heritage precisely derives, manifests, and witnesses these dynamics of change over time. For this reason, heritage should be understood as the result of a dynamic of permanence and change and, consequently, conservation should also integrate the principle of transformation, considering that preservation can be a process of continuous growth and creative transformation over time. Conserving heritage should pose the question of what legacy the present wants or can build or leave for the benefit of future generations (Holtorf, 2020).

Few social phenomena are as representative of the idea of transformation and change as the engine of human action as migration. In this sense, resorting to cultural heritages and migrants' memories as creation devices can be understood as a heritage conservation mode that integrates a growth and transformation process in time, thus creating the permanence and change dynamics we mentioned above and which we may call creative conservation.

Creative conservation is based on a conception of cultural heritage that understands it as a sharply political process of meaning-making, with its associated values constantly evolving (Rose, 2021), perceiving it not as the conservation of a particular moment in time, but as a dynamic temporal reality. The understanding of cultural heritage as a dynamic reality in time leads, necessarily, to a more flexible and critical conception of what the conservation of the past can be, not limited to the material integrity and open to the possibility of the conservation of meanings, identities, and memories of that past in the present, which may imply the inclusion of transformation and loss as means of conservation. It is possible to achieve this conservation either by using individual memories and cultural heritages as a matter of creation or by applying artistic craft techniques to new products and materials. In doing so, a personal and cultural heritage is preserved by transforming it through a creative process that retains the essence of its identity and can be called critical or creative conservation. Heritage conservation can also be a critical or creative intervention or action developed from a cultural identity if this is the most effective way to maintain or restore its memory and demonstrate its significance (Loureiro, Triães, Falcão, 2016). Creative conservation is distinguished by not intervening, even critically (Escobar Castrillón, 2016), in a pre-existing physical reality. The focus is put on the maintenance or restoration of values, philosophies, socio-cultural practices, and know-how through their use in the creation of new products and activities. In this way, we can rethink the social implications of dealing with the past through individual memories, renegotiate hegemonic visions of the past, including at the individual level, and create socially inclusive narratives through arts and design: Lowenthal, McLean, and above all, Cosgrove, have defended this option, demanding the possibility of

greater creative freedom on the part of the conservator, asking for conservation to be more creative, less deferential to canonical ideology, more open to the radical, the iconoclastic, and the invented, free from slavish subordination to a distorting notion of the authentic (Muñoz-Viñas, 2002, pp. 29-30).

The duration of the project does not yet allow us to assess the impact of the resulting products on the social integration process of migrants, understood as a process of negotiation between who they were at the time they immigrated and the values of the host communities. The questionnaires carried out so far have focused on the sustainability dimension, limiting themselves to checking whether the income of the project participants increased with the application of the skills and resources acquired and developed under UpStart. However, considering that of the 66.6% of the cases in which the question was applicable, 38% answered in the affirmative, allows us to conclude that this impact did exist, although in a still somewhat circumscribed way, possibly because it corresponds to a practice that is still very recent.

## **Conclusions**

The integration of disadvantaged individuals, such as immigrants and refugees, is facilitated by the cultural and creative sectors. Despite having little economic impact, they can support these citizens' integration and well-being. When confronted with a changing social reality, a heritage of ancient knowledge and skills might not perish. By using an entrepreneurial method, which is also a form of creative conservation, while developing new products, it is possible to preserve the core of their uniqueness. The same holds true for each person's unique recollections, which may serve as the basis for that same creativity. As a result, via active listening and debate, the co-design process was used to encourage mutual acknowledgement among all workshop participants as well as the diversity of knowledge and cultural forms.

Collaboration within the UpStart project offered the chance to improve immigrants' integration and foster their creativity in order to develop products that reflect their heritage and a hybrid culture as a result of life experiences between their country of origin and Portugal. Using this process, each immigrant craftsman who joined the project had their own brand created. Due to the wide range of cultures present, it is necessary to connect personally with the artists in order to learn about their lives and crafts. The engagement process played an important role in creating the project brand.

The formation of the Bandim cooperative formalized the relationship with the market, allowing it to be a multi-brand platform made up of enterprising people with a common interest: the creation of products in the area of creative industries based on their cultural heritage and with distinctive value in the market.

The project's duration does not allow for assessing the impact of the resulting products on migrants' social integration process, which involves negotiating between immigrant values and host communities. The questionnaires that have been administered thus far have concentrated on the sustainability aspect and only looked at whether the project participants' income rose as a result of using the skills and resources they earned and acquired via UpStart. However, the fact that 38% of the 66.6% of cases where the question was relevant gave a positive response leads us to believe that this influence did exist, albeit in a rather limited form, presumably because it relates to a practice that is still relatively new.

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