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Memory–Object–Talent

Art and Design for Social and
Cultural Inclusion of Immigrants and Refugees

ANTÓNIO GORGEL PINTO AND PAULA REAES PINTO

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Memory–Object–Talent: Art and Design for Social and Cultural Inclusion of Immigrants and Refugees

António Gorgel Pinto,¹ IADE/European University, Portugal
Paula Reaes Pinto, University of Évora, Portugal

Abstract: What kind of art and design practice can be developed to boost the social and cultural inclusion of newly arrived immigrants and refugees to their new places of residence? Is there something the host society can do to involve artists, designers, stakeholders, and citizens to support these vulnerable new fellow citizens, to help them feel more confident with their new lives and promote their emancipation? With this and other questions in mind, we decided to develop a hybrid art and design participatory project with immigrant and refugee communities, which took place in the summer of 2019, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa (US). The political situation of the US, which was at the moment somehow hostile to new immigrants, was the perfect context for our project to make a strong statement. The article starts by contextualizing the project in sociological terms, as well as arguing about this hybrid practice field of participatory art and design, specifically through some paradigmatic case studies. We also focus on other topics that are central to our practice, such as the domain of participation and creative thinking, as well as the importance of strategically considering each part of the project as a specific mechanism. In a more conceptual approach, we also focus on the migrants' overwhelming situation, inspired by Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed," where he advocates the development of a "praxis" to liberate both the oppressed and the oppressors and promote a righteous society. Following is a description of the methodology used for the interaction with the participants, namely the creation of a specific game, which is a form of self-representation and enhancement of the engaged immigrant and refugee communities. The core of the article is concerned with the project's playful nature, which is explained according to the concept of game by Hans-Georg Gadamer. The article ends with some extra data collected through interviews, as well as a reflection concerning the experimented practice.

Keywords: Participatory Art and Design, Migration, Game, Ceramics

Immigrant and Refugee Citizens in the US

The research underlying the participatory art and design intervention that we focus on in this article is related to the issue of migration, namely immigrant and refugee communities currently living in the US, in particular in the city of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. As such, it is important to retain some recent data regarding these citizens in order to better understand the importance of artistic approaches that promote inclusivity through multicultural enhancement.

The US is a country where the social and cultural dimension of immigration is at the origin of the territory's identity, being currently the nation with the most immigrants in the world. About one fifth of the global immigrant population lives in the US, including more than 40 million residents who were born in other countries. It is noteworthy that they come from diverse countries around the world, that the vast majority enter legally (77%), and that, together with their descendants, they are expected to be a very significant part of the population growth by 2065 (88%) (Budiman 2020).

According to data from 2018, the region where we developed the participatory art and design project, in the Midwest, is among the territories with the least immigrant population (11%). The Hispanics who participated—Mexicans and Hondurans—belong to one of the most representative groups (31%), only surpassed by Asians (37%). Some of the African

¹ Corresponding Author: António Gorgel Pinto, IADE / European University, Av. D. Carlos I, 4, 1200-649 Lisbon.
email: antonio.gorgel@universidadeuropeia.pt

participants—from Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo—were refugee citizens. According to 2019 data, the Democratic Republic of Congo was the country of origin of the vast majority of people who entered the US with refugee status (43%) (Budiman 2020).

In the political context, immigration is one of the central issues of national debate, with public opinion being polarized according to the dominant parties, and conditioned by proximity to immigrant communities. American citizens who generally vote for the Republican Party consider that the country allows too many immigrants to enter (46%), contrary to those who think that more immigration could be allowed (9%). As for the opinion of Democratic citizens, few think that there are too many immigrants (15%), while others think that there could be more immigration (42%). An important aspect that defines the opinion of the US population is the fact that counties with fewer immigrant communities are the same ones that consider immigration levels in the country to be too high (APM Research Lab 2020). This is a characteristic of most of the Iowa counties where our project took place.

The immigration crisis we are currently experiencing is somehow related to the moral problems of the richest countries in the world, “the societies that have the resources and the capacity to help those who are in severe danger and to mitigate or resolve the circumstances that lie at the roots of their plight” (Chomsky 2016, n.p.). Directly or indirectly, these more prosperous nations have responsibility for creating the crises that lead citizens to migrate. Historically, the US has promoted the emergence of migrant communities and the formation of settler-colonial societies, which were responsible for the genocide of the indigenous population, as well as the proliferation of forced immigration for slavery, through which several immigrant communities were instrumental in the development of the country’s agricultural economy. Humanitarian crises like these that occurred in the past continue to occur in several underdeveloped countries, among other social, political, and economic injustices, as well as environmental disasters and the growing effect of climate change. Given the diverse origins of the current migration crises and the moral problem they pose, it is essential that wealthier countries contribute in every way possible to promote humanitarian support and inclusivity within favored societies (Chomsky 2016).

Participatory Art and Design Involving Immigrants and Refugees

Contemporary social art practices, like the ones that are developed with the collaboration of migrant, immigrant, or refugee communities, have as their main objective the emancipation of the involved participants (Helguera 2011). This is an expanded field of post-studio practices that has been occurring under a variety of names, such as socially engaged art, community-based art, dialogic art, participatory art, collaborative art, activist art, new genre public art, among others (Bishop 2012; Lippard 1984; Lacy 1995). Many artists no longer make a clear distinction between their practice and a user-centered design approach, which is dramatically more political and speculative (Holt 2015), and many designers are experimenting with participatory and dialogical aesthetics (Kester 2011; Holt 2015).

Overall, participatory art and/or design practices with these communities can be seen as a small-scale dynamic approach that is aimed at counteracting the role of the state, which is not sufficient to improve the quality of life and the inclusion of immigrant and refugee citizens in society. Initiatives in this context seek to influence the socio-cultural structure and thereby promote innovation toward the sustainability of society. Manzini (2019) refers to this phenomenon as a process of transformative social innovation that usually begins from creative initiatives involving citizens and institutions, driving the creation or rehabilitation of links between people, as well as between people and the places they live. Thus, social innovation through participatory art and design is a small-scale system whose repercussion is expected to occur in other larger-scale systems and produce a positive effect for the improvement of democratic societies.

Two paradigmatic examples that clearly represent the hybridity of this type of participatory practice, in order to promote the inclusion of immigrant communities, are the Immigrant Movement International (IMI) project by Cuban artist Tania Bruguera, and the German project entitled Cucula, by S27 - Art and Education.

IMI took place between 2010 and 2015 in the Corona neighborhood of Queens, New York. It was supported by the local institutions Creative Time and the Queens Museum of Art. In its initial phase, IMI was a community center to support recently arrived immigrants in the country. Located in a storefront in the multi-ethnic Corona neighborhood, the project was characterized as both a social support service and a hybrid conceptual art space (Gerrity 2011). Among the various forms of social support provided were legal advice, multimedia classes, English, Spanish, dance, and Aztec philosophy. In the sphere of conceptual art, several participatory performances were created in order to promote the perception, recognition, and representation of immigrants, which were later presented in public space (Gerrity 2011; IMI n.d.).

Bruguera addresses a disenfranchised social group in order to establish a politically constructive relationship focused on the social visibility/invisibility of citizens, seeking to highlight a common social problem and bring it into public discussion. This is a *useful art* form, which explores new ways of visually and politically representing immigrants (Olascoaga 2012).

The Cucula - Refugees Company for Crafts and Design was an initiative that was undertaken between 2013 and 2018 by Kunst und Bildung/Association for the Promotion of Intercultural Youth Work that promoted the reception of refugees from West Africa. With the guidance of designer Sebastian Däschle, the construction of furniture based on the designs of Enzo Mari began, followed by the sale of products, which in turn financed the subsistence and education of the participants. After this experimental phase, the project was recognized at the Milan Furniture Fair, which was followed by the creation of an association (Cucula n.d.).

Through crowdfunding and the involvement of several volunteers, Cucula continued as a refugee reception center and a design workshop, namely through a strong educational framework, with workshops on design and craftsmanship, as well as legal and professional advice. Several pieces of furniture, set design, performance, collaborations with different artists and designers, exhibitions, among other actions of a more artistic or more technical nature, were then produced (Cucula n.d.).

The main goal of the Cucula platform was to leverage access to society with full rights and social justice, to promote the emancipation of the immigrants and refugees involved, so that they could plan and implement their own professional prospects for the future. It is an artistic and economic model presenting solutions to the current migration crises, offering opportunities for these disadvantaged citizens and solutions to unsustainable social issues.

Meaningful Coalitions, Strategic Planning, and Creative Conducting

Artists and designers in this field are creative agents who trigger participatory actions for the co-creation of objects, spaces, or events with certain socio-cultural objectives in mind. Therefore, it is essential to develop prolific forms of collaboration with participants, with whom it is necessary to have a prior agreement and a meaningful relational basis for the development of participatory situations.

Parallel to the importance of participation is the way everything is strategically planned. It is important that before engaging the vulnerable communities in a new creative project and starting the collaboration, there is a matrix of stakeholders, spaces, and materials to support the initiatives. Everything must be established as a mechanism where creative players develop their work in order to achieve certain objectives.

Regarding the strategic planning for the systematization of processes, it is important to understand it as a mechanism to generate the growth of creativity within each migrant and respective community, aiming at the regulation of the existent creativity capital. In Donella

Meadows' (2009) view, this systematization is called a return and reinforcement circuit, with the aim of increasing the flow of capital into the system beyond the existing one. In this way, the praxis and inherent mechanism aims to stimulate the migrant's resilience with regard to their capital of creativity. That is, taking into account that the existing creativity in those vulnerable citizens or community may be overwhelmed, the participatory art and design practice works as a specific impulse to rehabilitate a disrupted system.

By comparing participatory art and design with improvised jazz music, it is possible to see how the collaboration between participants of a particular project is established. Just as in jazz, where improvisation overlaps composition, a participatory project incorporates the participants' contributions in a context previously planned by the artist or designer. And if we think about the critique of a given jazz group, the analysis focuses on different musical styles, personalities, and the interaction between the elements of the band, even if it is marked by a dominant musician. Beris Gaut (2002) mentions that this is a model of democratic individualism, in which a group of strong musical personalities dialogues among themselves, creating music with a quality they wouldn't be able to play alone.

As conductors of a participatory project, we seek to keep participants in the course of the outlined activities so that they autonomously continue exploring knowledge, which sometimes can be diverted from the initial objective to meet other results. This is a way of promoting equality, in which artists and designers in community projects have a role as conductors. This is an absolutely necessary quality for social sustainability which needs agents for its promotion and permanent confirmation.

Rancière (2002) mentions the importance of willingness and the abandonment of passivity for the adoption of an attitude of exploration and discovery. It is this relationship with participants that is exactly what artists and designers should value in a participatory project. What is needed is a link between wills, rather than the submission of one intelligence to another, where the artist or designer act as the one and only leader guiding the project and eventually highlighting the knowledge that participants do not possess. The intent of establishing equality from the assumption of inequality is a perspective that perverts the initial objective.

In a participatory art and design project, the creative conductors must be sensitive to the great amount of knowledge that participants possess and be conscious of the existent social disparities that should not be reinforced. These agents must place themselves in the same space of understanding before they begin any exchange of knowledge. The approach to assume in this type of praxis must be characterized by the conductors initial planning in accordance to every stakeholder, followed by the free exploration of participants who focus on the proposed subjects.

Creative Praxis to Improve Democracy

According to Paulo Freire's concept of "pedagogy of the oppressed," vulnerable citizens, such as non-emancipated migrants who are dependent of other fellow citizens with social and cultural stability, are afraid to assume their own freedom. Despite their desire for autonomy and life opportunities, the "oppressed conscience" of the host society is undeniable, placing themselves in a situation of doubt between affirming their true self or assuming a dual personality, which, beyond their true being, mirrors the oppressor. The difficulty of social and cultural integration is still marked by a tendency toward alienation and indifference, at the same time as a desire to liberate and being closer to society. Liberation from the condition of oppressed and the "oppressor-oppressed" logic cancelation is a complex operation capable of creating righteous citizens "no longer oppressors; no longer oppressed, but a human-being liberating himself" (Freire 2013, 122).

The emancipating action of vulnerable citizens due to their condition as migrants, in the adaptation process to a new social and cultural reality, is more effective through a praxis that is both a reflection of the socio-cultural condition to be transformed, and a form of activism that mobilizes migrant citizens and motivates them to develop more activities with the same purpose. The citizens engaged in this kind of inclusiveness, including vulnerable citizens themselves, as well as other citizens involved in the same cause, must collaborate in the development of activities that are not of mere protest (which trigger more oppression and social exclusion), but creative actions that promote the development of intersubjectivity. This idea of praxis, which combines socio-cultural intervention with critical reflection, constitutes a model to stimulate the “oppressed consciousness” and generate “cultural action for freedom.” It is a political action whose effectiveness depends on the need to be developed in close collaboration with the oppressed (Freire 2013, 166).

As stated by Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed, it must be the migrant him/herself to claim his/her place as a citizen. This should be based on a creative and humanist praxis involving migrants and local communities through which the voice of social justice and equity may arise and be recognized in the society. This attitude, in addition to contributing to the emancipation of all those in vulnerable situations, also has the virtue of helping free the oppressors (Freire 2013). By rehabilitating the condition of vulnerable citizens in order to have the same social and cultural circumstances as the rest of society, these human beings displaced from their places of origin, as well as those who accompany them in the development of collaborative activities, contribute to the process of humanization and the sociocultural sustainability of individuals.

Participatory art and design have a key role in the development of this kind of praxis. Not just in the systematization of all the process through strategic thinking, but also in the performative way the communities are engaged and represented across different visual forms. Margolin and Manzini (Margolin 2012; Manzini 2019) refer the strategic role of design in relation to the interaction with public institutions in order to improve democracy. The concept of design for democracy defended by both, foresees an action of resistance to the threats emerging in developed countries’ democracies, simultaneously representing alternative proposals.

The joint action of citizens, artists and designers, through the development of a praxis with participatory artistic initiatives, is a political option of everyday life that determines how citizens organize their way of life. Societies with a more participatory culture and focused on their own innovation are more democratic, creative, and therefore, more cohesive and sustainable.

Memories, Objects, and Talents of Newcomer Immigrants and Refugees

In times of a certain intolerance and social injustice regarding immigration policies, we thought of a specific practice to demonstrate that the visual arts are an important means for embracing difference. What is impressive is the fact that anybody could be in a similar situation as refugees from extreme social or natural causes, forced to emigrate and without a place to live with fair conditions. All living species search for the best conditions possible to continue their lives and expect a better future. And we as human beings, with the intelligence that characterizes us, that made us build so many different civilized societies, have an obligation to provide new forms of welcoming and inclusion that encourage creative thinking and the visual arts as survival strategies (Gilmor, Reaes Pinto, and Gorgel Pinto 2019).

The *Shifting Ground* project is a participatory art and design initiative that took place in the city of Cedar Rapids, Iowa (US), in the summer of 2019, involving immigrants and descendants from Mexico and Honduras, as well as immigrants and refugees from Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The creative team that conducted the project is composed of the

authors and the American visual artist Jane Gilmore. In 2021 the project had a replica in Portugal, in the city of Lisbon, with another group of migrants.

The first workshop was held at the Iowa Ceramics Center and Glass Studio (ICCGS), involving six Hispanic participants; and the second workshop was developed at St. Paul's United Methodist Church, with fifteen participants (Figure 1). In both workshops there were more people who came for the first meetings, but only the above mentioned attended until the end and finished their ceramic sculptures.

The participatory artistic practice experienced during the *Shifting Ground* project is characterized by the use of different approaches and means of expression according to social objectives, such as the implementation of a set of relational principles and techniques, methods and strategies of education, as well as the use of sculpture as a means of expression and interaction with the social groups in question. The use of photography and video to document social engaged actions and to constitute an image archive of the project is also a central medium that allows a systematic communication with other audiences. Finally, the use of installation and happening is another way for community self-representation and for public participation.



Figure 1: *Shifting Ground's* Ceramic Sculpture Workshop at the St. Paul's United Methodist Church (Video Still)

Source: Gorgel Pinto and Reaes Pinto

We started out by explaining, through a set of examples, how ideas could be materialized in ceramic sculptures, using more or less degrees of abstraction. Afterward, we began by asking the participants to think about three things: a life story, a significant object, and what they consider their main talent. This is what we called the MOT challenge (Memory, Object, and Talent), in which each participant would have to share a memory, a talent, and an object that were supposed to be related with each other and represent the personal experience of each participant (Figure 2). Following this initial approach, the participants began writing about their own concepts, which they pitched to each other. After this ideation process, they started working on their own sculptures collaboratively, and each participant shared their opinions about the others' ideas and forms.

After the identification of the self-memory, object, and talent in a way that this relationship could mean the expression of each participant's individual freedom, reliefs in clay were made. In this phase the main ideas were synthesized through the combination of words, images, and

textures. An individual approach followed, in which different abstraction forms were suggested. The final objective was the creation of clay sculptures. We, the creative conductors of the entire process, acted as guides, interfering as little as possible, seeking to enhance the participants' autonomy, but providing deeper support whenever needed. Also very important were the volunteers who supported the workshop, especially the most skilled ones from the ICCGS, who were artists with a lot of experience working with ceramics.

Just after the two weeks of workshops, an exhibit-celebration was organized at the Cherry Building, in Cedar Rapids, a space dedicated to the arts, where the ICCGS that supported the project is based. The event represented the culmination of two weeks of community art practice with some of Iowa's newest citizens. The event was attended by project participants, who came along with friends and family (Figure 3). A gospel group, as well as local artists and the Cedar Rapids Mayor were also present. There was also coverage by local media. Later on, an exhibition of the project was organized at the Mount Mercy University Art Gallery, in Cedar Rapids, where the participants could take their sculptures home (Figure 4).



Figure 2: Playing the MOT Game at the Ceramic Sculpture Workshop, ICCGS, (Video Still)
Source: Gorgel Pinto and Reaes Pinto

Sociocultural Inclusion through Game Experience

Inside the mechanism where the creative players develop their participatory praxis, there is a very important and sensitive aspect—the interaction with participants—not in the sense of simply using the most effective participatory methods with the migrants involved, but with the aim of developing a method where their permanent feedback is crucial and where it is important to give as flexible and personalized answers as possible. In this context, the MOT game is a way of giving migrants a voice, and its playful nature decreases the sensation of being “the Other,” encouraging a more spontaneous participation.

Gadamer (1999) states that in the context of a game, the role of the player is analogous to other possibilities for the production of subjectivity. Game and player are two linked entities, each with their own meaning. The player keeps in mind that the game is reduced to its playful character, whose existence is marked by the “seriousness” of its objectives. In turn, this “seriousness” is what enables the game to be defined as such. The committed way of the player

and the importance given to the game are decisive factors of the game. Understanding the core of the game does not come from the player's subjective thinking, but through nature of the game itself. And this is comparable to the nature of art, which is not in the aesthetic consciousness, but in the experience lived through art, whose transforming capacity of the subject is the true being of the art object (Gadamer 1999).

In *Shifting Ground's* participatory artistic practice, the game emerges as a means of generating a specific commitment between the newcomers to a country and the host community through their self-representation. Through their life stories and creativity, the immigrants and refugees in question have made possible the production of subjectivity around the theme of migration. The game in question had as its purpose the creative involvement of these vulnerable citizens, which was followed, at a second level, by the community of Cedar Rapids engagement, which participated in the project events and became closer to their urban socio-cultural reality.



Figure 3: Sculpture Exhibition of Immigrants Living in Cedar Rapids, in the Context of the Participatory Art and Design Initiative Entitled *Shifting Ground*
Source: Rodney Bradley

Beyond the ludic nature, Gadamer (1999) puts the game on a level of understanding where there is no limitation of subjectivity, or subjects who act playfully. The game has a specific and autonomous condition apart from the player's conscience, the latter not being the subject of the game. However, it is through those who play that the game acquires the quality of representation.

Regarding the game created in the *Shifting Ground* project, we highlight the players' willingness to participate and align themselves with the established rules. The moment in which the player takes the option to play according to his/her state of mind, reveals the freedom in the act of going to the game, knowing that later on they will have to condition themselves to the game dynamics. The real purpose is the development of the game rules and regulations, as well as adjusting the game movement itself (Gadamer 1999).

The logic that characterizes the game is not that of achieving goals in each move, but rather that of a permanent self-representation, which defines the one who participates and fulfils their function, that is, according to Gadamer (1999) the action of playing is also one of representing.

Regarding the *Shifting Ground* playful nature, the main question is the continuous action of representing to someone the vulnerable and unfair condition of creative citizens, with their own culture, who need a more inclusive society to give them the opportunities they could not have in their countries of origin. At the same time, reference is made to the fact that those who play refer beyond themselves, involving those who watch and their respective context, and not just a simple representation for those who are present (Gadamer 1999).

All games are characterized by their interpreters and audience and as such are a/the representation of something. Caring for the representation quality is related to the *Shifting Ground* aim, as a personal experience that is, on the one hand lived by the migrant or refugee player, and on the other hand an experience oriented to the spectator engagement. From Gadamer's (1999) perspective, this understanding of game as representation transforms the role of the spectator into an actor. The one who watches this kind of representation is the game receiver, participating in it by the way that is placed into play. At the same time, the protagonist of the game also has the possibility of experiencing the game as a whole by watching his/her own representation. Both the player and the one who watches the game share an understanding of the game meaning.



Figure 4: From Left to Right, Ceramic Sculptures by Joshua Landin and Helen Mensah-Blevi
Source: David Van Allen

Understanding the Praxis through Data collection

Soon after the development of the workshops, we conducted some interviews with the participants, which involved the immigrant and refugee African community, as well as those responsible for supervising the inclusiveness of some situations. The following is a summary of the most significant interviews, whose semantics we slightly changed to provide a more logical reading.

Within informal talks, the organizers and the volunteers from the stakeholder institutions said that they appreciated the initiative and learned a lot about possible approaches to socially engaged and participatory projects. Regarding the final event, it seemed to be unanimous that everyone felt that the celebration was very exciting and great for getting the word out about the project. They loved that all participants were present, that we had Central African live music

and a Mexican music playlist, as well as that entire families came. The Mayor said he was very impressed with the final project presentation.

Keesha Burke-Henderson was, at the time, Director of Diversity and International Student Success at Mount Mercy University, where she worked directly with international students and all minority students, such as Black, Latino, Asian, Indigenous students and the LGBTQ+ student alliance, ensuring that all students were having a good educational experience (Giorgio 2021). She was responsible for mentoring four workshop participants, whom she knew particularly well—two students and two employees of the institution. She mentioned the advantage of immigrants and refugees being able to communicate through art, which is an area that they usually have more difficulty with, due to language constraints. Regarding the participants she accompanied, Burke-Henderson mentioned that she got to know some characteristics of their personality that she did not know before. She also emphasized the familiar environment with people who share similar cultural values, which allowed a more fluid and uninhibited involvement, which contrasts with the tension and inhibition that is usually manifested in a more school-like or professional context. Burke-Henderson observed that promoting creativity in immigrant and refugee citizens is a very relevant action, which she intends to adopt and implement more frequently in activities she is responsible for. As for the one-week period in which the workshops took place, she argued that although it is not a long time, it was very significant and was able to provoke the interest of the participants, so they could engage with other communities and artistic practices, which take place in various places in Cedar Rapids (Burke-Henderson 2019).

Francine Niyonyishu and Anna Tuyisenge were born in Africa and came to the US at a very young age, having no memories of their home country. Anna Tuyisenge (2019) was afraid at first because she was one of the youngest, the only teenager. Both said they wanted to repeat the experience and improve their artistic skills in sculpture, as well as how to materialize their experiences and thoughts. Anna Tuyisenge felt a little embarrassed to be in the same space as her mother, who, in her opinion, achieved more interesting results because of her modeling experience in Africa, which she herself never had. In addition to the artistic experience, Francine Niyonyishu (2019) highlighted the social engagement with the other participants. Compared to similar school activities, both valued the idea of exploring their talents, memories and culture.

Helen Mensah-Blevi (2019) had no experience in modeling clay, nor any practice in sculpture, but she confessed that she was quite satisfied with the result of her piece. She would like to continue to be involved in this kind of artistic practice and improve her plastic language. Regarding the other participants and the less developed sculptures, she said that if there had been more workshop time to learn and experiment with more techniques, the results would have been better for everyone. Among the aspects that Mensah-Blevi valued the most was the “achievement” of exhibiting the artwork in two exhibitions that were promoted by the Cedar Rapids community.

Sónia Mounzeo-Mampassi (2019) appreciated the playful aspect of the workshop, mentioning that she felt more difficulty in the conceptualization of her piece, namely the creation of an abstraction and the transition to a concrete form in clay. However, she considered the support given by the artists and designers very useful, highlighting the fact that they started by sharing ideas and then encouraged and supported each participant in the exploration of their own abstractions. Also relevant was the interest shown by Sonia Mounzeo-Mampassi in the ICCGS; she stated her intent to continue her sculpture practice and to spread the word to her friends and family.

Erisa Niyibhitanga (2019) had never experienced any kind of ceramic modeling before, but said she liked it very much and would recommend it to others. She started the workshop with a lot of anxiety, but as the process advanced and with the guidance of the artists and designers, as well as the support of the volunteers, everything became easier. In the beginning she thought it

would not be possible to achieve the proposed goals, but in the end, she realized she was wrong and that everything worked out very well. She highlighted the teamwork among everyone, not only those who provided support, but also the participants themselves. Regarding the public perception of the project, she considers that this was a relevant way to value the immigrant population.

The overwhelmingly positive feedback from all stakeholders and participants, the project recognition by the Mayor himself, as well as the broad media coverage in the local press, are relevant indicators of our performance and methodology. We emphasize the synergy between the stakeholders as an important action for the transformation of society in a more sustainable sociocultural environment. This is something that may be kept in a systemized way, with a practice of participatory art and design, involving different creative conductors and disenfranchised minorities. In this particular case, although we left Cedar Rapids for a new intervention in Lisbon, we could demonstrate a more equitable reality and activate the different actors in this process in order that they can continue the emancipatory and inclusive progress on their own.

Conclusion

Participatory art and design is a powerful way to leverage the social and cultural inclusion of citizens in disenfranchised situations, such as migrants and refugees who seek new communities and places to continue their lives and return to an improved human condition. Within this transdisciplinary field it is important to develop new methodologies and methods to approach the stakeholders and communities involved, in order to give them voice, encourage the synergy between these with artists and designers, and more vitally, to promote the emancipation of the most vulnerable citizens in our societies.

In this context, strategic thinking is a means to systematize the interaction with all those involved, which should be implemented at the same time that the engagement is experienced. It is critical for the participatory process that artists and designers try to understand the emotions, expectations and frustrations of those involved through their own tacit knowledge, which is much more important than the simple deployment of collaborative tools and strategies in general. This kind of emotional perception must orient the creative conductors of this kind of practice, in a cause and effect relation with the previously delineated strategy.

In the participatory art and design practice that we experimented with in the *Shifting Ground* project, the game emerged as a means of generating a specific commitment between migrants and refugees with the host community through their self-representation. What is possible to understand through the created sculptures, workshops, and exhibitions is the vulnerable and unfair condition of creative citizens, with their own culture, who need a more inclusive society to give them the opportunities they did not have in their own homelands. Thus, those who played the MOT reached beyond themselves, involving not only the audience but also society at large.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

António Gorgel Pinto: Integrated Researcher, UNIDCOM/IADE, Universidade Europeia, Lisbon, Portugal; Researcher, Centre for Art History and Artistic Research (CHAIA), University of Évora, Évora, Portugal; Researcher, Research Centre for Architecture, Urbanism and Design (CIAUD), Faculty of Architecture, University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal

Paula Reaes Pinto: Integrated Researcher, Centre for Art History and Artistic Research (CHAIA), University of Évora, Évora, Portugal; Researcher, Research Centre for Architecture, Urbanism and Design (CIAUD), Faculty of Architecture, University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal

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