



Artefacto #0000: study of traditional ceramic jug “Infusa”, for innovation by design, in Northern Portugal

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ABSTRACT

Artefacto #0000 is a Project dedicated to the study of handmade ceramic products from three locations in the northern region of Portugal. The project aims to understand the importance of a traditional ceramic artefact - “*Infusa*” (Jug) – in Portuguese life, studying its historical, ethnographic and morphological aspects. In addition to a didactical component of this project – to be materialized in an exhibition - this paper intends to foster innovation through product design. Four recent Portuguese projects with similar objectives were selected and analyzed. These are presented and illustrated with examples extruded from the study and interpretation of artefacts, materials or processes traditionally used by artisans from each location, but done by contemporary designers. The discussion observed three topics among the outcomes of those projects: a) Redesign of products aiming new markets; b) New processes and uses of traditional materials; c) Engagement of local craft activities. It is intended to share and discuss the preliminary results and, eventually, find partners for future developments of *Artefacto #0000* project.

Keywords: Product Design, Portuguese, Tradition, Crafts, Ceramic, *Infusa*

INTRODUCTION

Artefacts are the materialization of people’s experiences in the territory in response to their own needs, with material and immaterial local resources. Also characterize identities of places and are the result of interactions between society and territory. From the end of the nineteenth century onwards relevant changes in lifestyle changed our material world. Today some traditional artefacts that have served populations over centuries are seen with nostalgia as holders of identity and memories, revealing uses, habits and tastes of previous times. Some may see on them the simplicity and beauty of the ancient, rural Portugal where manual labor prevailed. These artefacts are now objects of desire, reflecting the growing fascination for different traditions and cultures. Thus the handcraft that once satisfied basic needs of the population now satisfies another basic need: the need of enchantment (Albino, 2016). Some contemporary projects reflect the relevance of using local resources, material or immaterial, re-contextualizing and updating them, according to contemporary tendencies and current needs and requirements. These projects are aware of higher demand of consumers, looking for products with historical references, which value traditional knowledge and techniques, and the importance of identity as a distinct element of the territories that must be safeguarded, valued and promoted.

This paper refers to a research work that started last February and that is still in progress, centered around ceramic handicrafts produced in three locations in the north of Portugal, focusing on the study of its relation with the customs and habits of the last century, on which we still have vestiges and some living witnesses. This project involves a team of designers, a historian and an archaeologist. Among various types of ceramic artefacts this work is focused on the study of “Infusas”, an utilitarian jug to serve liquids - water, wine and also milk - produced in the referred regions. With this work we intend to deepen the knowledge about techniques and processes, traditions and customs, material culture related to this typology of products in the territories under research. We aim to rescue this cultural heritage, stimulating the interest and knowledge of these traditional practises. The first outcome of this work will be a didactical public exhibition. Next, studying similar projects, we expect to highlight some common outcomes that may promote innovation through the interaction between design and local resources and traditions. This paper intends to discuss this first findings and eventually, find partners for future developments of Artefacto #0000 project.

FOUR EXAMPLES OF PORTUGUESE INITIATIVES

Several initiatives were promoted that seek to enhance the craftsmanship and its artisans, creating methodologies that vary from project to project, from territory to territory with the objectives to be achieved (Figure 1). Projects such as “*Designing tradition*”, “*Tasa Project*”, “*Editoria: design, crafts and industry*” and “*À Capucha!*” are among recent examples of initiatives promoted in Portugal.



Figure 1. Cases studies' locations

Designing Tradition (Direct translation of “*Desenhar a Tradição*”), 2005 (S. Pedro do Corval)

This project started in 2005, in S. Pedro do Corval (south interior of Portugal). This is a poor region that, in 2001, had 1578 inhabitants and 29 small and medium potteries at risk of bankrupting. This project appeared as response to a request for support made by a group of 10 local potteries, searching for solutions, trying to reverse a deep crisis (Arroz, 2006). It was promoted by CENCAL¹, and began with an analysis of problems presented by potters, who focused mainly on difficulties in marketing and the lack of technological and artistic training. The intervention focused on three areas: marketing, design and technology, with the collaboration of a team of consultants. The program started with the study of the products, manufacturing processes, analysis of market segments and characteristics of new products, defining different typologies for integration into a whole. They also planned to develop sales networks, and a communication and promotion plan.

One example of this project is the terrine “*Coelhos Alentejanos*” (Figure 2), designed by Pedrita studio. This type of terrine was once used to cook a local recipe of rabbit. The white slip, traditionally used in decora-

¹ Professional Training Center for the Ceramic Industry, Caldas da Rainha, Portugal

tive elements, served as a background for drawings of visual elements that refer to hunting activities of the region. Thus, on one hand, this terrine represents a reinterpretation of an ancient technology used in pottery and, on the other hand, it encourages continuity of an activity that characterizes that region and revives an old tradition of cooking “rabbit” in terrines.



Figure 2. Terrine “Coelhos Alentejanos”

TASA Project – Ancestral Techniques, Current Solutions, 2010 (Algarve)

TASA Project was created in 2010 under the guidance of two designers, Álbio Nascimento and Kathi Stertzig, and involved artisans, researchers, local and public entities, including students from the University of Algarve. It intends to adapt some ancestral techniques and materials to present requirements, by designing new products with added commercial value, to convert handcraft into a favorable prospect in the future. This way, TASA sets out to restore a “status” that craft objects had in the past as functional objects, identifying, updating their cultural context, according to contemporary needs (Nascimento and Stertzig, 2012a).

TASA promotes the dialogue and knowledge sharing and learning, by creating a broad network, articulating techniques, knowledge and materials, linking artisans of different practices, allowing them to discover new possibilities and businesses. TASA created a synergistic network among artisans, institutions and the commercial sector, designing utilitarian products with local values and identities tailored for current needs of the market (Nascimento and Stertzig, 2012b). TASA is being promoted by Proactive Tour, a company of responsible tourism, since 2013. That company has been developing courses, workshops, creative residences and lectures in order to preserve and transmit knowledge.

“Tarrina” (Figure 3) is an example that emerged from the collaboration between designers and craftsmen of different practices. Cork, clay and leather are used in the reinterpretation of a typical artefact from Alentejo – “tarro” - originally made of cork and wood and used by pastors to carry their meals. The authors, Joana Cabrita Martins and Salomé Afonso, transpose this traditional artefact, used when working on the fields, to the dining table. This piece consists in a “jar” in cork and a clay “pot”, serving, simultaneously, to serve and conserve temperatures and also as a warm base. The interior decoration is based on the Alentejo blankets and the Mediterranean landscapes.



Figure 3. Tarrina

Editoria, 2013 (Guimarães)

The project “Editoria: Design, Crafts & Industry” was created by Cláudia Albino within the scope of her PhD. It focused on the promotion of crafts that are still present in the region of Guimarães - embroidery, horn trans-

formation, tanneries, pottery, tinwork and wrought iron - which had, in the past, huge importance in the development of the territory (Albino, 2016).

The project started with an ethnographic study, realizing how artefacts conditioned the construction of territories, searching for the values that characterize them. Workshops were held between artisans and designers, on an interactive process focused on the experience of making, stimulating the sharing of knowledge for both.

"A Skull, a Pyramid and a few Hearts" (Figure 4) is the result of the collaborative process between Aitor Saraiba and the artisan Jorge Teixeira. Horn transformation was an activity of great interest in the territory. The manufacture of horn combs decline once plastic combs arrived. Aitor Saraiva took this utensil and combined it with his imagery, resulting on a product that maintains some of its functional character but reflects the fanciful work of its author.



Figure 4. A Skull, a Pyramid and a few Hearts

À Capucha!, 2012 (Arões, Vale de Cambra)

"À Capucha!" (Figure 5) is a project created by Maria Ruivo, Cecília Lages and Raquel Pais with the collaboration of Helena Cardoso, who redesigned a traditional Portuguese coat, made with 100% pure wool and called "Capucha". This artefact was used for centuries to protect farmers and shepherds from the natural elements in the mountainous and rural areas of Portugal. Made by hand the coat tells memories and traditions of rural life. The original product has been redesigned and adapted to a new market but keeping its identity. Commercial promotion is made through careful communication, valuing craft product, transposing it into contemporary life.



Figure 5. À Capucha coats

Table 1 summarizes the contributions observed in each of these four projects, organized into three topics:

- 1: Redesign of products directed to current markets, from the study, application of materials, traditional techniques or skills of local artisans, reinterpreted by designers;
- 2: Creative combination of traditional and new materials and/or processes;
- 3: Engagement and strengthening of craft activities - aiming to foster local development and the creation of opportunities for artisans as well as the transmission of knowledge to new generations of breeders.

We also sought to understand and record the origin of these initiatives and the leadership of the projects, seeking to associate it with some steps or actions developed in its scope:

- Public - autarchy or institution of administrative, teaching or other nature;
- Private – designers, individually or by groups of professionals, social organizations or others with commercial interest.

This work resulted in this summary table:

PROJECT	INITIATIVE	RESULTS	COMPONENTS OF THE PROJECT
Designing Tradition (S. Pedro do Corval)	Public	Products Processes Social Engagement	Study of traditional materials and techniques Qualifications of artisans Crafts dynamization Collaboration between artisans and designers
TASA (Algarve)	Public and Private	Products Processes Social Engagement	Study of different crafts practises Collaboration between artisans and designers Commercial strategies Promotion of crafts activities (courses, creative residencies)
Editoria (Guimarães)	Public	Products Processes Social Engagement	Study of traditional materials and techniques of different practises Workshops with artisans and designers
À Capucha! (Vale de Cambra)	Private	Products	Study of traditional culture and materials Commercial strategies

Table 1. Summary of the four projects

ARTEFACTO #0000

The project *Artefacto #0000* covers three distinct ceramic regions and productions (Figure 6): *Viana do Castelo* and its faience factory (whose production is now closed); *Barcelos* and its glazed pottery, considered the Portuguese largest popular ceramic industry (Peixoto, 1990) and *Bisalhães* (Vila Real) with its black pottery, recently declared “Intangible Cultural Heritage” by Unesco.

The project focuses on a typology of objects, called “Infusa”, a utilitarian jug of service of liquids - water, wine and also milk. It is among the oldest ceramic objects, accompanying the daily life of the Portuguese throughout the centuries (Basto, 1954). The research consisted of: a) studying reference works on the theme, standing out the works of Rocha Peixoto (1990), Emanuel Ribeiro (1924, 1927) and Isabel Fernandes (2003, 2012); b) collecting data and assets of jugs in museums of the three different regions, c) collecting historical and ethnographic information in a common data base, d) analysing and comparing processes and production techniques, decorative and differentiated shapes from those three locations, e) understanding the relations between people and those artefacts and its transformation through times and f) compiling the results in an exhibition aiming to share the craft’s vital importance in territories’ identities.

The three studied territories, Viana do Castelo, Barcelos and Bisalhães are located in the North of Portugal and although distances between them are short, we may find great diversity from region to region, “*the Portuguese territory has no natural unit, no wonder it also doesn’t have cultural unity*” (Mattoso, 2010, p. 41).



Figure 6. Artefacto #0000 ceramic regions and productions

Pottery has always been part of the life of local populations, which developed their own processes and techniques, (Figure 7) according to the resources they had available, responding to the needs of their daily lives (Ribeiro, 1927). These differences resulted in very distinctive characteristics (Figure 8), as the black tone of Bisalhães pottery, achieved through its firing in a reducing atmosphere (Fernandes, 2012) and its polished ornamentation with river pebbles; The living colour of Barcelos pottery, achieved by firing in an oxidizing atmosphere, enhanced by the glaze where pieces are bathed, and its decoration made with chicken feathers, with naive and primitive gestures, full of spontaneity and soul (Lage, 1940).

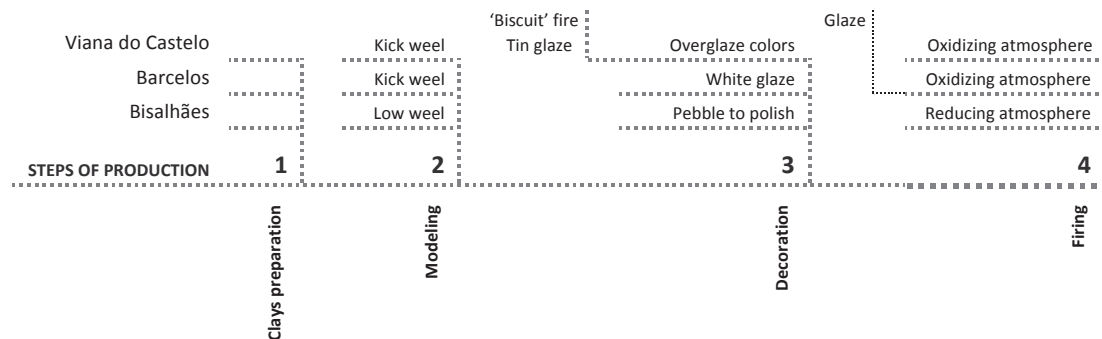


Figure 7. Steps of production – differences between regions

Serving essentially the rural world pottery created artefacts that responded to the needs of populations: storage, conservation and food preparation, at a time where life was very different from what we know today (Fernandes, 2003). The faience appears in a more urban context, first in the life of the most affluent, passing later to other social classes (Fernandes, 2012). Its coat with opaque white glaze, suited with perfect drawings where the colours and joy of Minho predominate, characterizes Viana’s faience production (Figures 8 and 9).

“Infusa”

These types of jugs were produced in the three places under study and are generally characterized by their globular or pyriform body that strangles in the passage to the neck and by having a handle and a spout (Fernandes, 2012).



Figure 2. “Infusas”: examples of decoration from Viana do Castelo, Barcelos e Bisalhães respectively

Their shapes, ornamentations and finishes vary according to the place of their production (Figures 7 and 8): they present a globular body with a low truncated neck in Barcelos, or higher in Bisalhães, and a trefoil spout with a marked strangulation; while in Viana do Castelo the body is also globular but the neck is cylindrical and its spout, made separately, does not suffer the strangulation of the others. Its ornaments reflect the legacies left by its ancestors, popular and traditional, as representations of the surrounding nature. The jugs volume range from 30 cl to 660 cl, from individual service to the service of several people. These types of jugs were used in very different contexts: in fairs and festivals, in train stations, where women, known as “aguadeiras”, were transporting and selling water to costumers (Ribeiro, 1924). These vessels were also used in the fields work to carry wine or water; there is even a type of these vessels called “lavrador” (meaning farmer) showing this custom. We could also find them in kitchens and in taverns, used to serve the wine taken from the barrels.



Figure 3. Examples of shapes and decorations from Viana do Castelo, Barcelos and Bisalhães respectively

As many other types of pottery these trefoil jugs started to fall into disuse, as the needs for which they were created were disappearing. But the production continues, with other purposes, as it happens with several typologies. We still can find them in fairs and in craft shops, but its functional character gave place to another, often, only decorative. Nostalgia of the past, the affinity with the places and the memories are now, mostly, the reasons of its consumption.

DISCUSSION

The four projects presented reflect an effort to value cultural heritage, incorporating values and meanings that help to recognize different specificities of the territories. Design is seen as a cultural mediator capable of enabling new experiences and relationships between artefacts and users. This dialogue between the territories and our everyday needs can be a way to strengthen traditions, promoting new social dynamics, transmitting and making visible different traditions and cultures to new generations (Krucken, 2013).

We selected and analysed one product of each project. All of them incorporate crafts, local traditions and memories, material culture that must be promoted and safeguarded. The collaboration between artisans and designers is a way to share and reinforce knowledge, creating products to be experienced by people (Celashi, 2013). In these examples we identify different processes that combine the matter with the personal interpretation of authors: thought the rescue of immaterial culture, formal and/or technical innovation, capable to transpose the cultural heritage for nowadays.

In our research project we see the ceramic production as a defining element of the territories under study. In the three different regions covered by Artefacto #0000 artisans developed their own techniques and processes, according to resources they had and their everyday needs. The “infusa” is an artefact that addressed the need to serve, store and carry water, wine and/or milk, accompanying Portuguese people for centuries.

Can these defining elements be seen as an object to be redesigned? Can design rescue these artefacts transposing them to our days? The case studies answer to similar questions, recreating typologies, able to dialogue with and about the territory, making visible values and traditions, sharing knowledge that can be experienced by final users.

Crossing the study with the learning from the projects presented we foresee some ways of evolving our project aiming to share its heritage with other: either by redesigning the ceramic artefacts, rethinking their shapes, suggesting new details, colours, adapted to new markets; or exploring combinations of traditional with new materials or techniques of production; establishing new relationships between designers and artisans looking for other forms of social engagement. The presentation of this article in this conference intends to enhance this discussion, adding value with contributions that can boost the future results of the project.

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