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Design as Democracy: the democratic potential of design

IZIDIO, Luiz Lagares;

Doctoral Candidate. Universidade do Estado de Minas Gerais - UEMG (Brazil)

lagaresiz@gmail.com

MORAES, Dijon De;

PhD, Full Professor. Universidade do Estado de Minas Gerais - UEMG (Brazil).

dijon.moraes@uemg.br

Abstract

The present article proposes to investigate possible futures for the design through a proximal and dialogical approach between design and democracy. In this way, we begin with the letter "Stand Up for Democracy", written by MANZINI and MARGOLIN. Thus we seek to understand the foundations of the concept of Design as Democracy, proposed by the mentioned authors. We seek a relationship between the structures of democratic models and design practices. For these reasons, we have opened up a dialogue on codesign as a possible methodological alternative for a democratic design, more comprehensive, horizontal and open for all. Providing a fertile ground where collective creativity can be used as a form of collaboration and solving common problems is mirrored in design as democracy. For this resonates with the creation of a more inclusive and sustainable world for the future generation.

Keywords: Design as Democracy; Citizen participation; Codesign and sustainable; Possible Future of Design, Common by Design.

1. Introduction

Design is a complex activity that influences and is influenced by multiple interests among the different social groups that participate in its process, being therefore an activity that is not neutral in relation to social and political issues.

Different authors deal with the social function of design and the performance of the designer as an agent of social transformation. Gert Selle (1973) relied on the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School to discuss affirmative action for Design, involving ideology and utopia. Tomás Maldonado (1972) observed the environmental degradation caused by the industrial consumer society and dealt with the projectual hope, the need for the designer to act with autonomy and social conscience. Bonsiepe (1978, 1986 and 2006) since the 1970s has observed the problems of technological and industrial dependence of the "peripheral countries" vis-a-vis the "center countries" and has reflected the relationship between design and democracy in the sense of seeking autonomy through design. Frascara (2000) emphasized the importance of approaching design with the area of social sciences for the development of actions geared more towards social benefits than commercial interests. Manzini (2008) has debated the importance of sustainability in the development of design actions and has been pointing the potential of social innovation, new social organizations based on collaboration networks, as a way to change the current paradigm of industrial production.

These theoretical approaches deal with articulations that broaden and deepen what is meant by "project activity" as well as the role of the designer in the university, in the city, and in society as a whole. Recently, Ezio Manzini and Victor Margolin at a Chicago's Conference wrote an open letter to the Design community calling for a lift for democracy. The authors believe that the design community should take a stand, speak and act to defend democracy as a core value of society, this attitude must happen by recognizing the strong possible convergence between democracy and design.

From this point of view, the present article intends to investigate possible futures for the design starting from a proximal and dialogical approach between design and democracy. The aim is to connect design concepts to democratic practice, in order to broaden the field of work and design research. Besides being a way for designers to position themselves politically in the complex scenario of fragility of democracy that we live in the contemporary world. At first we try to understand what the foundations of the concept of Design as Democracy, proposed by the mentioned authors. For this, we seek a relation in democratic models, as they are their structures of operation and their relations with the practice of design. From the relationship and articulation of these structures with the design we open a dialogue on codesign as a methodological alternative, for a design as democracy, so that it is more democratic, horizontal and open. Finally, the purpose of this article is not to exhaust the theme but to open up ways for this relationship to strengthen in order to widen the frontiers of knowledge in the field of design.

2. Development

The theories and practices of design have gone through new design spheres in search of improvement of human, environmental and economic factors, that is: they involve issues that go beyond simple project action and their interrelations condition and constantly redefine the way of understanding the design. This transforming and flexible feature of design makes the foundational fields of knowledge of its practice change according to the nature of the problem being treated.

In this way, we recognize the challenge of establishing new paradigms for the creation and use of design knowledge that is more democratic and encompasses the complexity present in the contemporary world.

2.1 Design in the complex scenario of Democracy

The contemporary political and democratic scenario is extremely complex, at the same time that capitalism has invaded our lives by capturing our subjectivities and our cognitive so fiercely that it also dominates and encompasses even the forms of resistance created against it. Moreover, the high levels of rejection of the traditional politics of representation by parties, leaders and institutions - largely linked to problems of corruption and misappropriation - have led to a global delegitimization of the model of representation, called to be corrected or even replaced by formulas of direct citizen participation (Crozier, Huntington e Watanuki, 1975, Pharr e Putnam, 2000). Today, with the Internet and social

networks, citizens feel more politically active, providing for the inclusion of different actors in civil society, making it possible for autonomous and horizontal actions to be established for political demands.

This participatory growth is very broad and ranges from organic reforms that seek to give more weight to the militants in the decisions on programs, alliances or internal leadership, to new forms of participation in the local space, such as participatory budgets or citizen consultations, which can be extended without great costs at local levels through referendums or formulas of electronic democracy (MOTOS, 2018).

The discussion of key concepts to democratic theory - participation, equality, legitimacy, self-government, dissent and freedoms - permeates the understanding of these contemporary forms of expression. It also goes through the productions of affections, how dissent manifests itself, how the public scene is handled, and the current forms of sharing are essential if democratic theory itself is to be renewed and can deal with current political problems. Design is connected to all this complexity by its strong context of social interaction and by being linked more and more to the production of subjectivity, that is, the projection of visualities and spatialities that interfere in our ways of living, of relating and to constitute ourselves as a society.

Manzini and Margolin (2017), insert design in this context of discourse on the direction of democracy by launching a letter / call to the design community to engage politically and actively in the maintenance of democracy through actions involving theory and practice of design. In this text, the authors emphasize that the development of democratic forms and processes has always involved design and must continue to do so, being a moment of construction of possible futures, through design, able to conceive, develop and connect new possibilities for democracy and well-being, resisting the growth of negative forces that have attacked democratic processes.

In addition, they draw a parallel between design and democracy, based on four aspects, namely:

- Design of democracy – improving the democratic processes and institutions on which democracy is built;
- Design for democracy – enable more people to participate in the democratic process, especially through the use of technology;
- Design in democracy – building access, openness and transparency in institutions so as to ensure equality and justice;
- Design as democracy – the practice of participatory design so that diverse actors can shape our present and future worlds in a fair and inclusive way.

With the exercise of opening a field of dialogue between democracy and design, this article focuses on understanding the relations contained in the fourth proposal of convergence between design and democracy, presented by the authors. The intention is to open channels of conversation between these two fields of knowledge without the pretension of exhausting the theme. Therefore, we propose a dialectical relationship between the structures of democratic models and the practice of design.

2.2 Design as democracy, but what democracy?

Democratic actions take place in the public sphere, that is, in a plural space as an arena of mediation of communicational dialogical processes, with articulations, opinions and reflexive reconstructions of moral and normative values that guide social coexistence. Therefore, if democracy is thought of as a way of life based on the notions of equality and self-government, it can be understood as the collective effort to build a shared world from just conditions. This effort is realized every day in the meeting of singularities for the texture of a common experience.

However, it is necessary to develop critical, hybrid, horizontal and living forms of knowledge production, which are essential for the production of emancipatory and democratic solutions in contemporary times. Whether they come from design or from any other area of knowledge. As a way to better understand the concept of design as democracy, as presented by Manzini and Margolin (2017), we search through the models of democracy, understand their structures and what relationships are possible in both theory and practice of design. The models of democracy can be understood as an "idealized theoretical construct to reveal and explain the key elements of a democratic form and its underlying structure of

relationships" (Held, 2007.p.25). Thus the models of democracy present us with possible types, that is: abstractions that allow us to capture the characteristics and normative practices that distinguish a democratic proposal from its alternatives.

2.3 Agonistic model of democracy

Mouffe (2005) proposes the idea of the agonistic model, based on the acceptance of dissent within the democratic process, a point that is opposed in the democratic model as we know it, would be a deliberative democracy. The democratic process of the deliberative type requires that the participants not only be free and equal, but also "reasonable", because democracy is understood as a system of social and political arrangements, capable of connecting the exercise of power to the free exercise of reason between equals. By "reasonable" it is understood that the participants in democracy seek to defend and criticize institutions and programs in terms of considerations that others, as free and equal, are right to accept, given the fact of reasonable pluralism.

That is, adherence to liberal democracy would be like a kind of rational agreement that would close the door to the possibility of contestation in the search for a final rational solution. Mouffe (2005) considers that it should really be at stake would be the constitution of a set of practices that make possible the creation of democratic citizens and not a question of rational justification, but of the availability of democratic forms, individuality and subjectivity. In this sense, the aim is not to eliminate the existing differences in the public sphere in order to have a rational consensus of equality, but to mobilize these different energies for the sake of democratic purposes.

If we accept, however, that power relations are constitutive of the social, then the main question for democratic politics is not how to eliminate power, but how to constitute forms of power more compatible with democratic values (MOUFFE, 2005, p.19). Understanding the constitutive nature of power implies abandoning the ideal of a democratic society as a perfect, harmonious, or transparent institution. To understand how the pluralism of the agonistic process and the relations of power form the social, the author proposes a distinction between "politics" and "the political." The first would be a set of practices, discourses, institutions that seek to establish an order of human coexistence, that is, structures that guarantee governmentality - The second would be the antagonism inherent in human relationships that emerge different types of social relations, that is, condition of society, in constant opposition and debate, materialized in acts of resistance and confrontation.

The author Carl DiSalvo (2012) using these distinctions of Mouffe (2005), inserts the design in this agenda creating a distinction between "Design for Politics", that involved with issues that involve the modes of governmentality, and "Political Design", whose goal is to create dissent. From this analysis we can also distinguish the design that is used as a tool by politicians, and one that has a more democratic and plural character where their practices generate constant reformulation generates more just and inclusive worlds. Therefore, it is possible to create a parallel and convergence of the agonistic model of democracy with the development of a "Political Design" and a practice of "Design as Democracy". Being the Political Design a form of positioning where the political potential would be placed before the questions presented to it, in order to always leave a space so that the subjectivities can be considered in the challenges before them.

Design as Democracy can then be seen as a political act through the practice of actions, mechanisms, and tools for the creation of spaces of experimentation of subjectivities. An example of this would be the possibility to include people in decision-making processes, in the creation and management of the process of developing proposals for problem solving in conjunction with communities aimed at improving the quality of life of citizens. In addition, Design as a democracy would be linked to practices that break paradigms of production and consumption, that go towards a design that sustainably exploits natural resources and materials available, seeks new productive aspects and values symbolic diversity and cultural. More democratic practices allow for the creation of new products, new values, new scenarios, where the concept of project covers the interaction between society, production, real demands and local development.

2.4 Codesign as Possibility of Design as Democracy

The evolution of the thought of the performance of the design, through a creation developed for the user has changed to a new perspective of co-creation, this has altered the design practice scenario, as well as the emergence of new domains of collective creativity.

The creation of possible futures through design necessarily passes through a regeneration of environmental and social capital breaking with old ways of life, production and consumption, opening up to new possibilities for everyday interactions between humans and their artifacts.

The creation of a space where collective creativity can be used for collaboration and problem solving, involving all, easily connects with design as democracy as proposed by Manzini and Margolin, because it is in resonance with the creation of new worlds more inclusive and sustainable.

In this sense, codesign, as a methodology, integrates into these scenarios of possible future creations through design, since codesign is based precisely on the idea of including people with different voices for collaboration within the design process in building common and collective solutions. "Designing with others" is a methodology that proposes a more democratic, open and innovative design process that has been finding space in different projects and actions, especially in what concerns public participation and social innovation.

In the perspective of democracy models, codesign would be in tune with the agonistic model because its characteristics are complex but basically take into account the other - in all its levels of affections, passions, perceptions, subjectivity and dissent - as part of process of social life. By including the other in its actions, the codesign "as a design approach" can potentially create new possibilities and new values, but requires a new set of skills and an underlying philosophical approach by designers "(Fuad-Luke, 2009, p 147).

The codesign actions involve collaborations with a high degree of confidence, are social services in which the end users are actively involved, assuming the role of codesigners and co-producers of the service (CIPOLLA, 2004). The challenge of codesign is to fit the design together with the other authoring tools into the process of collaboration and co-creation, so that it is not possible to identify a single authorship in this process.

Codesign is present in the experiments of democratic design, that is, in the development of a service, a process of collective construction that involves issues related to cities and regions, the conquest of more rights for its residents, among other possibilities.

The democratic process of codesign places the design within a set of actions involving the individual and society in order to find solutions to diverse problems. More specifically, the challenge is to integrate codesign methods and tools into these processes in order to improve the effective participation of citizens and society as a whole, thus enabling more people to contribute to transforming their needs in search of a better future.

However, there is a critical point in the use of codesign methodologies, which is their relationship to the time of results. The actions that involve codesign generally take a longer time to reach a good result, than could possibly be done using traditional solutions. Perhaps, this happens because the codesign initiatives take into account the individualities within the collective, that is, they consider the subjectivities of each participant to reach a collective agreement and more democratic in relation to the natural stages of the project which are: analysis of the problem, proposal for execution and immediate application of possible solutions.

A possible way to maintain the collective and collaborative way of acting in design is to promote a new thinking about the accelerated pace of our lives and the revision of the contemporary lifestyle.

3. Final considerations

With regard to democracy, the act of inclusion, even dissent, as part of the democratic process strengthens its structures and makes them more comprehensive. In terms of design as democracy, practices that seek to include citizens as trainers and thinkers of this process also create a more democratic bias for design and strengthens the possibilities of citizen participation.

Facing this, linking democracy and codesign considerably broadens the scope of the design activity. This integration expands its scope of action through new formats, models and methodologies that present themselves as more creative and integrative. In this way, it is possible to allow different social actors to

propose new paths with subjectivities and affections, with consensus and even dissent, promoting different ways of democratically occupying the public scene and common shares.

However, this process is essential to strengthen design as an important area of knowledge within applied social disciplines. In this context, using codesign as an instrument of democratic participation is not seen here as a passive process that provides voices to individuals, but rather to generate effective proposals through collective actions through design. The collaborative practice, through codesign, opens space for design to act as a mediator of the processes of structural changes in contemporary society that go well beyond the management of interaction models and collective collaboration processes.

As a conclusion, the perception of design as a democracy still includes in its practices more horizontal forms of social participation that, when potentialized by co-creation, make the whole process a model for conceiving, developing and connecting new possibilities for democracy and for design itself.

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