Contributions towards a plurality in design narratives: Addressing dynamics between global and local discourses

Heitor Alvelos and Susana Barreto
ID+/Unexpected Media Lab, University of Porto, Porto, Portugal

ABSTRACT
The present research addresses empirical evidence of the predominance of a macroscopic, canonical narrative in design: it argues that design education and research may benefit from a substantial expansion and diversification upon this traditionally prevalent narrative. Furthermore, we posit that this diversification of design may begin by acknowledging and addressing its multiple narratives at a local level, upon which a global web of detailed knowledge may emerge complex, global discourses and paradigms may require articulations of the intrinsically contextual. With this premise in mind, prior research has been held in Porto, Portugal, from 2018 to 2021, through in-person interviews with retired design teachers and professionals, and field work with local crafts and industry; these actions have confirmed the above hypothesis within the context of the case study. We now aim at further reverting these findings into higher education curricula and propose a working dynamic between the intrinsically contextual and a scalability of enquiry and relevance.

KEYWORDS
Portuguese design, education networks, design histories, design plurality, design ethnography

Introduction
The discipline and practice of design face a particular crossroads now: while content in educational instances has occurred primarily via a shared predominant narrative regardless of context, recent cultural shifts have been addressing a pressing need to question the prevalence of specific kinds of dominant public discourse. A series of factors have been contributing to this renewed sense of a need for plurality: a global permeability to multicultural fluxes, as well as a generalised, heightened awareness of socio-political
dynamics of dominance and visibility. All of these are largely traversing younger generations whose default expectation and relationship with knowledge is often based on empirical multiperspectivity.

In turn, we must acknowledge that design itself has considerably broadened its scope in the past decades, expanding from an original practice anchored in aesthetic and functional parameters, into territories that now encompass strategic, perceptive and ideological concerns: early on, Buchanan (2001) had already envisioned the changing role of designers as drivers of socio-cultural innovation by connecting knowledge from various specialisations and creating new frameworks in support of positive cultural change. This shift has had an evident impact on a range of activities and outputs that, in past instances, might have been relegated to fairly fluid categories of traditional craft, improvisational devices or amateur communication processes devoid of further ambition; and yet, despite contextual origins in craft, arts and industry (Trocchianesi and Guglielmetti 2012), design is now undergoing a process of re-appreciation, as innovative design objects and activities re-establish ontological ties - a rather urgent, if somewhat paradoxical, process if one considers the wealth of unwritten knowledge and aesthetic rupture thereby contained: the paradox resides in unearthing innovation among endemic practice.

Adding to the above is mounting empirical evidence that a design practice is, first and foremost, anchored in its own tangible contexts, and associated scales of operation: from regional resources to specialised industries, from verbal and visual idioms to cultural manifestations, design is bound to find its first sphere of meaning, resonance and impact among its own ecosystem. And yet, design has largely favoured a global macro-narrative throughout its own recount; this may occur in detriment of a detailed web of local instances that may ultimately contribute to valorisation (both semantic and economic) and positive differentiation across the discipline and the practice.

With the above in mind, the present article argues for the need to reconsider and expand upon established content in design narratives and outputs; we further argue for the key role of design education and research in the identification and dissemination of said narratives and outputs, proposing that higher education and research institutions are particularly well-suited to conducting enquiry on a contextual level pertaining to their own individual ecosystem (Figure 1). By looking into Portuguese design as a case study, the present research aims at unearthing a detailed reconstruction of local design narratives that legitimizes a range of authors, processes and specimens that remain not just largely unacknowledged in their own locus, they are often overshadowed by a largely imported narrative when it comes to the dissemination of local knowledge.
From here, the research posits that similar occurrences might be taking place in further contexts, thus proposing that this inquiry into local design narratives may expand towards national and international networks.

**Research question and hypothesis**

Given the emerging awareness of (and engagement with) the need for historical, social and disciplinary pluralities, with consequent cultural, political and epistemological impact, how can multiple design narratives ensure their own exponential process of legitimisation and mutual recognition beyond dominant canons?

We posit that this may be achieved by engaging, observing, and interpreting design activity on a local and regional scale, thus facilitating the recognition and positive differentiation of its systemic diversity, with tangible and complementary semantic, even economic gains.

While reporting on the critical gathering of a body of knowledge in the context of Portuguese design, we further argue that a broader network dedicated to equivalent processes of local scrutiny may be an effective approach towards the multiple perspectivity and complementarity. We further vouch for higher education and research as particularly effective contexts for both the study and the dissemination of new and unearthed knowledge in the field.
Context

In recent years, design has begun to embrace multiple perspectivity, a clearer understanding that History weaves complementary and contrasting versions of a shared narrative, in line with Boaventura de Sousa Santos’ view that a cosmopolitan approach starts from the recognition of the presence of a plurality of knowledges (2007).

The need to embrace design’s multiple viewpoints runs concurrently with a renewed awareness of complex socio-cultural and political imbalances, both contemporary and historical, with impact traversing a multitude of disciplines.

Margolin (1996, 3) argues that ‘there can be no single design history’; more broadly, Morales argues that ‘when we rely on written records, we need to continually ask ourselves what might be missing, what might have been recorded in order to manipulate events and in what direction, and in what ways we are allowing ourselves to assume that objectivity is in any way connected with literacy’. This concurs with Adamson, Riello, and Teasley (2011) affirmation that we need ‘[an] ethical history of what design should do’.

The present research translates these premises into field work developed in the Northern Portugal region. Empirical evidence gathered from fifty interviews with retired Portuguese art and design academics has confirmed a predominant narrative bias in design in their own repertoires. Concurrently, design students participating in associated workshops have themselves pointed out how core references provided in their courses often tend to be foreign, and even national references tend to be reduced to a small range of canonical individuals and aesthetics.

A series of factors may explain this trend: a central role is played by design values and history taught through a European and North American canon of designers that seem to have set an aesthetic and narrative foundation; and a prevalence of mainstream discourse has largely overshadowed the work produced by non-Western cultures outside a modernist design paradigm of global vocation. Clearly, the gradual, exponential shift in editorial and dissemination channels via online media has done much to overcome this lasting construct; however, the intrinsically chaotic nature of digital networks has been far from effective in filtering legibility among volatility, in preserving context among random circulation, and in rescuing coherence within content abundance.

As noted by Ansari (2018), the starting point is ‘challenging and critiquing the current status quo in mainstream contemporary academic and professional discourse and bringing greater depth to the conversations happening around issues of gender, race, culture, and class’. A plurality in Portuguese design education thus aims to be at the forefront of current innovation.
policies: one of the strategic actions by the European Design Leadership Board \citeyear{2014} positions design research for the 21st Century, and the recent New European Bauhaus initiative \citeyear{2000} calls for participatory design as key to development and inclusion - as well as a conscious return to sustainable components of the making process and subsequent impacts, with emphasis on tangible, preceding contexts and ecosystems.

Certeau \citeyear{1988} notes the importance of such context-specific outcomes as a counterpoint to internationalised perspectives on design \citeyear{2016} that question several ideological biases underpinning conventional modes of communicating design history, such as origin, geographies, gender, and sustainability. The conjectured inside-out orientation additionally reflects Calvera’s \citeyear{2005} view that a ‘new geography of design history has to be built from the specific, as opposed to the general’, wherein a global vista of the field can be gained from comparative/contrastive analysis of regional narratives. Additionally, the reader’s circumscribed focus and foundation within interpretivist inquiry would embody constitutional differences with noted readers/anthologies in the field, such as the works of Clark and Brody \citeyear{2009}, Candlin and Guins \citeyear{2009}, Lees-Maffei and Houze \citeyear{2010}, and Triggs and Atzmon \citeyear{2017}. These authors showcase the state-of-the-art inter-disciplinarity of design, but at the cost of ‘canonising significant definitions, centres of creative power, key players, objects, and concerns’ \citeyear{2009}.

Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that the research hereby presented does not aim at de-legitimising existing canons; instead, it means to place them as components of a broader, node-based geometry, as opposed to maintaining a ‘center/periphery’ model that has dominated discourse in the past.

An imported and male-dominated narrative has thus been evidenced throughout the present research: design as a successful and canonical practice has fundamentally been taught at undergraduate level as happening elsewhere.

Other evidence is telling of an imbalance: despite a predominance of female students, teaching staff in the present case study has been systematically, predominantly male, as are the few national references that have managed to rise to inclusion onto a broader narrative. As noted by Aguiar, the gender asymmetry was striking, with an average of 75\% of female students contrasting with an entirely male faculty \citeyear{June 15, 2019}. As such, gender is inevitably one of the core issues to be addressed in a plural design narrative and works as a particularly expressive example of the challenges at stake.

Costa \citeyear{2019} states that until the early 20th Century there is scarce evidence in Portugal of a participation of women in design practice, and this continued until a surge in the 1960s; we posit that, to an extent, this
invisibility may result from traditional gender role paradigms, certainly reinforced throughout the former conservative regime, ended in 1974. However, there is an element of attribution to be considered, a split between the making and the authoring. Adding to this is evidence of a late inscription of communication design as such in the Portuguese context: for decades it primarily consisted of a side commercial practice by fine artists venturing into graphic arts and typography, occupying a subsidiary role to the arts as a consequence. Simultaneously, product design took tentative steps among a precarious industrial fabric and ties with mechanical engineering.

A turning point in the country’s political and social fabric, the Revolution of 1974 triggered a surge of written and graphic expression celebrating free speech and civic engagement. Publications, associations, gatherings, murals, events, posters largely driven by the spur of the moment, the abundance of graphic specimens that followed the revolution is largely preserved at the Ephemera Archives (Pereira 2021), mostly awaiting scrutiny due to the sheer volume of available documentation (Figure 2). This body of evidence records the shifting visual languages of a nation, and yet, most specimens are of uncertain authorship, and can only be traced back through testimony and snowballing.

In addition to the above, we further posit that a multi-ethnic insight is particularly overdue in the case of Portugal: following the 1974 revolution and the subsequent concession of sovereignty to Portugal’s African and Far Eastern colonies, a surge in immigration translated in the appearance of self-organised suburban communities of colonial provenance. To this day, these communities largely retain a considerable degree of social stigma that only

![Figure 2. Posters, publications, and miscellanea at the Ephemera Archive, 2016. Photography by Heitor Alvelos.](image)
now begins to take tentative steps towards actual visibility, and legitimacy in contributing to inclusive socio-political dialogue and representativity. Yet similarly, customs and practices of these communities as contributions to national cultural and creative narratives and dynamics remain residual. We thus propose to contribute to a belated reconstruction of this legacy towards the attribution of its rightful place in the national narrative of cultural artefacts.

**Methodologies**

Northern Portugal has become a case study and testbed to the aforementioned issues, due to the authors’ own decades-long experience as educators and researchers in Portuguese higher education design institutions in the Porto region, their international teaching and research experience notwithstanding and contributing to a simultaneous, broader perspective. Their scientific affiliation, the Unexpected Media Lab, further vouches for the present approach, as it intends to reinscribe traditional crafts in contemporary contexts (Alvelos 2019).

Two prior research endeavours undertaken by the authors between 2018 and early 2021 within the scope of ID+/Unexpected Media Lab have unearthed detailed, contextual ties to Portuguese design that have formed the epistemological and methodological groundwork of the present research:

- **Project Wisdom Transfer**: towards the scientific inscription of individual legacies in contexts of retirement from art and design higher education and research [WT]. A wealth of testimonies by retired designers pertaining to a first-person recount of art and design Schools in the 1970s and 1980s; intricate memories of design production were recalled, where authors and protagonists had often been forgotten, or even self-excluded (Figure 3) (Barreto, Lima and Penedos-Santiago 2021a, 2021b);

- **Project Anti-Amnesia**: design research as an agent for narrative and material regeneration and reinvention of vanishing Portuguese manufacturing cultures and techniques [AA]. Strategic and creative mediation with local crafts associations and small industries currently facing viability challenges; design research was essentially employed as a facilitator of self-empowerment (Figure 4). A set of four distinct entities were chosen, based on their practical range as well as the relational geometry of their structural challenges: a traditional ‘Almalaguès’ weaving association (Herança do Passado), a small, contemporary manual tile-making business (Gazete Azulejos), a shoe factory largely sustained by the fulfilment of outsourced orders by foreign brands (Netos Shoes), and a traditional
typography shop catering to local businesses and private clients (Tipografia Damasceno). To a varying degree, all these entities possess strong ties with their localities, communities, cultures and visitors - as well as a strong sense of duty towards common well-being. A permanent
online archive has been created (Alvelos and Chatterjee 2021), as well as a monograph gathering findings, methodologies, and documentation (Alvelos, Chatterjee, and De Almeida 2021).
These two foundational research projects adopted a mixed-methods approach, drawing on the strength of both paradigms (quantitative and qualitative) to gain a broader understanding of the issues at stake, hear the voices of informants, and develop an effective examination of nuanced topics. Mixed methods worked from the early stages of the studies’ rationale, all the way to their analytical and conclusive stages.

In the case of WT, pre-existing statistical data was combined with observational analysis. Observation occurred at different degrees of immersion throughout a series of semi-structured interviews: in the interviewee’s chosen locus, at the interviewee’s workspace, and occasionally in private places that emerged within the context of the conversation (Table 1). Preliminary statistical data was central to the establishment of a chronology and the identification of journey maps, which later helped single out key players to be interviewed. From then onwards, studies followed a snowball sampling technique, in which the initial study subjects recruited future subjects from among their acquaintances. The snowball sampling method was enhanced using social media, thus triggering interest and reaching out to additional key informants (Dosek, 2021). Ethnographic interviewing subscribed to Atkinson et al. (2001) premise that it helps gather rich, detailed data directly from interviewees, providing tangible insights into the ways participants recollected their experience; this in turn has helped fine-tune ensuing interviews.

On both WT and AA, the interviews were conducted in natural settings in multi-sited fieldwork, to minimise the researchers’ influence on the activities of the people that are studied. This provided the means to obtain a set of exclusive observations within the interviewees’ testimonies and the opportunity to witness first-hand a range of practices that characterised their creative process. The interviews were filmed and recorded, complemented with field notes, site documentation, and contextual photographs that allowed the building of a well of resources for project archives and various outputs, namely public exhibitions, graphic novels, posters, portraits and photographs, website, and student workshops (Figure 5).

In turn, artefacts such as books, objects, graphic work, letters, photographs, artworks, magazine cut-outs and various specimens were unearthed and documented during these interviews. The ethnographic content and information gathered was interwoven and analysed through timeline maps, field notes, personal inventories, diary studies, factual and archival data: this led to categorisation by patterns of gender, age group, degree, and professional paths.

With local crafts associations and small industries, interviews and documenting processes were complemented with a range of pedagogical experiments involving the hybridisation of outputs: these crossed source materials,
| Interviewee                | Gender | Date       | Location                  | Subject area                    | Age group |
|----------------------------|--------|------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------|
| Armando Alves              | M      | 05.12.2018 | Art Studio, Porto         | Painting, Graphic Arts          | 80+       |
|                            |        | 15.01.2019 |                           |                                 |           |
| Carlos Carreiro            | M      | 16.01.2019 | Art Studio, Porto         | Painting, Graphic Arts          | 80+       |
| Carlos Barreira            | M      | 08.01.2019 | Art Studio, Sobreira      | Sculpture                       | 75+       |
| António Quadros Ferreira   | M      | 12.04.2019 | Faculty of Fine Arts, Porto | Painting                      | 70+       |
| Maria Elvira Vieira Pereira Leite | F    | 15.01.2019 | Home, Matosinhos          | Painting                        | 80+       |
| Maria da Purificação Lopes Fontes | F   | 22.01.2019 | Art Studio, Porto         | Sculpture                       | 80+       |
| Maria José Valente Ferreira | F      | 22.01.2019 | Art Studio, Porto         | Painting                        | 80+       |
| Leonilda Princelpelina dos Santos | F | 14.12.2018 | School of Design, Matosinhos | Painting              | 80+       |
| Carlos Marques             | M      | 11.12.2018 | Art Studio, Sobreira      | Sculpture                       | 75+       |
| José Paiva                 | M      | 17.12.2018 | Faculty of Fine Arts, Porto | Painting                      | 65+       |
| Lima de Carvalho           | M      | 31.01.2019 | Art Studio, Lisbon        | Painting                        | 80+       |
| Rodrigo Cabral             | M      | 13.12.2018 | Jerónimo Restaurante, Porto | Painting, Sculpture            | 80+       |
| Zulmiro de Carvalho        | M      | 07.01.2019 | Faculty of Fine Arts, Porto | Painting                      | 75+       |
| Pedro Rocha                | M      | 06.02.2019 | Faculty of Fine Arts, Porto | Painting                      | 75+       |
| Mário Américo              | M      | 25.01.2019 | Art Studio, Porto.         | Painting                        | 80+       |
| Domingos Pinho             | M      | 17.11.2019 | Art Studio, Porto         | Painting                        | 80+       |
| Paula Soares               | F      | 08.04.2019 | Art Studio, Porto         | Painting                        | 60+       |
| António Mendanha           | M      | 10.01.2019 | School of Design, Matosinhos | Painting              | 65+       |
| Manuela Bronze             | F      | 04.01.2019 | Art Studio, Porto         | Painting, Scenography            | 60+       |
| Sobral Centeno             | M      | 20.12.2018 | Art Studio, S. Mamede Infesta | Painting              | 65+       |
| João Nunes                 | M      | 26.02.2019 | Art Studio, Serra da Arga | Communication Design           | 75+       |
| Isabel Cabral              | F      | 28.12.2018 | Serpente Gallery, Porto   | Painting, Sculpture             | 75+       |
| Haydée De Francesco        | F      | 21.01.2019 | Art Studio, Porto         | Sculpture                       | 80+       |
| João Barata Feyo           | M      | 13.02.2019 | Art Studio, Vila Nova de Gaia | Sculpture.        | 80+       |
| Helena Almeida Santos      | F      | 07.01.2019 | Home, Porto               | Painting                        | 80+       |
| Antero Pinto               | M      | 10.01.2019 | School of Design, Matosinhos | Painting              | 75+       |
| Maria José Aguiar          | F      | 14.01.2019 | Home, Leça de Palmeira    | Painting                        | 75+       |
| Helena Abreu e Lima        | F      | 23.01.2019 | Home, Porto               | Painting                        | 80+       |
| Lucia Matos                | F      | 24.01.2019 | Faculty of Fine Arts, Porto | Philosophy         | 60+       |
| Graça Morais               | F      | 31.01.2019 | Art Studio, Lisbon        | Painting                        | 75+       |
| Ana Campos                 | F      | 27.06.2019 | Faculty of Fine Arts, Porto | Painting                      | 75+       |
| João Machado               | M      | 01.03.2019 | Art Studio, Porto         | Sculpture                       | 80+       |
| Jorge Pinheiro             | M      | 15.04.2019 | Art Studio, Lisbon        | Painting                        | 85+       |
| Heitor Alvelos             | M      | 13.03.2021 | ID + Studio, UPTEC        | Communication Design           | 55+       |
| Mário Bismarck             | M      | 05.04.2021 | Art Studio, Porto         | Painting                        | 60+       |
| Francisco Providência      | M      | 09.05.2022 | Art Studio, Porto         | Communication Design           | 60+       |

(continued)
Table 1. Continued.

| Interviewee             | Gender | Date       | Location             | Subject area | Age group |
|-------------------------|--------|------------|----------------------|--------------|-----------|
| Adriano Nazareth        | M      | 12.12.2020 | Faculty of Fine Arts, Porto | Painting     | 75+       |
| Alexandre Falcão        | M      | 07.03.2019 | Faculty of Fine Arts, Porto | Painting     | 75+       |
| António Madureira       | M      | 06.05.2019 | Home, Porto          | Architecture | 80+       |
| António Quadros Ferreira| M      | 03.02.2019 | Faculty of Fine Arts, Porto | Painting     | 75+       |
| Filomena Gonçalves      | F      | 07.01.2020 | Home, Porto          | Architecture | 75+       |
| Francisco Laranjo       | M      | 07.06.2020 | Art Studio, Porto    | Painting     | 70+       |
| Henrique Pichel         | M      | 12.11.2020 | Home, Porto          | Painting     | 80+       |
| Jaime Silva             | M      | 06.06.2021 | Fine Arts Society, Lisbon | Painting     | 75+       |
| Joaquim Machado         | M      | 27.07.2020 | Art Studio, Porto    | Painting     | 80+       |
| José Paiva              | M      | 11.10.2019 | Faculty of Fine Arts, Porto | Painting     | 65+       |
| Manuela Bacelar         | F      | 08.10.2020 | Home, Porto          | Painting     | 80+       |
| Mário Moura             | M      | 16.12.2020 | Home, Porto          | Architecture | 80+       |

Source: authors.

Figure 5. Interview with Artist and Educator Manuela Bronze at her Studio in Porto on the 18th of March, 2019. Photography by Cláudia Lima.

aesthetics, and content, overwhelmingly new to students/participants up to that point. Furthermore, whenever possible, students were encouraged to engage in the actual process of craft production, however briefly: this proved to be an essential component of the embodiment of knowledge contained in these techniques (Figure 6; Table 2). A series of publications and an online
repository bear testimony to the collaborations, and as such, are now readily available as course materials. Furthermore, the hybridisation of materials and repertoires between the four case studies has led to a range of exploratory products whose business value is being considered in association with start-up specialists. Finally, the research team has been able to help identify specific issues in the process of communicating these four distinct realities, thus contributing to a renewed sense of identity, visibility, and purpose.

With former academics, interviews gave way to workshops furthering biographical and iconographic content: each student became responsible for producing original content deriving from an interviewed individual (Figure 7). Portraits edited audio visual content and quotes became source material for a range of exhibitions and moderated public sessions. These, in turn, became key elements in the establishment of inter-generational ‘weak ties’, where each student had the opportunity to bond with the older designer/artist they oversaw portraying/quoting - a bond with the potential to recover the concept of mentorship and further possible thematic networks that might emerge as a consequence of inter-generational affinities.

The unearthed and produced content has become the source material for public exhibitions, a Summer School, and a projected archive in cooperation with the Arts Library at the University of Porto.

Students and staff tended to perceive these experiments as enriching the scope of possibilities for skill acquisition, and even future professional viability. Furthermore, a broadening of conventional borders attributed to contemporary design, incorporating craft, artistic expression, and analogue outputs,
| Partner    | Brief description                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Status                                                                                       | AA contributions                                                                                           | Associated educational activities                                                                                                                                 |
|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ALMALAGÜES | Rural, self-sustained association in Central Portugal, specialising in millenary weaving techniques.                                                                                                               | Struggling with viability due to lack of generational renewal in producers and limited product circulation. Supported by local governance, albeit with limited expression. | Product miscegenation with shoe industry; brand awareness; self-perception; political visibility.            | Weaving practice; participant observation; audiovisual documentation; packaging workshops.                                                                                                                                  |
| DAMASCENO  | Family-run, 53-year-old typography shop in Coimbra, with historical ties to counter-cultural movements, activism, and local cultural expression.                                                                                                                                   | Maintains viability through a balance between traditional typographic production for niche markets, and a gradual renewal of technical resources. Continued involvement with local design courses and projects. | Essay for monograph celebrating 50 years.                                                                   | Manual typographic workshop and resulting posters; audiovisual documentation; public exhibition/installation re-purposing industrial leftovers/residues;         |
| GAZETE     | Small, independent unit in Porto, dedicated to manual production of tiles since 2017; organises workshops teaching techniques and providing tourists and locals with the experience of tile production.                                                                          | Implemented a successful model for preservation of local tiles, a tradition in peril due to closure of factories. Growing involvement with local entities in façade restoration and cultural valuation. | Brand awareness; self-perception; curatorship of traditional motifs; aesthetic and semantic renewal.        | Workshops blending digital media and analogue tiles; urban ethnography; masters dissertation in branding and illustration for tiles; public exhibition/installation re-purposing industrial leftovers/residues; |
| NETOS      | Family-run shoe factory operating for over 60 years in the industrialised, greater Porto area. Younger generation of ‘Netos’ family is now in the start-up business.                                                                                                         | Viability largely ensured via fulfilment of orders for foreign brands.                        | Aesthetic renewal; self-perception; archival and historical content - storytelling, branding, advertising.  | Public exhibition/installation re-purposing industrial leftovers/residues.                                                                                                                                           |

Source: authors.
was welcome as means of further capacitation. Both participating educators and students mentioned that these projects changed their perceptions in regards to curricula, both conventional and the ones that emerged - for instance, in how the projects shed light on the invisibility of local actors and practices, while providing a sustainable framework to incorporate this local patrimony.

Following the successful completion of both projects in 2021, their conclusions and confirmations now form the basis of subsequent enquiry: efforts are currently focused on the curricular consolidation of tested pedagogical methods among participating higher education institutions, the furthering of taxonomies towards the launch of a public archive, and, to a degree, scalability/replicability of local design ecosystems/dynamics/narratives in further geo-cultural contexts.

**Analysis**

Pursued under a networked perspective, the specific ties currently under development with various Portuguese design schools and local narratives/agents are naturally conducive to a logic of simultaneous contrast and complementarity: Schools may offer a positively differentiated curricular content
based on their own ecosystem and may resort to one another’s competences and resources when needed and appropriate. Furthermore, the contrast/complementarity logic may become a motto for research-related dynamics: as a prime example, the Schools identified in Figure 8 have congregated their design research competencies in a shared Research Center (ID+, Research Institute in Design, Media and Culture), where critical mass attains further density and scale while fostering tangible opportunities for complementary know-how. We argue that this model of cooperation is scalable and may therefore ultimately come to represent a gradual step towards the aforementioned global network.

As an example of tangible dynamics at work, AA has congregated researchers from Schools 1, 2 and 3, while WT has congregated researchers from Schools 1 and 3, as well as researchers from three other design schools in the region. Furthermore, as an example of educational cooperation, a joint PhD program is offered in cooperation between Schools 1 and 2.

A further example is an early-stage cooperation project in preparation between researchers at ID+ and the Innovation School of the Glasgow School of Art: while acknowledging irreducible socio-cultural specificities deriving from their respective geographical locations, their shared vocation in regards to work with local crafts may facilitate the creation of a channel of reciprocal information, consultancy and validation.

These various instances of validation bode well for further, stable curricular insertion of detailed recounts by local design professionals and strengthening of reciprocal knowledge between a design school and its immediate ecosystem, and between design schools themselves. We posit that this dynamic of local reciprocity and care may ultimately become an actual duty of design schools, to be replicated/‘fractalized’ and customised according to

Figure 8. A map of the Northern region of Portugal, outlining three design schools that converge in a joint research center and PhD program. 1. School of Arts of the University of Porto: Design BA created in 1974; strong ties with Fine Arts, Engineering, and cultural agents; recent investment in RandD with start-ups. 2. Communication and Art Department, University of Aveiro: Design BA created in 1995; strong ties with local industry, namely ceramics, shoemaking, and fishing. 3. Higher School of Design, Polytechnic Institute of Câvado and Ave: Design BA created in 2015; strong ties with local industry, namely furniture and shoes; primarily market and job-oriented education. Image by the authors.
further local, regional and national contexts, pointing toward a shared endeavour on an international scale. This approach, we argue, may contribute to the plurality in design education by ensuring that the inscription and relevance of each design narrative is attained through close, rooted scrutiny and systematisation (Figure 9). Contextual narratives can subsequently circulate as needed for pedagogical ends, among a wealth of knowledge that is rooted locally but can travel globally.

In essence, what is being proposed is that the replacement of the former, univocal design narrative with a fractal multitude of perspectives and interwoven protagonists is best attained through a bottom-up approach, rather than any attempt at regulation on a higher level, itself a hypothetical ambition in contradiction with the premises of diversification and empowerment hereby argued for.

**Conclusions and strategic outlook**

The present article has addressed and substantiated the need to survey, expand, detail, and diversify design narratives, with historical repercussions, educational value, and potential economic impact. Prior research has been conducted throughout the span of two years; this research addressed the

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**Figure 9.** An exhibition visitor views a contextual timeline of Portuguese artists and designers interviewed within the scope of WT. Design by Eliana Penedos-Santiago; photography by Cláudia Lima.
issue of narrative diversification and activation by developing field work in the Northern region of Portugal, namely through interviews with design practitioners and industrial/crafts association representatives, as well as the collection, analysis and taxonomy of specimens and artefacts, and mediation of contexts of production and education hybridising distinct skills and generations. Preliminary findings in these case studies have revealed a wealth of intrinsic, context-specific design skills and resources, as well as aesthetics, iconography, and life stories that in themselves possess the potential for added value to local and regional production.

The above actions and findings point towards a series of advantages in fostering plurality in design narratives and education:

- The current, multidisciplinary discussion on socio-cultural diversification, as well as its concern over formerly fixed models of historical narrative, may greatly benefit from the contributions of design.
- Reciprocally, design may benefit in continue its own endeavour towards the recognition of its own plurality, namely by employing higher education and curricular content as prime tools for the fostering and dissemination of multi-perspectivity (Figure 10).
- A purposeful differentiation among design schools according to their local and regional narratives may lead to the exponential enrichment of design education through the consolidation of a complementary web of empirical, contextual knowledge.
- Additionally, the above differentiation may be obtained by strengthening working ties with local agents, particularly crafts and industry, through curricular content and activity; preliminary research on this front has revealed promising reciprocal gains.

Strategically, the present study points towards the following:

- As a local/regional approach, the contrast-complementarity model may be rehearsed as an international web of design schools engaging with their respective local partners and narratives, while strengthening complementary cooperation within the proposed Design School Network.
- This objective is a longer-term endeavour, and further preliminary research is needed in order to gradually establish a first network of design schools. At this stage, the research is looking into how a network of Portuguese Schools may build upon this proposed model of reciprocal contrast-complementarity.
- An international network is likely to be the following logical next step. A dialogue in this respect is welcome by the authors, particularly within the framework of the New European Bauhaus (2021): its motto and the
strategic scope of the present research clearly share an ethos of ‘bottom up’ re-evaluation and participation.

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*Figure 10.* First session of a Conference Series within the scope of the Wisdom Transfer project, aiming at the aforementioned multi-perspectivity: Porto, 7 November 2019. Guest speakers: Carlos Carreiro, Helena Abreu e Lima and Sobral Centeno. Photography by Cláudia Lima.
Notes on contributors

Heitor Alvelos: PhD Design (Royal College of Art, 2003); MFA (School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 1992). Associate Professor at the University of Porto, where he directs the PhD degree in Design and the Unexpected Media Lab at IDþResearch Institute for Design, Media and Culture. Current research interests include design pedagogy, multidisciplinary networks, the ecology of perception, and new media studies.

Susana Barreto: Ph.D. Design (Central Saint Martins - University of the Arts London, 2007). Currently an Assistant Professor at the University of Porto after previous working experiences in the United Kingdom and Macau, an insight that fueled her interest in global and local designs. Research interests converge on the role of ethics in visual communication, design and crime, visual methodologies, and life stories of Portuguese designers.

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