LEARN[IN] II Digital Learning Spaces

Digital constraints and opportunities.
Reorganizing teaching procedures in time of emergency.

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Resume

In the view of the emergency determined by the Corona Pandemic, higher education institutions were forced to review their practices both in terms of institutional organization as well as the approaches and methodologies applied to the teaching/learning process. A change dictated by the urgency and that implied the revision of an entire mental and relational framework questioning daily practices taken for granted.

Previous certainties have collapsed.

In this context, and despite the initial resistance and anxiety from all of us, namely at the level of the academic formation with a strong technical and artistic character, unknown resources we experimented, evidencing opportunities that must not be neglect. This does not mean that we surrender to a model of education technologically mediated: we strongly believe in the imperative of a physical and face to face relationship between the actors engaged in the teaching and learning process (comprising students, teachers and all supporting staff), but still, some opportunities are glimpsed.

At the beginning of the pandemic and the decree of the state of emergency, the School of Architecture of the University of Minho sent home 600 students from all its study cycles from bachelor, integrated master's, master's to doctoral degrees. Suddenly we were confronted with interrupted daily routines, suspended relationships and an abrupt remodeling of the programed classes, as well as a whole myriad of activities that gravitate around these such as exhibitions, workshops, field trips, visits, open classes, etc.. And this, just for mention the institutional activities, leaving aside, and in addition to these, the

football or volleyball games in the school lawn, student dinners, parties and long conversations at the campus bar terrace.

The progressive resumption of learning activities, now at a distance, made it possible to resume relationships and networks, namely through activities that went beyond the strict scope of the classes and allowed to open the school activities to a broader community. It is the case of Open Classes and the PhD seminars that, being online (and taking advantage of the opportunity to bring other teachers or liberal architects, artists as designers into the school), called the participation of students from different levels and courses and even from other institutions. The possibility of sharing works under development on the school web site and social networks (exposing achievements beyond the classroom group), and the promotion of social events, such as NEA_Share, in which the nucleus of students promoted the sharing of readings and research suggestions from teachers, students and alumni, alongside moments of conversation or even online workshops.

Apart from the general state of exhaustion, affecting our psychic capacity and then our performance towards work and others, we learned a lot about what we did, how we do it and how we relate being obliged to stop and questioning: what do we want for the future to come.

This was indeed a challenge, launched in one of the first of the many meetings among the school's teachers. We launch ourselves into experiences that otherwise we would not have the courage, or opportunity, to embrace. Resuming, to the rigid and standardized curricula we were offered an opportunity to test and rehearse new frontiers, themes, methodologies, new ways of working and relating.

And that was what we did, although in an intuitive way rather than based upon a conscious reformulation. There have been certainly losses from the published syllabus or even of the envisioned level of training. However, most importantly we kept on Learning and Teaching.
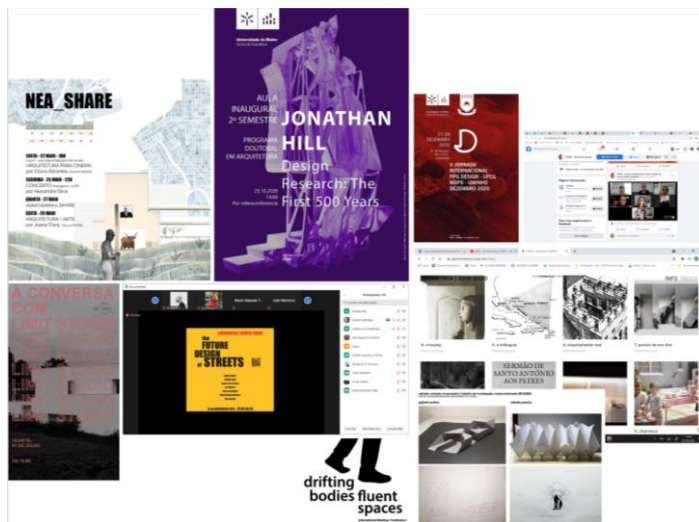
Strengthened, from all this process, the School emerges as a democratic and equitized place, a cornerstone of the social construction desired by all of us. It is precisely about the threat to this essential dimension of the School, rather than any shortcomings and gaps in the teaching and learning process, that we must reflect on the role of the school and the opportunities placed by digital media.

At the end we are even more convinced that school is a place of collaborative relations, now, and due to the circumstances, more demanding and challenging than ever.