

LEARNING BY WALKING. EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN THE OUTDOORS TO DEVELOP A (DESIGN FOR) SUSTAINABILITY MINDSET

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Abstract

The island of Madeira is attracting an increasing number of tourists from all over the world who are drawn to it by the lush diversity of its natural subtropical landscapes and ecosystems. With the local economy focusing most of its investments on the tourism sector, the island's biodiversity is already being endangered due to the increasing pressure on the balance between the cohabitation of humans and other living species (Bertolotti & Vezzani, 2021). Islands like Madeira are vulnerable territories and, as such, require the application of new methods and tools to help them transition towards regenerative and distributive systems that would make local economic growth more sustainable and ethically just towards nature, communities and ecosystems.

This talk will share some of the learning experiences we have been developing since 2018 through several international design research actions on the island, and in our teaching at the BA in Design at the University of Madeira. These include a series of exercises structured to train the designer's ability to change perspective with a post-anthropocentric sensitivity (Braidotti, 2016; Puig Della Bellacasa, 2017; Escobar, 2018; Fuad-Luke, 2022). Living and working on a peripheral and island territory allows us to observe and reflect on the challenge of sustainability and sustainable development from a unique angle. From an island perspective it is easier to think about boundaries, and therefore to visualise the aspects of circularity, interrelation and interdependence (Borgnino, 2022). In the context of design education for sustainability we consider it to be fundamental to reflect on the complexity of interrelations that exist among different natural elements and ecosystems. For this reason, our methods are based on the idea of learning outdoors in contact with nature, and bringing together people from different disciplinary backgrounds to develop, through the action of walking, a shared consciousness about challenges to a specific landscape and its communities (human, plant and animal). Finally, the talk is an opportunity to reflect with the audience on some of the challenges we encounter as (design) educators trying to switch towards a more bio-inclusive approach that would allow future generations to contemplate and build a more sustainable and just world.

Biography

Elisa Bertolotti works with storytelling, the moving image, and communication design. With a PhD and postdoc from Politecnico di Milano, she is currently teaching at the University of Madeira, Portugal. She considers that listening, poetry, having fun and collaborative making, play a central role in her work. At this time, Elisa is experimenting with ways of changing points of view in design in a post anthropocentric perspective, through forms of collaboration with different disciplinary fields, and using walking and movement outdoors as ways of learning.

Valentina Vezzani has got a PhD in Design, and a MSc in Service Design. She is Assistant Professor in Design at University of Madeira and co-founder of Paco Design Collaborative. Her research and teaching interests are in the field of strategic design, service design, sustainable development, social innovation. She believes in collaboration and participation as fundamental tools to solve today's problems, and design as a creative approach to build communication bridges.