The historical trajectory of the pioneers of design education in Brazil: ESDI/ UERJ and ED/UEMG

DIAS, M. Regina Álvares / Drª / State University of Minas Gerais / Brazil
SAFAR, Giselle Hissa / MSc. / State University of Minas Gerais / Brazil
AVELAR, Johelma Pires / Esp. / State University of Minas Gerais / Brazil

Industrial design / Design / History / Teaching / Pioneers

This current paper presents a historical survey of the creation of two pioneering institutions in the teaching of Design, in Brazil, the School of Design / State University of Minas Gerais (formerly Art Foundation of Minas Gerais) and the Superior School of Industrial Design / State University of Rio de Janeiro, focusing on aspects of the context of their regions, who encouraged or led to its creation, in order to identify and confront their different genesis.

1. Introduction

The first courses of Design in Brazil began in the mid-twentieth century, in line with the policy of modernization, developed by Juscelino Kubitschek and the cultural effervescence, then created by the maturation of the modernist artistic conceptions.

Over the past twenty years, the importance of design as an economic factor of development was gradually consolidated, which increased the demand for vocational training and led to an exponential growth of design courses in the country.

Recovering the pioneering initiatives of the Teaching of Design both in Minas Gerais and in Rio de Janeiro is not just to recognize the merit of those who supported the bold proposal at that time, but mainly, to create subsidies for future generations under the merit of those who supported the bold proposal at that time.

The School of Design is one of the units of the State University of Minas Gerais and offers undergraduate courses in Interior Design, Graphic Design, Product Design and BA in Visual Arts. It also offers postgraduate courses in Jewellery Design, Furniture Design and Management Design for Micro and Small Enterprises and maintains, in partnership with UFOP and CETEC, the Masters’ Doctoral REDEMAT in Materials Engineering, as well as its own Master in Design. In addition to teaching activities, the School of Design develops research and extension activities through its Centers, Laboratories and workshops.

The School of Design/UEMG has a history closely related to the history and to the development of design in Brazil. Founded in 1955 as a School of Fine Arts, was attached to the existent School of Music of the U.M.A. - Art University of Minas Gerais, whose opening date is 1954. The U.M.A. was the result of associations that pointed the design in Minas Gerais. Known and respected nationally and internationally the School of Design has been adapting the teaching of design to the permanent changes of context and demands of the dynamic characteristics inherent to the discipline.

The School of Industrial Design (ESDI) of Rio de Janeiro is considered the first institution to offer a design course as a University level in Brazil. Inaugurated on July 10, 1963, by the governor at that time, Carlos Lacerda, the School has a history closely linked to political changes that Rio de Janeiro passed through in the 60s, especially the climate of cultural effervescence due to the economy growth of the 50s. For its creation, important personalities converged to the world of politics and culture of the country and abroad.

1 Brazil has now, according to data from INEP, 461 design courses spread over 23 states in the country, and features 36 courses in Minas Gerais and 24 courses in Rio de Janeiro.

2 The State University of Minas Gerais – UEMG, a public entity, was created by art. 81 of the Transitory Provisions of the Constitution of the State of Minas Gerais, in 1989, in the form of Local Authority, with the presidency in Belo Horizonte (capital city of MG) and Units located in different regions of Minas Gerais.
The historical trajectory of the pioneers of design education in Brazil: ESDI/UERJ and ED/UEMG

The school was designed in an well done plan by Alexandre Wollner and Karl Heinz Bergmiller from their previous experiences with projects like the Technical School of Creation designed by Tomas Maldonado for the Museum of Modern Art - MAM in the late 50s and the experimental graphic course by Aloisio Magalhães and Alexandre Wollner at MAM in 1961.

The history of Brazilian design is a matter of few publications, having been quoted only by Bardi (1986), Bomfim (1998), Bonsiepe (1997), Cardoso (2008), Lima (1995), Souza (2001). The design education in Brazil has been the subject of some publications, like Couto (2008), Dias (2004), Witter (1985) and Wollner (2002). It should also be noted further publications on design education in Latin America described by Fernandez.

Regarding the path followed by those two institutions studied, the School of Design-UEMG was only treated in Aguiar (2006), Laper (1991) and Teixeira (2004). On the other hand, the School of Industrial Design-UERJ was widely described in Niemeyer (2000) and Souza (2001).

The reason for this discrepancy may be caused by the lack of historical studies, promotion and publication of the institution of Minas Gerais. The creation of the ESdi by that time joined people with higher academic and cultural influences as the alumni from Ulm School [HFG], in Germany, the Royal College of Art in London and Brazilian intellectuals, such as Carl Heinz Bergmiller, Alexandre Wollner, Aloisio Magalhães, Thomas Maldonado, Patrick Whitney, Carlos Lessa, Max Bill, Gui Bonsiepe and Lauro Cavalcanti.

2. Methodology

This research, by its nature, was characterized as an applied research, which, according to Silva (2005), aimed to bring forth knowledge for practical application and directed to the solution of specific problems involving truths and local interests.

As to the objectives, it was framed in the characteristics of descriptive and exploratory research. The first aimed to describe the characteristics of a particular phenomenon or the establishment of relationships between variables, and, according to Gil (1991), generally takes the form of survey. The second - exploratory research - aimed at providing greater acquaintance with the problem, in order to make it explicit.

Regarding the focus of the problem, the research was characterized as qualitative, by addressing the interpretation of phenomena and the assignment of meaning. In this case, it did not require the use of statistical techniques, but the collection of data sources in the "natural" phenomenon, which means, in the institutions studied.

The methodology adopted in this project was not restricted to isolated analysis of the phenomenon of the creation of both institutions surveyed. Specific information about the creation story of each of the institutions was confronted with many and varied aspects of society at that time so that one can have the real dimension of their innovation.

To achieve the objective mentioned above, it was adopted as a technical procedure, according to Gil (1991), a literature review, document research and case study. The literature review was developed from previously published material, consisting mainly of books, journal articles and material available on the Internet. The document research included the collected material that has not received analytical treatment, such as historical records, statistics, photographs, documents, primary and secondary information relevant to the issues under study. In the case of this research it was necessary documentary research in both institutions studied in Belo Horizonte [MG] and in Rio de Janeiro [RJ]. Finally, the project enabled the comparison of the factors that might explain differences and similarities in the experience of more than 50 years of the two institutions.

3. Beginning of design in Brazil – historical context

To understand how the teaching and the profession of design began in Brazil, it is necessary to provide historical background that announce and contextualize the actions which identified that time (Figure 1).

"Design is one of the few professions that were established more as an instruction, through schools, than as a practice", (SOUZA, 2001, p. 11). This particularity brings relevance to analyze how the Design course is taught. Understand how was the creation of the first schools and how the curriculums were developed and put into practice are relevant to understand the emergence of Brazilian design.

The euphoria of development

In Brazil, the 1950’s is known as the “Golden Years”. Such designation may be explained by the great economic and industrial growth occurred at that time. The term is directly related to the Kubitschek government, which pledged to bring development to Brazil, carrying 50 years of progress in just five of government, the famous “Fifty years in five”.

In the years of Kubitschek presidency (1956-1961), the country had what can be called the “Euphoria of development”, which means that Brazil was enjoying industrialization and cultural and economic progress. The population was eager for consumption, derived from capital accumulation and the increased purchasing power of the middle class.

During this period, Brazil went through a transition started before in the administration of Vargas, in which government policy encouraged industrialization to create conditions to consolidate the industry assumed as an important sector of the economy. The low quality of domestic products did not meet the new demands of the population and there was lack of knowledge of the Brazilian industrialists about Design. Part of the São Paulo elite
foresaw the need for training professionals with appropriate qualifications to supply the demand for product design and visual communication, originated from increased economic activity and springing national industry (NIEMEYER, 2000).

The creation of the first schools was supported in the beginning by the idea of bringing national identity to the products. According to Niemeyer (2000, p. 93), "The orientation of the courses was basically pragmatic, market-oriented work".

The institutionalization of the academic education

The Law of Directives and Bases of National Education, number 4.024/61, in its art. 9 followed by the art. 26 of Law 5.540/1968 from the University Reform Law, has given the Federal Council of Education the authority to fix the curriculum of undergraduate courses. This measure resulted mandatory compliance of the "Minimum professionalization curriculum" from each of the undergraduate courses in the country or those which would be created from that date on, including their qualifications, regulated through resolutions of that Board, valid for any nationally educational system (BRASIL, Ministry of Education).

The Minimum Curriculum, according to Couto (2011), directed primarily to the professional practice and limited by strict structures, led to a fragmented academic education lacking in flexibility, which, in most cases, did not follow the social, technological and scientific development process of society. This context resulted in a widening gap of graduated students in relation to the competent performance required in post-academic activities. According to the model of the Minimum Curriculum, innovation and creativity in the institutions were inhibited. There was no space or freedom to reformulations, since the curriculum mandatory components and content detail required by the resolution of the Federal Council of Education, was pre-established nationally.

4. ESDK/UFRJ X ED/UEMG

The teaching of Industrial Design in Brazil had as its beginning two isolated moments which were understood independently, one of them gave rise to the ESDK in Rio de Janeiro. The other took place in Minas Gerais, with the recognition of FUMA (actual School of design) by the state government.

Regarding the creation of the ESDK, it is evident that much happened more by the will of Rio de Janeiro's governor Carlos Lacerda than from a real need of that time, since the teaching of design was very convenient to his political project. The proposal of the ESDK had the intention of forming, with the first classes, an elite group that would be responsible for the implementation of the profession in Brazil. This task began to be accomplished within the course itself, which took on the process of endogenous formation of its professors. Students, after graduating, were hired as teachers making it possible to breed and crystallize the culture and knowledge developed there. At the same time, the endogenous opened space for the maintenance of power structures which would be highlighting and emphasizing certain knowledge, a favorable situation to the establishment of a hegemonic thinking.
The historical trajectory of the pioneers of design education in Brazil: ESDI/UERJ and ED/UEMG

The government’s action behind the ESDI also caused failures, such as the political favoritism in the choice of some colleagues, in the place of better qualified teaching staff, which certainly produced injury to the school. Proof of this can be seen today, since almost a third part of teachers at ESDI has only under graduation and 57% of all teachers are graduated in the school. Another negative point during the creation of ESDI was the definition of a curriculum with bases directly related from Ulm School, which did not fit in the reality of the Brazilian production sector.

The pedagogical model adopted by the ESDI, based on the concept of learning by doing, according to Niemeyer (2000), would have weakened the theoretical dimension of education. By investing more in labor practice the school “[...] took a dogmatic character, not allowing to teach the students a critical view, neither from content view, nor from the education, or the role to be followed by the future designer,” (NIEMEYER, 2000, p. 119).

In addition to this factor, the lack of teaching experience of teachers, coupled with the relationship between student and teacher based on the master, officer and apprentice system, legacy of the Bauhaus, by Ulm, mainly applied in the project teaching.

The School of Design opened in 1953 as the Art University of Minas Gerais and was the result of which, as told by Clovis Salgado, a “nationalistic, romantic and idealizing idea at the time. Their creators were mostly young graduates in architecture, lacking of professional and cultural experiences. They were young and were enthusiastic about the experience, short but efficient of Bauhaus. They adopted, therefore, the original ideology of this movement as a guide.

It is important to point out that both the School of Design/UEMG and ESDI/UERJ present, along their respective paths, the same structural, educational and professional training problems, as well as the same kind of victories and successes. After all, ESDI and FUMA were created in distinct time and means, but committed of the same desire to build and institutionalize the design as a profession and effective activity that can add value and improve the quality of users lives, and also meet demands of the industrial sector.

Currently, as it can be seen, by studying the educational objectives and lines of ESDI and School of Design, only recently the theoretical knowledge of the design has been outstanding. In both institutions, teaching was for a long time developed the same way as the Bauhaus and Ulm. In this practice, a teacher assists the student project practices and the knowledge is grounded in large part, only in practice. This change can be seen in the fact that only recently both schools established master’s degree in design.

5. Conclusion

The teaching of Design in Brazil was influenced directly by the School of Ulm, and indirectly by the Bauhaus. The process of installing an undergraduate degree in Design was not simple. Despite the efforts and planning, some other courses, which could have been pioneers, remained only on paper. Thus, the later curriculums were based on these models that were never put into practice and, in turn, were also influenced by the teaching of German schools.

It can be concluded that the culture of aesthetic repetition from the foreign practice has been enhanced in the implementation of design schools in Brazil. The poor adaptation of teaching standards and the presence of German teachers unwilling to teach in accordance with the historical reality of the country, led to an ingenuous acceptance of the first graduation students in Brazil to those styles. What could have been tools for creating a national identity became a hindrance to it.

It is still limited the effective participation and dialogue among students and graduates of the Universities of design together with the Brazilian production sectors, especially when considered in industrial parks and productive market. Only in the last two decades, design teaching in Brazil began to become more effective to the needs of the country. However, it is still far from determining the identity of Brazil on this issue, not only by foreign influences on design professionals, but also on the country’s cultural diversity.

Observing the trajectory of two historic institutions reveals the need of changing the paradigms of the training of design professionals, stimulating the formation of not only individuals with technical and projectual skills, but mainly with critical skills that could contribute to the definition of the designer role and, hence, with the definition of the profession’s position considering the market.

Acknowledgment

In particular, we thank the Foundation for Research Support of Minas Gerais (FAPEMIG) for financial support for this research.

References


Bibliography

Design Frontiers: Territories, Concepts, Technologies

About the authors

M. Regina Álvares Dias is a designer, teacher and researcher at the School of Design at the State University of Minas Gerais. She is a PhD in Engineering and Knowledge Management, Federal University of Santa Catarina [UFSC], and Master of Production Engineering at UFSC. Has 30 years experience as a designer and teacher, having worked in the following institutions and companies: Brazilian Laboratory of Industrial Design [LBDI], School of Design [UEMG], Unisul [SC], Itautec [SP], Agency for the Development of Ceramic Design - A2D/ UFSC, Paradesign, Ethermídia and PixelDesign. <regina.alvares@gmail.com>

Giselle Hissa Safar is an architect, teacher and researcher at the School of Design at the University of Minas Gerais. In the School of Design was the coordinator of the Product Design Course (2000/2004), Director (2004/2008) and is currently Extension Coordinator. She teaches History of Design in general or specific (furniture, jewelry, fashion), in specialization courses in the country and is a consultant on developing projects with emphasis on the integration of design in micro and small enterprises and training social centers. <giselle.safar@gmail.com>

Johelma Pires de Avelar is designer, teacher and researcher at the School of Design at the State University of Minas Gerais. She worked on projects for the insertion of design in small enterprises at Design and Enterprises Center at School of Design/UEMG. She also worked in design offices like Quantum Design [MG], developing products for healthcare. She is currently developing projects and researches in service design and design for health. <johpires@yahoo.com.br>