ABSTRACT

The following paper describes a participative study conducted with a voluntary group of design students. A collaborative, multilevel, local and open-ended group have created a design focused digital platform called Cazuela. The platform is administrated by students and primarily aims at student audience. At the core of Cazuela lays an action research that has involved over 30 students, two researchers and different peers for almost two years. Its main objective is to develop a tool that influences the behaviour of young creative practitioners and observe the results as their identity as creative professionals is evolving. The principal hypothesis that gives the fundament for the study is that the definition of self-identity of creative individuals may provoke the change of their context by nourish the condition of a local creative industry. The paper explores the scope and importance of key areas of students’ self-definition process: knowledge, professional experience, context and impact awareness and organizational culture. The principal factors of behaviours that may potentially influence it will be informed by findings. Collaborative approach to designing proper environment for development of these behaviours gives a hypothetical platform for a "behavioural meme" that may empower the participants in order to arrange an organization that may naturally evolve and spread the attitudinal change, and as a result, positively influence the local community.

Keywords: local creative community, behavioural-meme, meta-design, design, transition, awareness.

INTRODUCTION

Following paper describes the methodology and findings of a one year and a half action research conducted in Puebla, Mexico. Main objective of the study was to determinate key factors that enable collaborative creativity and action-taking attitude of young designers in a process of creative community development in order to extend the social and cultural impact of the community. Theoretical framework of the study is based on a definition of meta-design and meta-memes (Wood, 2003), the transition theory as interpreted by Doordan (2013) and the importance of creativity and collaboration in the local economy development (Florida, 2002).
From Students To Designers: How To Co-Create A Behavioural-Meme Within A Local Creative Industry.

S. Ulicka and E. Cruz

2 CONTEXT DEFINITION

Puebla is known for its unique architecture, churches, furniture design, talavera, its vast rich cuisine and applications of their natural resources. Currently, according to ProMéxico - the federal government agency responsible for coordinating strategies aimed at strengthening Mexico's participation in the international economy - Puebla stands out for its “great richness and extensive experience in design: textile, automotive, graphic, architectural, industrial, jewellery, etc., offering very specific design elements at national and global level” (ProMéxico, 2013). Mexican federal government defined the City of Puebla as a future Design Capital of the country. This project aims to increase the value and influence of local creative economy exploiting strengths defined mainly as: rich cultural heritage, presence of established industries that have been present in the area for more than 100 years, cultural landscape marked by the design and architecture, considered World Heritage by UNESCO since 1987. At the same time, due to its location, Puebla is the university enclave in the southeast of the country and has campuses of the most prestigious universities in the country. It concentrates 40 Universities and Educational Centers that offer more than 70¹ professional education programs specialized in industries such as architecture, interior architecture, industrial design, graphic design, fashion design, automotive design, digital design, animation design, and advertising design.

However, during the definition of Puebla Design Capital program, one of the principal weaknesses of the project is defined as a lack of collaboration and alienation of objectives between the triple helix of: governmental institutions, academic institutions and representatives of the industry. There is also a latent need for cultural change of communication structures in order to “promote a different work culture in the Puebla society focused on creativity, responsibility, aesthetics and value creation in all its activities; both professional, as in the everyday.” Other weak points defined on the axis industry-academy are: low innovation culture and low openness and flexibility to new opportunities (Promexico, 2010).

Despite of the fact that governmental perception of the creative industry condition in Puebla is quite optimistic, there are facts that are suggesting the opposite. Some of the biggest industries, textile one for example, are shrinking and losing competitive advantage. It used to be one of the strongest industry in the country for more than 30 years, but now it is struggling to keep the external changes and it is unlikely to have the capacity to renew itself.

In that context it is worth to analyse the actual conditions and behavioral profiles of creative programs' students. In order to do so, there is a need to describe a regular studying process in Puebla. Firstly, the education system forces the high school students to choose a professional career before the completion of their senior year. This choice is usually influenced by friends and family. Each professional career is structured by an established program with defined courses that lasts nine semesters. Usually the first ones are administrated by a common area that cluster different programs, in the specific

¹ ANUIES 2007
From Students To Designers: How To Co-Create A Behavioural-Meme Within A Local Creative Industry.

S. Ulicka and E. Cruz

case of a design program, it includes architecture, arts, graphic and industrial design. During their professional career, students are obliged to carry out one semester of professional internship but it is rarely that they get involve with a design studio or similar organization. Mainly because it is sensed as an obligation and waste of highly priced university program. Following the academic development of creative careers’ students and the survey performed within five different universities in Puebla in 2012, we may define four main students’ behavioural profiles:

1. **Noobs** - are students in their early stage of their career when they are discovering the professional activities of design and the role of designer. They usually idealize the designer’s profile and try to adjust that paradigm to their reality; this stage might be characterized by the adoption of a professional language and pretended high level of self-esteem. Generally “noobs” are confused and their role as young designers in the society is largely undefined. On the other hand they are eager to confront challenges and open to hear different point of views regarding to the design profession.

2. **Party breakers** - are defined as highly sociable students focused on external activities that sometime diminish their efficiency as students. On the other hand they have a high sense of sociability and multidisciplinary knowledge that could be seen as a potential professional competence. They are usually familiarized with different design news and they get involve in various local network activities basically with a social intention.

3. **Intellectuals** - are students focused on activities regarding to the accumulation of knowledge and development of professional skills. They are trying to master their creative process and experimenting through participation in different academic projects. It is uncommon to observe their involvement in local activities and their professional referents are usually foreign projects. Their self-identity as young professionals might be fixed and they are not so open to critic or external points of views, being quite egoist and individualists.

4. **Precooked** – are ones that are close to the completion of their career and they are usually facing the need to get involved in a professional context to obtain a job after their graduation. They may be characterized by a strong sense of insecurity and an overlapping intent to avoid decision making as they do not feel ready to work in a creative field. They usually want to postpone choosing an area of specialization feeling that their skills are based on theoretical knowledge.

It should be clarified that above descriptions are behavioural observations, they are not a segment description of a student. Each one may behave differently during certain conditions and adopt various profiles depending on the context.

**3 STATEMENT**

Principal hypothesis that gave the fundament for the study is the idea that by defining the identity (self-identity) of creative individuals it is possible to provoke the behavioural change of their context and nourish the local creative industry
From Students To Designers: How To Co-Create A Behavioural-Meme Within A Local Creative Industry.

S. Ulicka and E. Cruz

(as it is shown on figure 1). Self-identity in that case is understood as a set of individual aims, values and responsibilities as designers and their context refers to creative community and economy in the city of Puebla.

Figure 1 –Functional scheme of behavioural-meme.

Therefore the principal objective of the study is to define the critical factors for self-definition of the creative identity that altogether may function as a "behavioural-meme" based on positive example and catalyst of pro-active behaviours in order to modify the local context of creative industries.

As Wood (2013) defines it, memes are "patterns and habits (that) play their part in the evolutionary process". He claims that in an actual dynamic world meme could be an innovative idea and that there is an extremely close relationship between a successful meme and its current environment. Furthermore Wood (2013) points out that "a potentially crucial aspect of design is the regulation of value", because in fact "no values can exist in isolation and all values have a complementary relationship to other existing values. Meaning is generated as part of a process of exchange". Thus authors are suggesting that a behavioural pattern may be seen as a meme, and the study is an attempt to define the key factors that influence these behaviours of young creatives, and in order to do so, ethics and individual responsibilities of designers cannot be left aside.

On the other hand, although Doordan (2013) refers to more general and holistic issues of transition directed to sustainable societies and a change of paradigm, we assume that the same system rules may be applied to the transformation into creative societies, based on creative industries and values defined or managed through design as Wood describes it. Thereby in the search of actual knowledge of creative local community there is a "dramatic calls to re-conceptualize the skill sets, knowledge bases, and professional identities of designers."(Doordan, 2013, p.58) and as Ehrenfeld (2008) points out there is the need of awareness about the context. Various authors (Fuad-Luke,2009; Florida, Meroni, 2007) are defining factors of structural change as: empowerment of participatory creation and sharing, small scale perception in order to influence the real structural change, open-ended processes of experimentation, mutual learning, community building, coevolution, multilevel perspective, multiphase perspective and co-design and learning.

The principal reason of focusing the study on designers is as Manzini (2014) describes it: "Designers can of course act as facilitators, supporting ongoing initiatives. But they can also be the triggers that start new social conversations. Similarly, they can be members of co-design teams, collaborating with groups of well-defined final users, but they can also behave as design activists, proactively launching socially meaningful design initiatives". Therefore the study was
From Students To Designers: How To Co-Create A Behavioural-Meme Within A Local Creative Industry.

S. Ulicka and E. Cruz

conducted as an action research within the collaborative, multilevel and open-ended group of design students.

4 INQUIRY STRUCTURE AND PROCESS

Action research methodology (Greenwood & Levin, 2006) was conducted in order to define the problem and cogenerate relevant knowledge by using qualitative social research techniques. Two professional researchers (from the field of strategic design and product design) worked with a voluntary group of over 30 students and different peers for almost two years. Methods of social research were implemented during that period of time, varying between participatory observation; semi-structured, and non-structured interviews and co-creation of prototypes.

Cazuela project was defined after analysing the results based on the preliminary observations of a group of students in a professional context. The conclusion was to develop a tool that could change the behaviour of a group of students and observe the results on their own identity as creative professionals. The findings were co-evaluated by regular meeting sessions in order to redefine the task of organizing the structure and objectives.

The action research tool Cazuela was established as a design blog administrated by students and aiming to a student audience. The intended objective was to generate contents that could help to access other sources of information and, by that, generate more open-minded view of their professional context. Another intention was to encourage a sense of community (belonging), as they get involved in local activities, such as: exhibits, conferences and networking events.

This research tool was focus in three main areas:

— **Accessibility of information**: By selecting relevant information regarding creative activities like local events, contests, relevant news and information sources, there was an intention to affect the involvement of the students in a professional context. There was a special focus on encouraging them to make a constant research of information by establishing a number of daily publications for the blog.

— **Involvement in local activities**: Here the intention was to force the students to socialize with senior creative professionals. The emphasis was aimed at facilitating the participation and accessing different activities that could give the students external recognition.

— **Collaborative organization**: This factor is based on the creation of “little mafias” of creative students that could work in the future as collaborators in professional projects or probable structures or sub-structures, such as collectives or studios.

There was different adjustments at four phases of the project “Cazuela” during this process of the action research tool had different structures, objectives, activities and collaborators of the team. This adjustments were taken to guarantee the continuity of the research and the interest of the students in the project.

This stages are defined as phase 1 (Platform creation), phase 2 (Definition), phase 3 (Collaboration) and phase 4 (Restructuration).

*Phase 1 Platform creation*

*November 2012 – August 2013*
From Students To Designers: How To Co-Create A Behavioural-Meme Within A Local Creative Industry.

S. Ulicka and E. Cruz

This first research stage involved an inquiry in social media between 60 design students to name the platform. The ‘Cazuela’ name was established and the creation of the blog commenced with support from one intern with commitment of 5 hours of voluntary work to develop content and regularly publish blog-based information.

Soon after, the blog generated RSS information proactively embraced by the student, who then broadcasted the relevant information. Few weeks after, the project was introduced to a class of 30 students and two professors and they all had been given access to publish and edit the information available on the blog.

They had freedom at all decision-making levels related to content generation, development, and publication with locality as betoken context.

There was a special interest between the students to have the opportunity to make a window in the professional media to present their successful projects and gain recognition in the professional context.

After one semester the publishing results were very low.

Phase 2 Definition
August 2013 - November 2013

The second phase of the action research involved exploring the definition of the project as a tool to generate content for a design student audience. Four collaborators were selected and specific activities were assigned to obtain desired data.

The participation of an external expert in social network was also required to help define the project and the different tools in other platforms that could generate engagement between students of different creative programs. There was also a need to start the development of virtual feedback tools to measure the impact within the audience that could help define a structure of information.

A certain number of internal workshops were developed with the collaborators that helped to structure an organizational flow between them. The definition of the objectives and the use of different tools including the content and virtual platforms were decided by the collaborators.

Phase 3 Collaboration
November 2013 - May 2014

This phase was characterized by an expansion of collaborators that grew from four to twelve students. They focused on the development and the improvement of the tools of ‘Cazuela’ and quantitative objectives where established for the social media platforms. The intention was to develop engagement between the local creative communities.

During this phase the collaborators got involved in the local design festival "Puebla Design Fest" when the association of designers ‘Coordenada 21’ and the municipal government asked the team to administrate the virtual networks of the festival. This event helped the team to get identify by local creative community and gain credibility for the project. It also gave them the opportunity to create an activity during the festival that could involve different students of other universities and design programs in the city, called ‘Colectivo Inter-Universitario’, which was intended to generate a common voice between all the
From Students To Designers: How To Co-Create A Behavioural-Meme Within A Local Creative Industry.

S. Ulicka and E. Cruz

creative students and mapping the general public perception of design and designers.

As a result of the festival collaboration, the team has been invited to participate in the international workshop of Intuit-Lab (Paris) in February 2014.

This phase also had a few downsides that resulted in an unstructured organization and got low results of engagement between the intended audiences. In May 2014 of this year four of the central members of the team graduated and stopped working on the project.

**Phase 4 Restructuration**
**May 2014 until now November 2014**

The last phase of this action research project focused on structuration of the organizational activities and the growth of collaborators, but with a different dynamic. The need for a creation of departments was defined as the resting member of the team where struggling to create engagement between their audience and three areas were created.

— Collective (external activities, structure, administration and strategy)
— Collaborator (information flow, blog and calendar management and documentation)
— Contact (community management in social networks)

All the members from different teams where also responsible for “public relations”, this was made to guarantee the participation of external peers and respond to different collaborative projects.

There was a selection of “field leaders” that were responsible of the administration of different teams they defined and organic management of activities within each cells. They were all responsible for the results of their work with the particular emphasis on provoking “self-definition” and “self-organization” between the members of each team.

## 5 FINDINGS

After one year and a half of the initial definition of the four archetypical behaviours of the young creative professional in Puebla and the decision of creating Cazuela´s action research project the findings were concluded and defined as outlined below:

### I. Barriers, expectations and needs

In order to understand principal factors that could enable the creation of a local creative community it was necessary to define barriers, expectations and needs of young Cazuela´s collaborators. BEN’s model results are summed up as follow:

The main barriers are:

— Fixed and unilateral understanding of design and designer’s role in a society.
— Impotence caused by lack of professional certainty.
— Detachment from creative and social tissue of the city.

The main expectations regarding to the professional development are:

— The possibility to present and compare project results with other peers.
— The sense of positive influence on the wellbeing of the local community.
From Students To Designers: How To Co-Create A Behavioural-Meme Within A Local Creative Industry.

S. Ulicka and E. Cruz

— A strong wish of enjoying undertaken projects.
— Three principal needs were clarified during the research project
  — The possibility of living from the design profession.
  — The need of venture capital for creative projects that are willing to invest in non-traditional models of cooperation.
  — A network platform that involve other designers.

II. Stages of collaborators

During revision meetings of Cazuela group, workshops and retrospective interviews with actual and former participants focused on creative attitude, perception of context, professional aims and design values and designers’ responsibility, the participants defined three levels of individual involvement in the creative community. These self-identity change process was observed within the group of Cazuelas’ collaborators and could be defined by three stages:

— Pre-Cazuela’s profile: Dependence Phase “I’m afraid of responsibility.” These students that started in the Cazuela Project have been characterized with a high level of individualism and separation from local creative tissue in the city. Generally they show low levels of initiative in the professional area, uncertainty and short-term orientation. Besides having the restlessness to deepen the practical and theory knowledge they also have curiosity of what may be possible to achieve as designers. Also their definition of design is superficial and narrow, principally understood as a decorative activity. They were showing extremely and strong dependence for their teachers and their educational organization opinion, worldview and decision-making. Their attitude might be resumed in this words: “I do what they ask me to do”, leaving all the responsibility for decision making to their close authorities.

— Cazuela’s profile: Questioning Phase “I define what I want to do” During this period the students got involve in different activities inside and outside the project, this experience have given theme a wider perspective of the design profession. It has been also observed that they got more involved in individual projects that extended outside their previous comfort zone and with other young designers. There are also observations of a high level of self-definition, which is a reflection of some level of professional security obtained in the recognition of peers. Collective structure of the group has been an important support to initiate actions.

— Post-Cazuela’s profile: Action taking “I do what I want to do” The ex-collaborators (now alumnis) are characterized by an action-taking and cooperative attitude. They are in the process of creating their own projects and experimenting with them, most of them with collaborative involvement. They have a wider worldview of professional possibilities and refer to them as close possibilities, based on other professional’s observations, with whom they have or are working in different projects. They are also extending their own redefinition of the design profession in the local context. Another interesting finding in this group is that they have applied documentation and definition tools and this have helped them to find VC’s that are willing to invest in their projects. Characterized by high associative culture, they can be seen as a group of linked individuals with a clear definition of their aims and responsibilities as humans and designers.
From Students To Designers: How To Co-Create A Behavioural-Meme Within A Local Creative Industry.

S. Ulicka and E. Cruz

III. Key behaviours

After analysing the last information of the research interviews and based on the observations that are explained previously, four key factors of the behavioural changes are defined. These self-perception categories that are influencing students on their creative identity definition were pointed out as follow:

— **Knowledge**: a definition of individual professional objectives and areas of interest, and the conviction of the possibility of maintaining by performing projects within that areas.

— **Professional experience**: the possibility of recognition and appreciation by others peers and the wider creative community.

— **Context and impact awareness**: knowledge about the local conditions and initiatives not only within the creative industries, but more generally the capacity of mapping local qualities in the globalized world. Definition of individual and professional responsibilities.

— **Organizational culture**: capability to work and organize within the complex, multilevel and non-hierarchical structures.

IV. The meme

The crossing between students’ profiles and the key behaviours defined above shows the evolution process that Cazuela collaborates have experienced during the research. The comparison of attitudes of students is shown in the Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PRE-CAZUELA</th>
<th>CAZUELA</th>
<th>POST-CAZUELA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Knowledge</td>
<td>External knowledge and lack of professional definition</td>
<td>Local context knowledge and the process of choosing preferences</td>
<td>Conscious selection of areas of interest within the local creative tissue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Professional experience</td>
<td>Experimentation within the academic security</td>
<td>Local recognition of the group and stepping out the comfort zone</td>
<td>Professional confidence based on previous experiences of involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Context and impact awareness</td>
<td>Success or failure defined by academic authorities. Low perception of responsibilities as future professional designers</td>
<td>Individual responsibility for the activities in which they are getting involved as a group</td>
<td>Acknowledge of the positive impact that they can create in the area and the context in which they are working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Organizational culture</td>
<td>Hierarchic structure and individualism. Creativity is understood as a personal inspiration</td>
<td>A sense of collective structure. Knowing the power of co-creation and collaboration.</td>
<td>Associative culture. Structuring and linking individual efforts in a professional context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Action</td>
<td>Passive or active</td>
<td>Pro-active but</td>
<td>Pro-active and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From Students To Designers: How To Co-Create A Behavioural-Meme Within A Local Creative Industry.

S. Ulicka and E. Cruz

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>taking</th>
<th>only if instructed to do so</th>
<th>needing a group that supports the initiative of action</th>
<th>ready to pull others in their initiatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 1 – Behavioural-meme. The process of evolution of self-perception of young creatives and its influence on the behavioural change.

These factors, if introduced to the learning process of creative professionals, may generate the incremental loop of positive impact on other students. In a larger context it may influence onto a local creative community and by that, on the industry as well.

The fifth factor, which might be seen as a result of the mix of the other four, is the action taking behaviour. This result depends strictly on the previous ones, but gives the basis to think about the individual process of change as a "behavioural-meme" for social innovation and a shift of paradigm.

V. Expansion indicators

Analysis of the quantitative indicators obtained by Cazuela Project since November 2012, permits to define an expansion model for next four periods, till May 2017. As we have mentioned before, the principal objective of a study is a stimulus of an action taking behaviour, therefore there have been defined four indicators in order to measure the expansion of the creative community. They are pointed out as follow:

- **Impact** – virtual audience based on social network scope, in that particular case, Cazuela’s Facebook followers were taken into account;
- **Engagement** – based on Facebook followers engagement; composed of a unique number of people who liked, commented on, shared or clicked on Cazuela’s posts. Should be clarified that is an organic reach of Cazuela’s publications, given that the community have never paid the social networks publicity;
- **Influence** - convening and coordinating capacity of Cazuela’s events; attendance and number of participants during events organized by the community;
- **Group growth** – number of Cazuela’s collaborators;
From Students To Designers: How To Co-Create A Behavioural-Meme Within A Local Creative Industry.

S. Ulicka and E. Cruz

These four factors are grouped to indicate the action taking attitude defined as **expansion** (as it is shown on figure 2). Until now, every post-cazuela generation has formed the alternative creative group. First, design collective named *Cucurrucucu*, formed by four ex-cazuela participants and one external student in May 2014. And the second one, *Labolatorio*, the creative local hub initiated by two Cazuela students that are going to graduate in May 2015. These two cases let us to assume the appearance of similar behavioral pattern within next four periods and predict the overall impact and influence on the local creative community (as it is shown on figure 3).

Impact of Cazuela Project measured by the overall number of virtual audience is constantly growing, and within two years is predicted to reach 85,918 followers. However, it can be observed that the percentage of growth is slightly
From Students To Designers: How To Co-Create A Behavioural-Meme Within A Local Creative Industry.

S. Ulicka and E. Cruz

decreasing, the impact indicator is rising. Based on the proportion between the influence and impact indicator measured during first two events organized by Cazuela, we may assume the 6% ratio in order to predict influence on 5,155 in May 2017 as a convening power of Cazuela.

If we assume the correctness of the hypothesis, seeing Cazuela as a first node of a larger creative eco-system, where each generation of graduated students are capable of forming a peer node that can be defined by the same characteristics, the initiative may influence over 211 000 followers, and have a direct impact on over 13 100 students and creatives in Puebla and Mexico. (As it is shown on figure 4.)

6 CONCLUSIONS

Cazuela project may act as a platform for research and a functional blog that recompiles the information about local design initiatives and, at the same time, serves as an idea presentation space. Students who have cooperated or are still co-creating Cazuela’s structure are continuously gauging the local creative community. Initiatives undertaken by the community may be followed on www.cazuela.info and on its social networks.

Moreover, it provides the basis to formulate the hypothesis of change of behaviour. This self-perception definitions have the possibility to become viral and repetitive as a “behavioural – meme”. This can help to create a local booming creative industry if it influences other young designers in their process of self-definition and encourages the interdisciplinary practice rather than the migration of creative professionals to other industries.

The questions of whether ‘the next generation of design students adopt the newly self-defined identity, or instead will they adopt the self-defining process?’ was derived and it remains open. Similarly, the questions of ‘whether the group of Cazuela will be able to trespass the actual identity and cultural value barriers, and if so, how will it be done and which methods could be used?’ requires further examinations.

These questions will form the basis for further studies within the Cazuela group.
From Students To Designers: How To Co-Create A Behavioural-Meme Within A Local Creative Industry.

S. Ulicka and E. Cruz

7 REFERENCES


