

An innovation Project at the IPB: higher education for all

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Introduction

Epistemologically speaking, higher education (HE) is oftentimes regarded as a place of “receiving” knowledge and skills rather than “giving”, a place of watching creation happen rather than participating in creation processes. However, in the new millennium, HE institutions have gradually been rediscovering **constructivism** and broadening its scope to a more participatory approach. Thus, **cocreation ecosystems** have mushroomed and given rise to a number of projects, experiences and work philosophies and methodologies, among which Demola at the IPB is worthy of mention.

“**Cultura para Todos Bragança**” (ref. NORTE-07-4230-FSE-000058) was a project the IPB conducted for the Municipality of Bragança. It presented itself as an opportunity to put a **multidisciplinary and multi-ability team** together, as well develop and enhance a myriad of skills and knowledge(s). We drew on the acquired experience and agreed to focus on the IPB as a means not only to give the previous project a new lease of life, but also to encourage its **sustainability**. Our aim in carrying out this project is to enable the IPB become a more accessible and accommodating institution to human diversity, be it cultural or ethical, be it ability-wise. Additionally, we intend to contribute to quality education at HE, to minimise inequality and to make the IPB more inclusive. Ultimately, we seek to contribute to the IPB’s capacity of coming up with solutions for ALL those who share the IPB.

Methodology

To begin with, the team is composed by professors-researchers, junior researchers and collaborators with impairments, some of whom had already collaborated as validators and active makers for the project “Culture for All Bragança”. Despite the technicalities of such actions, all members of the team are to intervene in all stages.

The team adopted two methodologies: action research and participation. As far as **action research** is concerned, we drew from the previous project the assumption that implementing and testing an initial theoretical approach should be followed by an effective action in the community and then by observation, which enables the team to reflect upon the pros and cons of such an action and consider changing it in some degree, before moving on. (Cf. Lewin, 1997; Bradbury, 2015; Tanabe, Pearce & Krause, 2018; Searle et al., 2021)



Figure 1. Action Research stages (techknowtools.com, 2014)

On the other hand, **participatory methodologies** enabled us to work side by side with a diverse team of people with and without disabilities. This stance is in line with a substantial volume of literature that encourages an accessibility revolution (cf. Greco, 2018) and a shift from traditional, particularist and reactive approaches to those that are more universalist – to ALL and not just people with impairments –, creative and proactive that requires the involvement of end-users in the process of creation from the very first moment.

In the end, we seek to uphold the motto “Nothing about us without us” (Michael Masutha and William Rowland in 1993).

Results

The expected results for this project are as follows:

- 1) Diagnosis of the accessibility conditions for the 3 schools on the IPB’s Campus and for the Central Services
- 2) Production of the respective reports and accessibility plans to set up actions for future improvements
- 3) Creation of the tactile plans for each of the floors in the 4 buildings in 2)
- 4) Creation of the audiodescription for tactile exploration for each of the buildings to be made available in audio and by means of a QR code
- 5) Creation of information in Portuguese Sign Language for each of the buildings to be made available in video and by means of a QR code
- 6) Creation of information in easy language for each of the buildings to be made available in video and by means of a QR code
- 7) Translation of the resources in 4, 5 and 6 into English.

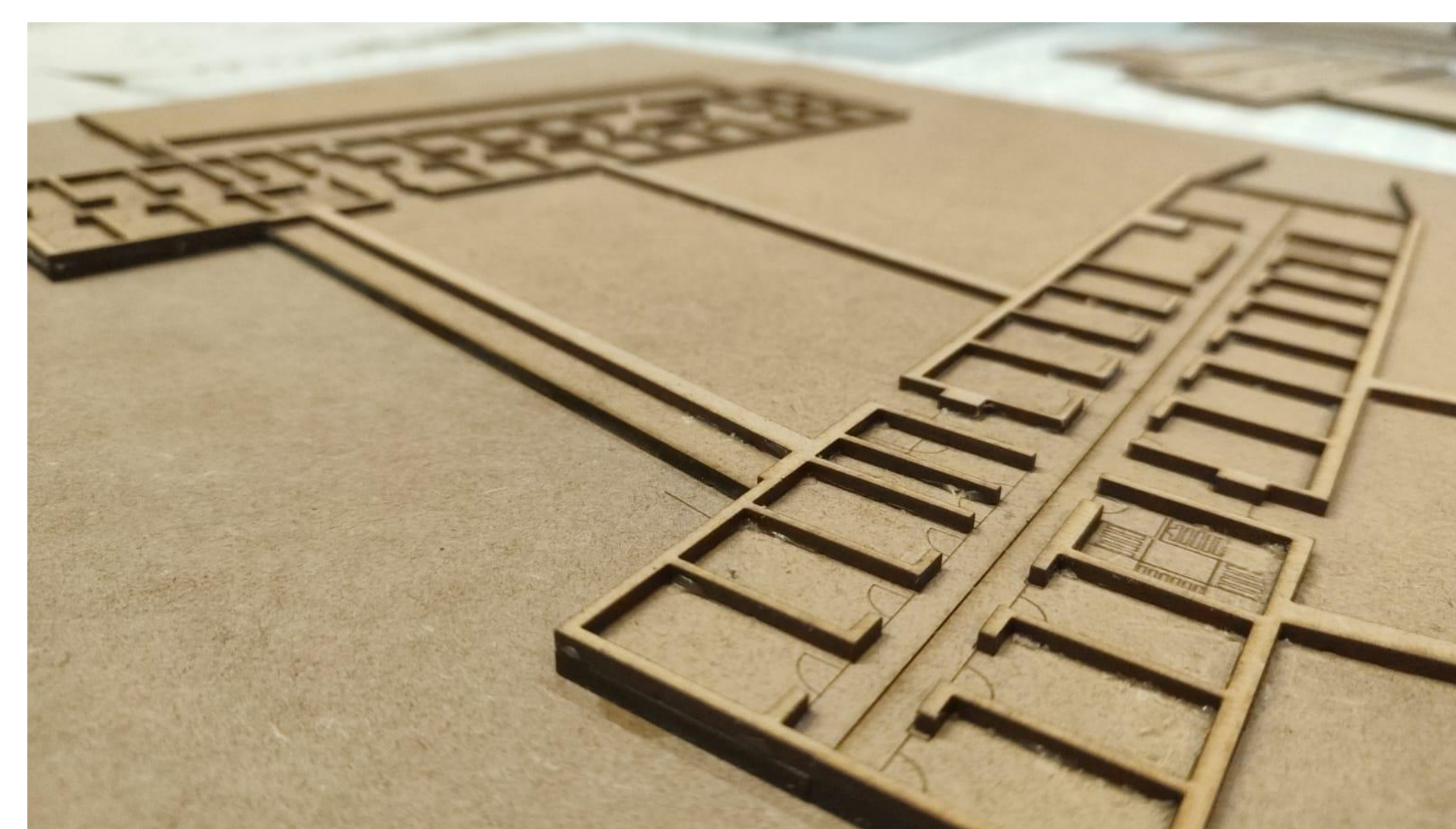


Figure 2. Tactile Plan for the School of Education (© Jorge Santos, 2023)

Conclusion

This project was designed to be the first in a number of stages within a more ambitious plan that aims to turn the IPB into a national reference in terms of human diversity. This is not a one-case initiative, since the “IPB for @LL” follows in the footsteps of other actions, such as “Cultura para Todos Bragança” and the Accessible Film Festival.

Through this project, we sought to raise the visibility of the different needs we ALL feel within the IPB and cater for some of them, by producing multiple resources and materials made available at the IPB’s facilities and online. Together these can foster empathy, emotional accessibility and a feeling of belonging, as well as contribute to the community’s openness to difference.

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