

The Place of Place in Lifelong Learning

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Strand: Research in lifelong learning

Abstract:

Life, in societies strongly based upon technology and information, demands "global literacy". Education systems have key roles concerning promotion and acquisition of basic skills, including digital literacy leading to flexible ways of learning and teaching. Experience, both as teachers and researchers, leads us to notice that the use of Information and Communication Technologies is far from being a reality, concerning pedagogical relationships between teacher/student/knowledge within learning processes. One main challenge is to be able to use technology in a creative perspective, not only as a simple tool.

Technological issues oblige thinking the places related to resources and associated equipments that compose its architectonic configuration.

Paradigms wrapping architecture and teaching apprenticeship inherited from traditional models will have to give place to open and creative nets of places, not closing the full interactivity and socialization, but promoting it, establishing bases for real exploration of both human and technological resources of today's society of knowledge. It is in this context that options for e_ and blended learning, i.e., acquire the most precise sense.

Emergence, self-organization, freedom, transparency and accessibility will have to set oneself up as topics of inquiry together with the necessary reflection on "friendly" access protocols available for the new technologies and efforts to extend the minimal skills that guarantee the eradication of illiteracy and exclusion in the access and use of the IT resources.

This paper aims, in a multi-disciplinary wide-cross spectre, a critical reflection on work developed on the use of ICT in learning processes.

Keywords: technology, learning, pedagogy, literacy, architecture, place, life.

1 – Introduction

This paper was brought up in the interplay of different approaches on the subject of Lifelong Learning. The architectural, anthropological and philosophical arguments that set the basics of a reflection concerning the role of place in the learning processes and the relationship

between the ones involved in these processes, i.e. teacher/student in the traditional schoolroom and the everyday mutation that these – and in a broad manner all the institutions traditionally devoted to educational systems – are subjected in recent years. Such mutations owe ICT's, along with the openness of globalization, its hard core. Setting the place as the crossroad of reflection – the place of place – intends to mean and bring to the forepart a very often hidden dimension of the technological apparatus. Every place as an architectonic container is a producer – re-producer – as any other technological device. Than it is not just a container and no less a neutral functional container – culturally and historically – adapted to some specifications. It plays along with the general technological shifts, the impressive global changes that affect us all. As well as all the traditional well defined places that we were used to deal with – i.e. street, plaza, house, hospital, factory or also hall, bedroom, living and dining rooms, kitchen and so on – the school, as a defined, structured and acknowledgeable place as well as its more abstract counterpart as type, is about to be in a mutational process – a dissolution that we can take part and claim to fulfil – spreading its roles for all the different places – both actual and virtual.

As said before these transformations are pushed strongly by technological changes and so all its devices, interconnected, must be considered under an accelerated process of mutation that affects us all. ICT's as well as the architectural they support and provide are a main factor of the transformation of the school communities and their workplaces as well as other dimensions of our collective life – family, sports, health, politics, jobs, etc.

2 - An education for a lifetime

The main goal of the European agenda in what concerns Lifelong Learning Programs (LLP's) seems to draw attention to new learning opportunities to people who have not previously benefited, fully or at all, from education or training and also in a most ambitious way to consider new places of education that no longer are restricted to the classroom or to a particular stage of life. European Commission has integrated its various educational and training initiatives under LLP's and “all actions are conceived to enable individuals at all stages of their lives to pursue stimulating learning opportunities across Europe in the use of ICT”¹.

We live in a world where re-skilling is continuous, informal education learning accredited and people build their own knowledge and skill profiles in a rapid and different way. So, the promotion of ICT for learning is one of the key activities of the LLP's, perspectived in a transversal way and supporting actions that address general issues concerning different educational sectors, either formal or informal, private or public ones. As a consequence of the technological development there are everyday new ways of learning, new objects and new processes that oblige thinking the places related to resources and associated equipments that compose its architectonic configuration.

Lifelong Learning (LL) – is only a formal way of referring an essential fact about existence. To learn constantly, not intermittently, it is a basic demand to be alive – of living creatures. An “history about learning” would be able to explain much or little about this subject and we can suppose it would do little more than much, for history itself is an inherent bias of human thinking, even more of the contemporary thought. This on being too much focused in the social aspects of the human communities, where the individual evolves, easily forgets the plan of the biological that allows each one to be, to exist in this another plan of possibility. This introduction intends to mark two different but irreducible aspects of development. One of these aspects will maintain each individual under notice; the other will look at the modes of

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc96_en.htm (consulted 2nd of August 2008)

current social organization where they find shelter. It will be here, eventually, where we will find the specified institutionalizations of learning modes relevant for, circularly, the institutions that provide, straight or indirectly, the relevant ways of learning. This formulation detaches so the necessity of making the way more included of thinking these problems and so looking at the totality of the being and not to detach his parts.

3 - Existential Space and Architectural Space

*The architectural space can be defined as a "realization" of the existential space.
(Norberg-Schulz, 1975.p.46)*

[...]

*To simplify the problem we will not distinguish here between natural elements and the debts to the acting of a man. To what the man selects of the nature to give fulfillment to his purposes, we will call also "architecture".
(Norberg-Schulz, 1975.p.139)*

And in the conclusion [p.135]

*I tried to demonstrate that the existence of the man depends on the establishment of a significant and coherent environmental image or "existential space". I also marked that such an image presupposes the presence of certain concrete environmental structures (or architectural), refusing to admit that these principles lose its signification because of the television and many other ways of quick communication
(Norberg-Schulz, 1975.p.135).*

The architecture of the place belongs entirely to the existential domain, of the existential space, if we want to be accurate. Summarizing the argument, all the organisms, while living creatures, structure themselves and structure a set of relations beyond the strict limits of individuality, and its existence depends on them. It is in a certain way what expresses a concept of organism and environment, and in a more political and ideological terms the variety of modes of saying, i.e. ecology. In this more abstract level that we claim, near of a theoretical biology, the enunciation of this relation finds its expression in another more basic and imperative level of materiality, the possibility to be alive. Even before the "must be", that will approach then to a normative and moral set of rules of an organization of different individuals. In a simple way, only those who exist can organize themselves, once the relation with the other, before, is strictly mechanical. We define this way something that we called "the spheres of the ecology and economy" (Araújo, 2008). We were still so in the biology.

In these conditions the place fulfils, in the interdependence, a determinative role in the existence of the individuals.

The territory is, in the fullest sense of the term, an extension of the organism, marked by visual, vocal and olfactive signs. Man also created territorial material extensions, as well as a set of territorial visible and invisible signs.

[...] *space of fixed organization*

[...] *it appoints one of the basic frames of activity of individuals and groups. It encloses material aspects, at the same time as hidden and internalized structures that govern the dislocations of the man in the planet. The buildings of human construction are an example of fixed organization. Equally, its grouping as well as its way of internal splitting corresponds also to characteristic structures determined by the culture. The organization of villages, of small and great cities*

*and of the field that surrounds them is not an effect of chance, but a resultant of a decided plan that varies with history and culture².
(Hall, 1977, p.121)*

Place [the House, the School] and the New Generic Spaces

The art of place is the art of totality. Its purpose is to create "images of the world," which through their interaction manifest the meaning of things, which surround us and clarify the interaction itself as a local presentation of global meaning. Naturally all the works of art are totalities, which is to say synthesis of various basic qualitative elements, but the art of place, which is to day architecture, by principle has to do with all of the experience of living, and therefore is justly described as the "mother of the arts".

[...]

*The totality, which the images of the work of art make present, is nothing other than the experience of living and therefore also has to do with the work of nature and the work of man.
(Norberg-Schulz, 2000)*

The house as well as other human places has fixed spatial organizations within each social group and particular culture, with minimum and no pertinent variations. The emergence of the technologies in the domestic areas, and mainly ITC ones, strongly demands the traditional functional distribution, and the interaction within the social areas. Interbreeding the house with the school, made possible using those technologies, produces a change in both the traditional settings of home and school and the ones who interact in such places.

Place in the Digital Era [the "places" in the cyberspace]

*A teacher speaks; students listen and respond. The teacher has access to some corpus of knowledge, beliefs, and practices, and makes this corpus available to the students. Schools, colleges, and universities are spaces that exist primarily to bring students and teachers together so that this sharing of a corpus can take place.
(Mitchell, 1996, pp. 65-70)*

In Schoolhouses / Virtual Campuses (Mitchell, 1996, pp. 65-70) William Mitchell draws the differences from the traditional when referring:

*As the twentieth century draws to a close, the idea of a virtual campus – paralleling or perhaps replacing the physical one – seems increasingly plausible. If a latter-day Jefferson were to lay out an ideal educational community for the third millennium, she might site in the cyberspace.
(Mitchell, 1996, p. 65-70)*

Whatever the model we want to use to check the learning processes – synthetically said as learning when we refer to any action developed by an organism to solve new situations – we run the human risk of theorizing from this other one that sets up the prejudices with which we deal with the world. We weave so this complex net that will lead us, at each moment and in each place, to adopt particular attitudes, i.e. example political and religious. This ideological matrix for the, or the one, enunciation that describes what synthetically – we will call it definition – of the learning concept stays so, always depending of a specified and relative vision of the world. The global complexity inherent in the task-actions that we alluded before, as specifics of any living organism – and essential to this last reference and classification – stays outside of major precision certainly more than its cutting in parcels. The width of time

² Though the text of Norberg-Schulz dates back from the beginning of the 70's [Existence, Space and Architecture. London: Studio Vista, 1975; Praeger (1974); New York: Praeger Publishers (1971)] the question was put already, at the time, concerning the interaction between media and the architecture of the places.

and places in the process of the evocation life seems to demonstrate it. And, the limited history of the human life, in his varied ways, is a sufficient example. To describe the processes in which in different longitudes and latitudes, in never ending times, subjected the living beings that could be designated as man and woman in order to acquire competences, accompanying the change with the reformation of appropriate behaviors, or always approximate ones. Processes and competences told in broad way knowledge or, in other words, the reciprocal action on the same activities that are caused by the imperious necessity of transformation. There are so interwoven the concepts with which we mark man and women and society, for example, going off exponentially our means of indication of discreet moments without excesses of obvious reductionism. And although this one tends to look like a guarantee of the intelligibility that escapes us in the global, the totality. To reduce learning to knowledge will be to shut a possibility of definition, at the expense of the opening of a new field of not exploitable dimensions. In other way we leave for the same field, which shows the infinitude of the process, if we actually want to accompany the process in real time. Perhaps a basic aspect of this problematic is here, since the real time is demanded as intrinsic to the nature of the learning process which we approach when drawing the bases of the existence of any organism.

It results from the exposed the space-time relation of the actions and its holistic character, which obliges quoting Hall (1977) again, when he evokes Winston Churchill:

"We give form to our constructions which on turn give us form". In a debate concerning the refurbishment of the House of Commons after the War, Churchill was expressing his fear about changing the internal structure of the Chamber's space, where the adversaries face each other in bothe sides of a narrow gallery, could lead to a change on the very structure of the political power.(Hall, 1977, p.125)

It might seem from this theoretical matrix that in it is produced a criticism or a resistance to the modes that seem to break with the most traditional formulations. But we will follow the argument in a way that allows explaining how this will not be the case.

We should point nevertheless that the historical example does not fit the argument – because such an example is just a built abstraction of the real historical experiences of the historical of each individual – since this one is no more again than the model in which the anxieties of the present are mirrored. History is here an ideology and the changing ways are in the calibrated measure demanded by the rupture and re-accommodation, constantly.

Places of gauging and control are the material expression of what we can also tell as architecture; the architecture that was demanded by the institutionalized modes of learning. And it is in this context understandable the exacerbated interest of several totalitarianisms concerning the systems of transmission of knowledge, including the institutional phase, properly stated and its construction, real and symbolic, the concrete architecture of the place. The place is established and started to he be also a generative matrix of the process, simultaneously with the processes of control of each individual and of the group, and at the same time with the efficiency of the same, as already stated. Whatever the device that has been used, or still in use, the concrete physical concrete device of each institution – in this case by chance and generically designated as school – will be always, even when mitigated, an imposition apparatus of a vision of the world, a mechanism of reinforcement, very often hidden, but always present.

What the digital school brings us is another mode of virtue and vices. It does not fit us the eulogy of the systems, let us keep in the approach of its critical analysis.

4 - School and leisure [*Scholé*, the Place of Leisure³]

The most generic process of which LL serves us of motto – Lifelong Learning, forever – obliges going out of the canonical exhibition of the places specifically devoted to the “*transmission of the knowledge*”, the several variants of the *model school*. Going out implies two ways. All places are places of “*transmission of all different knowledge*” still escaping to the strictly functionalist mode of watching and above all *nominating them*.

As observed, let's keep out of the narrow limits of the institution and devise a frame where the referred process of learning might be established. In one side within an extended spectre of relations between the search and the offer, in an always open field of possibilities, and in the other within more stable structures to which might correspond levels of organization that correlate the necessities and the opportunities. To the first case we can set the example of the availability or provision of any "content" relative to a specific knowledge – what would correspond to a "encyclopaedia" of the knowledge, and know how to do doing, in constant updating – what corresponds to the millenarian offer of transmission of information by the most varied methods, ways, means, etc. To the second one, in a reverse way, there correspond the "selections", “top down” structured, institutionalized, and placed in a hierarchy, that compose the growing complexity of the “teaching world”. Between this one, pertaining different mediations, and the real everyday world of people's life, are molded the relations, not always easy, which allow to satisfy necessities informing, forming, and so opening or closing each set of opportunities "offered" to each individual for the society where he is integrated. So schools, being able to show this public classification, are allowed to offer to those who join them and carry out the rules, the essential title or diploma so that they can be recognized as able in a determined area of the knowledge. Besides schools and depending on time and concrete particular situations, also other institutions are credible of public respect to offer this training. This is a complex web where the outlines will always be weak. So, between schools and the world, i.e. the professional world, new institutional bodies that regulate these loose frontiers, which we talked about, have been established. The associations, trade unions, orders and other professional institutionalized structures serve to carry out a level of gauging and control, mediated before in other instances that approaches and serves of mooring cable to the political power, the State, in a more sophisticated way.

It will be enough to take as model for reflection the radical change that took place between the epoch in which a cultured orator moved from one place to another, carrying forward, and literally, the knowledge that he could offer to each one of these places, and the precise moment in which the relatively massive production of the book turned him into a domestic wise man sending packets of knowledge and know how to each one of these places. To the first moment we owe the school in the most traditional sense of the term, since only modernity allowed the luxury of satisfying the demand exceeding time and place in most heterodox ways. Still today the absence of a physical tutor's presence bothers the most conservative, and this concern does not exclude any different area in the spectre of the political field, nor should support and accommodate the more visible traditional modalities.

³ If the school coexisted in the institution or in the instituted way of thinking, both abstract, also it would be a **place** in our world. Its origin is not lost in the bottom of the time since, again the Greek etymon, it tells us that it is a **place of leisure**. And, a purpose, so that the connotation does not darken the sense, must be said that this leisure, at good place, is not any more than the expression of conditions, wanted qualities. To be able to think, to think about thinking, and keep ourselves attentive on thinking about to think, that thinks about what has been thought, and again thinks over and over, always in a reflexive way, **time** is demanded, all the time. From here the Greek demands the leisure that is free time, and of release. This **school** is lost in time, in our time. Brought back to an excessive normalization, it is today a monstrous mutation waiting for an evolutive sanction. It is worth for us what each one will evoke. Nevertheless we may not misunderstand the terms and the conditions. This new mode, I want to insinuate, it would demand to talk about democracy, and again Classic Greece asks permission to speak. Only that from then till now we have to think the whole way. Free time, leisure without seizure, has costs and can be expensive, a lot (Araújo, 2007).

Any history of customs, of each time and stopping, offers a sufficient diversity of ways that liminary reject the unanimous institution and the unique way. From the **Nubas**⁴ to the **Mirandeses**⁵, there goes more distance than from Earth to the Moon and less difference than we could imagine. Being nevertheless the substance of this expressed in different ways and places that reveal them immediately. What and when to eat, and where, to what one sleeps and one is woken, and what then is done, where and how, there goes all the differences that do the difference, in the time and in the space between the *Nubas* and the *Mirandeses*. Although in the equality of them all, for they are, there is eating and sleeping, and other obvious functionalities where the necessity of being alive is expressed without difference.

The ongoing technological process that inexorably changes contemporary societies towards globalization erodes aspects that already marked the difference and hardly underlines the subtle ones, now just signs that mark the diversity of the histories. And even these ones in the provisional circumstances that support modernity in one or another axle of the change. They so transmit to the permeability of the cultures the interbreeding that take each one to all and these to each one. And it is in this movement that it is built, on one side the homogenization, blending of the necessary one and the distinction of the essential one. Never as in this time of the generics, of the global, were the most intimate aspects of the place, its different eccentricities so cared.

5 - Using technology in a creative perspective

In this perspective education systems have key roles concerning promotion and acquisition of basic skills, including digital literacy leading to flexible ways of learning and teaching. Our research leads us to notice that the use of ICT is far from being a reality, concerning pedagogical relationships between teacher/student/knowledge within learning processes. The computational literacy and the access to the ICT to young people are frequently preceded of an informal learning mainly at home and through the culture of the electronic game offline - as the Gameboy or PSP (playstation portable) among others. The massive access of the children to this type of devices is previous to its access to the computer and always had a great importance in the industry of the entertainment. To Paul Gee (2007) we are in the presence of a new concept of literacy or, at least, before a more global concept, a time that the written language left of being the only system of communication. The image, symbols, graphs, the artefacts and many other visual symbols are also important and very significant. More: images and words are juxtaposed and combined in this new concept. In books, as in the Internet and games, the images each time occupy more space – in all places – and have more importance and nor always they need a written explanation.

The appeal of the technological advance is, as Valentine and Halloway (2001) refers, the promise of rapidity, power, control, knowledge, pleasure and development. We all know that there are a lot of educational projects, new pedagogical methods, different ways of teaching and learning but in portuguese school spaces, the processes of appropriation of online for children and young is not yet a reality (Lencastre & Araújo, 2007).

It is *comun sense* to say that new generations have no difficulties to deal with all kind of

⁴ [Member of] a minority ethnic group forming many small autonomous groups in southern Sudan

⁵ Population of about 15000, living in northeast of Portugal – the region of Miranda do Douro – that vindicates its own cultural specifics and language, “mirandês”.

technology, but this seems not to be true to all their teachers. In fact teachers we have been working with have difficulty to understand this ICT world and what really matters when we are in a formal education environment. When questioned about their difficulties they referred that they use at home but have difficulty to use at school. They use computer only to communicate with colleagues by email, to write a report or a text and that they have difficulty to use ICT to prepare pedagogical materials to their classes with the students. They don't really know what to do and how to do it, and sometimes they use it the same way they use manuals. They don't feel prepared either technically or pedagogically.

We think that effective integration of ICT into education must go beyond simply replacing. It is necessary to find new solutions, more effective ways to work, operate, innovate and supporting pedagogical and organizational teaching and learning. Moreover ICT are not understood to all as transversal technologies to the curricula that allow an access to the production of original information a privilege to communicate but foreseein and used as a tool.

As we have already mentioned in this paper one main challenge is to be able to use technology in a creative perspective and not only as a simple tool. Education history shows we lived in a world where apprenticeship became impractical because there were too many knowledge seekers and not enough knowledge providers. In 21st century strategy must be different: "we have to capture knowledge so that it can be instantaneously accessed and shared" Rosenberg (2006: 1).

Everybody is more or less creative and the capacity to innovate and be creative is not confined to a generation, age or group. Using technology in a creative way means that we have to combine our knowledge and ICT skills and be capable to invent different and new ways of using it in favor of our learning or teaching objectives. This means that we have to be open to the unexpected world that this technology can provide.

Our research shows that young generations are not worried with ICT or Knowledge Society, they are not constrained with the curriculum neither they think it is necessary to fulfill a specific apprenticeship program in school, they only want to use the equipments to experiment, to play and they do it wherever they are. ICT can be possible any place and they really profit it either at home or at school, when waiting for the bus or between meals.

6 - In brief

This competitive world where re-skilling is continuous, demands effective collaboration and trustful environments in order that people can build their own knowledge and skill profiles in a rapid and different way. So, the promotion of ICT for learning is one of the key activities of the LLP's, perspectived in a transversal way and supporting actions that address general issues concerning different educational sectors, either formal or informal, private or public ones. In fact, ICT have already changed our lives at every level, educative, cultural and social and this digital world changed significantly the way adults deal with each one and specially with new generations.

The character of the architectures that will support the reformulation of the places, promoting a critical revision of its limitations and allowing the teaching institutions to accommodate at the same time that they promote the dissemination of its resources within the net of places that emerge in the current societies.

As already noted the paradigms wrapping architecture inherited from the traditional models will have to give place to open and creative nets of places where one could find full interactivity and socialization.

Both the definition of politics for the development of technical infrastructures and logistics, as well as the formation of trained people and institutional politics of interconnection with the communities – from which they emanate and to whom they owe the service they produce – cannot be placed outside the great developmental lines related to the university of the future, or in its future form. In this context the reflection on the architectural devices that seem to emerge associated to its dimension and its variability, simultaneously with the constitution of nets that break up, dematerialize and give flexibility. The technological issue obliges still to think besides and beyond the places, in their relation with associated resources and equipments that in certain way compose its configuration.

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