

# Pulse Approach: integral design project management to empower transformative processes

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**Abstract** This article proposes the basis of an *integral design project management* approach as a strategy to empower transformative processes. It is believed that in a context of humanitarian crisis it is vital and urgent to think of design guided by spirituality, and this as a means, facilitator of transformative processes to favor the recovery, flourishing and continuity of life. The study takes place within the framework of design project management, an area that currently does not sufficiently recognize dimensions of spirituality. The *Design Thinking* design project management approach and the *Theory U* management methodological framework are critically discussed, promoting possibilities to develop prototypes for future testing and implementation. It is proposed that the spiritual dimension should be a fundamental component of a design project management strategy that intends to be integral: multidimensional and holistic, where spirituality is presented in an expanded, defragmented and contemporary vision. The concept of *integral design project management* is presented as a differentiation from the two aforementioned models: it draws on different classical and contemporary outlooks. Theoretical references on wisdom for contemporary complexity, design and spirituality, spirituality for contemporaneity and the *Souths* communities are analysed. These become a source of inspiration for design, as well as the identification of components of spirituality for empirical and theoretical construction. Following a qualitative, deductive and inductive approach, the fieldwork takes place in an online and face-to-face ethnographic and auto-ethnographic format with three *Souths* communities from Portugal and Brazil that have implicit spirituality-driven design project management approaches. As a conclusion, we propose the *Pulse Approach* model, based on the ancestral wisdom philosophies of *quilombola* and Afro-Brazilian communities from Brazil, and of a family farming community that preserves ancestral wisdom philosophy around the linen cycle in Portugal. The proposal is grounded on the observations and experiences in the fieldwork, as well as with special emphasis on Mãe Beata de Yemonjá (Costa, 2000, 2002, 2017), Bispo dos Santos (Santos, 2015, 2018, 2019), Steiner (1962; Lanz, 1983), Buber (1923), Osho (Jain, 2012) e Escobar (2016, 2018), also based on 13 main and common components of spirituality identified in the activities of the three *Souths* communities that collaborate with our study, namely: the present (the here and now), presence, organicity (the circularity, the spin, the circle), interdependence among all that exists, relationality, the feminine, matriarchy, love, affection, care, ethics, intuition and ancestry.

## Author keywords

Contemporary wisdom; Integral design project management; Design and spirituality; *Souths* communities; Pulse Approach.

## Introduction

This article proposes the basis for an *integral design project management* approach as a strategy to empower transformative processes. These processes aim at the recovery, flourishing and continuity of life. Transformative processes are understood as those that promote diversity; respect; self-development; quality of life; health; education; housing; land; cultural sustainability; environment preservation; human rights protection; socio-economic transformation. They also encourage territoriality; localisation; autonomy; organic, creative and circular wisdoms, economies and communities. The objectives are: 1) contributions to a critical discussion on *Design Thinking* and *Theory U* towards a definition of *integral design project management*; 2) presentation of a theoretical framework based on authors who address themes of design and spirituality as well as spirituality for contemporaneity: sources for empirical and theoretical construction. 3) reflection on the themes of wisdom for contemporary complexity and the *Souths* communities, and legitimisation of communities of this nature as learning references; 4) identification of main and common spirituality components through the work with three analysed *Souths* communities; 5) the proposal of *Pulse Approach*, based on ancestral wisdom philosophies of *Souths* communities from Portugal and Brazil.

The focus of the research is design project management, an area currently lacking in recognising dimensions of spirituality. We propose that a spiritual dimension should be a fundamental component of design project management strategy that intends to be integral. This is regarded as a research gap as, to date, the present study has yet to identify the existence of *integral design project management* approaches with references to *Souths* communities from Portugal, Brazil and/or the Community of Portuguese Language Countries. We believe that in contexts of humanitarian crises, it is essential to consider forms of design guided by spirituality. To promote such forms and to remedy the aforementioned theoretical gap, the *Pulse Approach* is hereby proposed: it is based on the ancestral wisdom philosophies of *quilombola* (Conaq, n.d.) and Afro-Brazilian communities from Brazil, (Batiste, 1961; Santos, 1988) and of family farming community that preserves the ancestral wisdom of the linen cycle in Portugal (Oliveira, et al, 1991).

## Theoretical foundations

### *Humanitarian collapse and wisdom for contemporary complexity*

Over the past 40 years, we have observed a dominance of Western, Anglo and Eurocentric values and practices by force of capitalist, neoliberal, industrial, colonialist, Christian, patriarchal, racist, massified and globalized thoughts (Gutierrez, 2015b, 2021; Santos, 2009; Santos, 2015). These have promoted, and continue to promote, environmental devastation, climate change, failures of economic development together with extreme social inequality, conflicts, exclusions, wars, and migrations (Latour, 2020). As a result, we find the 21st century is largely characterised by broad humanitarian crises that may more accurately be described as a collapse, as they no longer seem transitional or reversible.

As a framework for the above scenario, we closely follow the writings of the following authors:

- **Ailton Krenak** – who highlights the importance of realizing that “*we are going through a transformation (...) our collective dream of the world and the insertion of humanity in the biosphere will have to happen in a different way (...)*” (Krenak, 2020: 44)”. Krenak refers to the praxis of indigenous peoples, the use of our body as the main tool for observing the earth, the sky, to bring out the feeling that we are not disconnected from other beings (Krenak, 2020: 45), the importance of dreams as “*(...) a place for the transmission of affections (...)*” (Krenak, 2020: 37)”;
- **Antônio Bispo dos Santos** – who signals the importance of being inspired by the organic and circular wisdoms, looks and attitudes of the *quilombolas* and native peoples from Brazil that refer to being, to relationships, to community, to see the other and to the relationship with the cosmos. These are rooted in the understanding and

implementation of beginnings, means and new beginnings based on the wisdom of their ancestors (Santos, 2015, 2018, 2019);

- **Bruno Latour** – who suggests *a repolitisation of the soil*, it is necessary “*coming down to Earth*” (Latour, 2020; Costa, 2020 In: Latour, 2020: 154, 155);
- **Donna Haraway** – who affirms our duty to build collaborations as “*humus*”, “*to live well as terrestrial beings*”, “*to make multi-species relations*”, in the here and now, without projecting towards the future, while understanding that the present moment enables our responses to the now in turbulent times (Haraway, 2016; Haraway, 2020 In: Torres, 2020);
- **Anna Lovenhaup Tsing** – who shows us that through disturbance we find the beginning of action, the possibility of transformative encounters. Tsing presents the now as an opportunity “*to realize the precariousness and in the process, looking around, without looking ahead*”, also in collaboration and coordination with other terrestrial beings, we provide “*the possible life*” (Tsing, 2022: 227, 229, 233, 234; Tsing, 2021 In: Gonçalves Brito, 2021).

#### *Design project management*

Within the scope of design project management for sustainability, *Design Thinking* (Brown, 2010) is often used to facilitate the creation of creative and collaborative projects that can promote social innovation and sustainability. In the area of management, the closest reference oriented by spirituality is known as *Theory U* (Scharmer, 2009). Its basic concept is *presencing*, merging the words presence and sensing: it refers to the learning of collectivity and intuition to enhance new visions and intentions.

Both of the above promote the development of prototypes to be tested and implemented in the future. This study performs a critical reading on Brown and Scharmer, as *Design Thinking* is a design project management reference that uses collaborative, collective, social, human, and empathy aspects, but does not acknowledge extended and contemporary dimensions of spirituality in its approach. Inversely, *Theory U* is a *head (think) – heart (sense) – hands (act)* management methodology, inspired by anthroposophy spiritual science founded on its *presencing* base concept, and is geared towards implementing future projects. As a dynamic and differentiation from these two references, we propose the concept of *integral design project management*, and define it as a design project management with an integral vision, i.e. multidimensional and holistic, recognizing spirituality in an expanded, defragmented and contemporary perception. Its foundation on the philosophies of ancestral wisdom of the *Souths* communities (in this study, from Portugal and Brazil) facilitates ideas, approaches, processes, systems and projects in the present as well as in organic and circular format.

#### *Design, Spirituality and Contemporaneity*

The subject of design and spirituality was analysed from the perspectives of Papanek (1995), Schumacher (1974), Walker (2011, 2020), Margolin (2014), and Escobar (2018). In this analysis, we identified 66 components of spirituality, and their concepts were interpreted (Lopes, Franqueira, Alvelos, & Parente, 2021). Further analysis was subsequently performed on Bispo dos Santos (2015, 2018, 2019) and Krenak (2019, 2020). Furthermore, key contributions by Mãe Beata de Yemonjá (Costa, 2000, 2002, 2017), Steiner (1962), Buber (1923), Kumar (2017), Osho (Jain, 2012), Lovelock (2014, 2020) and Margulis (2014) are summarised below. We identify three more components of spirituality in their thoughts: organicity (the circularity, the spin, the circle), matriarchy and the feminine.

- **Beatriz Moreira Costa (Mãe Beata de Yemonjá)** – Spirituality lived in her life through myths, dreams, poetry, imagination, intuition, wisdom, and connections with nature and ancestry, grounded in *Candomblé* (Batiste, 1961; Santos, 1988), in the matriarchal and feminine care that promotes affection and love with ourselves, our fellow human



### *The Souths*

The focus of the research has been on learning from the *Souths*, as presented by Gutierrez (2015b; 2021). The term “*South*”, or “*the Souths*”, does not refer exclusively to the geographic south, includes “*the silenced*”, the peripherals: people, communities and groups that have been “*excluded, denied, ignored*”, considered “*defective, backward, underdeveloped, and in need of progress*”, due to a dominance of Western, Anglo-Eurocentric values and practices. Gutierrez expounds on the concept of designing the world from the vision and practices of the different worlds that permeate these *Souths*, equally proposed by Escobar’s “*pluriverse*” (2018). Gutierrez states that “*the South, the Souths, the Others and by Other NameS* (DESSOBONS - DEsigns of the South, of the Souths, Others, By Other NameS)” should be considered as central references of wisdom, knowledge and worldview in a concept that involves collective, communal, ethical, ecological, human, social, cultural and justice values and praxes. These are considered useful as a way out of totalitarianism, unsustainability, uniformity and massification of the industry and development projects proposed by the Western Anglo Eurocentric capitalist world (Gutierrez, 2015b; 2021). We observe that, inspired by Freire’s libertarian philosophy and pedagogy (1987, 1992), Gutiérrez, Escobar, Bonsiepe and Santos question western domination along with the hegemony of the North, while signaling the need for the decolonisation of knowledge - focusing on looking, listening and learning from the voices and wisdoms of the *Souths* that experience social practices (Gutierrez, 2015b, 2021; Escobar, 2018; Bonsiepe, 1985, 2011, 2012; Santos, 2009; Santos and Meneses, 2009). We consider the *Souths* as learning references in that they convey ancestry, wisdom and knowledge towards recovery and flourishing and continuity of life. Within this scope, we posit that design has the possibility of finding informative clues to promote transformative processes.

### **Methodology**

Fieldwork has taken place in online and in-person, ethnographic and autoethnographic formats, through participatory experience. The qualitative methodology of inductive and deductive nature implied a proximity to the studied communities; moreover, complex data collection was performed among direct and participant observations, along with conversations, and exploratory and semi-structured interviews. We identified *Souths* communities from Portugal and Brazil that reveal implicit spirituality-driven design project management approaches, as selection criteria for the learning objects of our research. They are:

- i) Association of Women Farmers of Castelões (Associação das Mulheres Agricultoras de Castelões - AMA Castelões, Tondela, Portugal);
- ii) Quilombola Association of Conceição das Crioulas (Associação Quilombola de Conceição das Crioulas – AQCC, Salgueiro, Pernambuco, Brasil), and
- iii) CRIOLA NGO (CRIOLA, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil).

An added factor in the choice of communities in Brazil was proximity based on collaborative work previously carried out between the years 2002-2004 and 2006-2008. The community in Portugal was identified contextually, in a leather craft workshop held in the village of Castelões in September 2020. They are comparable due to the presence of a *Souths*, ontology, as presented above. A brief presentation of the three learning cases and associated methodologies follows below.

### **Learning cases and the fieldwork development process**

- **AMA Castelões** is a Portuguese association formed by a group of women artisans over 65 years old, who for more than 20 years has ensured the viability of the linen cycle tradition in the region of Castelões, Tondela, Portugal. They meet weekly to produce linen fabric pieces with embroidery and crochet, perpetuating ancestral wisdom and

knowledge contained in local linen cycles (AMA Castelões, n.d.). Field work began on 29 September 2020, and ended on 8 March 2021: it consisted of 21 face-to-face meetings (approximately 3 hours and 30 minutes each), totalling 69 hours and 30 minutes of participatory experience; 52 pages of field diary; 795 photographs; 221 videos, a sum of 3 hours and 11 minutes of recorded images and speeches; and 40 audio recordings, a total to 14 hours and 23 minutes of recorded audio material.

- **AQCC** is a Brazilian association created in 2001 to promote the development of the community of Conceição das Crioulas along with its ethnic and cultural identity, as well as the fight for the *quilombola* cause (AQCC, n.d.). Field work began on 30 May 2020 and ended on 15 July 2022. 12 meetings were held: 3 face-to-face meetings with the community, 1 via WhatsApp and 8 online via Google Meet: 56 hours, 12 minutes and 15 seconds of participatory experience; 18 pages of field diary; 204 photos; 36 videos, totalling 1 hour, 11 minutes and 10 seconds of recorded images and speeches; and 16 audio recordings totalling of 5 hours and 57 minutes of recorded audio material.
- **CRIOLA** is a Brazilian civic organization created in 1992 in the defense and promotion of Black Women's rights within social values of justice, equity and solidarity. Its mission is to empower black women in face of racism, sexism, lesbophobia and transphobia, acting as agents of transformation in public spaces (Criola, n.d.). Field work began on 26 April 2020 and ended on 22 September 2022. We held 7 meetings, 6 online via Google Meet, 1 face-to-face in Rio de Janeiro: 9 hours, 23 minutes and 30 seconds of participatory experience; 8 pages of field diary; 46 photos; and 5 audio recordings, a total of 6 hours, 23 minutes and 30 seconds of recorded audio material.

Experience through direct and participant observations, together with conversations, exploratory and semi-structured interviews, provided us with the awareness of implicit, potential spirituality-driven design project management components in the activities of studies communities. The outcome is a set of 13 main and common components of spirituality: present (the here and now), presence, organicity (the circularity, the spin, the circle), interdependence on all that exists, relationality, the feminine, matriarchy, love, affection, care, ethics, intuition and ancestry.

We came to realise that the communities' representatives, teams and artisans plan, create and implement their projects in synchrony with the needs that are being experienced in the present, as well as in an organic and circular format. Project planning, creation and implementation are anchored in ancestral wisdom philosophies of the *quilombola* and traditional African matrix peoples, as well as women linen artisans. These are empirically experienced in lived life, and rooted in the aforementioned *quilombolas* (Santos, 2015, 2018, 2019), *Candomblé* (Batiste, 1961; Santos, 1988) and Portuguese linen cycle traditions (Oliveira, et al., 1991). Thus tangible actions become transformative towards cultural sustainability, environmental preservation, health, socio-economic transformation, territoriality, as well as creative, circular and organic economies and communities. Especially in the scope of the CRIOLA and the AQCC, we also observed actions towards protection of human rights and promotion of education, citizenship, diversity, respect and good living of the black people.

### **Preliminary conclusions and grounded theory developments**

Based on the aforementioned 13 spirituality components, empirically grounded on developed field work and literature review, we posit the *Pulse Approach*. As an ongoing formulation, the *Pulse Approach* is currently founded on the ancestral wisdom philosophies of the *Souths* communities from Portugal and Brazil. We present it as a head (think) - heart (sense) - hands (act) *integral design project management* approach towards the empowerment of transformative processes. It may facilitate strategic planning, project management, group and team

development, self-development, and complement other design project management and/or management tools for the above purposes.

The *Pulse Approach* operates as follows: with a relaxed and open mind set, sensory receptivity and active processes; in the here and now; in authentic presence; in connection with relationality (with humans, non-humans, forces of nature, the cosmos); in interdependence with all that exists (terrestrial beings and life energies); in organic and circular forms; sensing intensely at the core: matriarchal and the feminine love, affection and care, ethics rooted in the intuition and ancestry (intelligence, consciousness, wisdom, deep confidence).

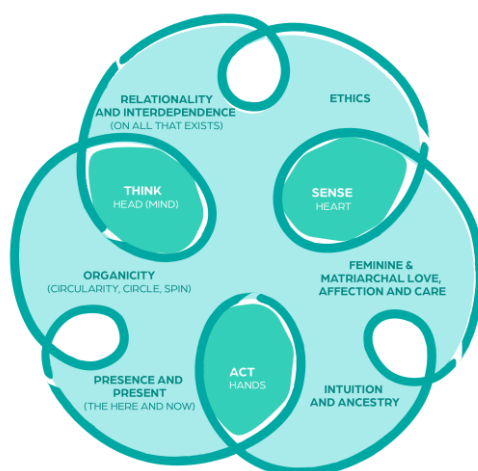


Table 2: *Pulse Approach*, created by the authors, 2022.

We propose the application of the *Pulse Approach* at this developmental stage in precariousness and turbulent times. Further research will be performed regarding its implementation. In addition, elaborated design will include the knowledge acquired in two sensory experiences that have meanwhile been developed with Conceição das Crioulas and Castelões.

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