



Original Research

Decoding the Communal Self: Ethnographic Documentary and Design as Methodologies for Understanding a Social Phenomenon

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Abstract: This article draws on the interdisciplinary potentialities of design for societal intervention, to present and discuss approaches to ethnographic documentary in vulnerable socio-economic contexts, and specifically social housing neighborhoods. The article reflects on the impact of the approach taken in the project “Echoing the Communal Self: designing the dissemination and replication of self-initiated practices in underprivileged urban communities in a post-pandemic world” (ECHO) and specifically the results obtained in the case of the Recreational Association Club Balteiro Jovem, located in the Balteiro neighborhood in Vila Nova de Gaia, northern Portugal. The main research challenge was to get to know and document this community practice, through close collaboration with the social actors involved and through the construction of an informative and inspiring narrative. This approach also helped to disseminate the emerging narrative beyond the borders of the neighborhood itself. This paper highlights the interlinkages between authors and practices related to design, anthropology, and audiovisual documentary, and reflects on the empirical and interdisciplinary work carried out. This research resulted in a documentary film, exhibited to the community and the city, and was also adopted as a tool in the work of social action technicians, for the promotion of community initiatives.

Keywords: Social Design, Ethnographic documentary, Communication Design, Social practices, Design and Audiovisual

Introduction

Social Design and Co-Design methodologies are recognized as important ways to empower less privileged populations in socio-economically difficult situations, which have in many cases intensified due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Cañete and Peralta 2022; Chen et al. 2016; Leal et al. 2022). The research project “Echoing the Communal Self: Designing the Dissemination and Replication of Self-Initiated Practices in Underprivileged Urban Communities in a Post-Pandemic World (ECHO),” funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT), aims to identify, understand, and disseminate successful community practices, born in underprivileged social contexts, particularly in social housing neighborhoods. Using the tools of Communication Design, this research project intends to document these phenomena and help the dissemination and potential replication of these

practices (Guimarães et al. 2023; Martins et al. 2021; Vasconcelos et al. 2023). This article explores the results that the project's methodology has achieved in the context of the particular case of the Recreational Association Clube Balteiro Jovem, in Vila Nova de Gaia, northern Portugal. The Association focuses on the practice of sports—particularly football—by children and young people from the neighborhood and adjoining areas. The identification of this particular community practice (and emerging Association) arose from previous fieldwork, namely through contacts with other neighborhood associations, social action technicians and with the municipality of Vila Nova de Gaia.

The local authority recognized, namely through effective support, the work carried out by this initiative in favor of the local community and its importance for social inclusion and well-being. However, the local authority also identified a high level of difficulty in good examples of this type transcending the boundaries of the neighborhood itself, with regard to their recognition, social valorization, and dissemination. ECHO thus arose with the aim of helping to respond to this problem. To this end, a methodology was adopted which consisted of the following four steps. First, holistic knowledge of the problem had to be built, through fieldwork for integration and knowledge of the related environments, including exploratory interviews with different individuals and protagonists of the practices and communities involved. Second, audiovisual documentaries were produced, resulting from interviews and recordings made in different contexts, namely the neighborhood and community practices. Third, initiatives of interaction and support to community practices were undertaken, namely illustration and design workshops, and creative projects. Fourth, and finally, the results were disseminated through exhibitions, publications, and an online platform.

This article focuses on the first two methodological elements. The fieldwork and interviews were carried out fundamentally for the understanding of the context under study and, consequently, for the definition of the design and communication strategy to be adopted, namely the production of the documentaries. Thus, based on the case study, this research intends to reflect on the importance of the documentary as a methodological process for the decoding, dissection and understanding of a social and community problem. Subsequently, it is also able to reflect on the creative process of the production of a documentary as an effective means of recording and building a narrative about the reality under study. Simultaneously, the research also demonstrates how this process can serve as a pedagogical tool and inspiring object for the target audience.

The first part of this article presents the central theme, the objectives and characteristics of the research project and the case study, highlighting the importance of the process of recognition and study of the context in which the case study is inserted. After presenting the main challenges and establishing the objectives, the theoretical and methodological foundations are presented, relating the potentialities of the interdisciplinarity of design in the social field, at a crossroads with anthropology and ethnographic documentary.

Since the case study has a strong ethnographic component, requiring immersion in the field, the description of the empirical work is fundamental for understanding the course of the work carried out and the construction of the narrative about the Association and the people involved in it. Next, the discussion reflects on the crossing of different authors and basic concepts in this work. Finally, limitations and recommendations for future work are identified in the conclusion.

The Challenge of Recognition and Dissemination

The central problem identified in this study is the lack of recognition and dissemination of the often very valuable and empowering community activities occurring in underprivileged social housing neighborhoods. In this context, the aim of the article is to explore, through the practices of design, the audiovisual as a tool to study and empower, rather than only communicate, such phenomena (Rebelo, Mehmood, and Marsden 2020). More specifically, the following stages of audiovisual study were approach, registration, and collection of information in the field; analysis, systematization, and narrative construction of the material collected during fieldwork; and dissemination and creation of empathy for the case study.

To understand this problem, it was necessary to build a gradual approach, resulting in different methods and techniques of data gathering. Being a medium with malleable characteristics, the audiovisual allowed ordinary and spontaneous recordings to be made inside and outside the neighborhood, without prior preparation—as in the case of exploratory interviews—as well as formal recordings, such as semi-structured interviews.

The gradual process of immersion of the research team in the context of Balteiro contributed to an efficient survey and elaboration of key questions about the emergence and functioning of the activities of the case study. This included the relationship between the social actors involved (representatives of the City Council, social workers, and the president and members of the Association). This process revealed social design as the ideal method to document and disseminate, and the ethnographic documentary as a tool for recording, diagnosis, analysis, and communication.

The respondents chiefly explained the success of the initiative based on the co-production and co-creation approaches taken. In other words, the Recreational Association Clube Balteiro Jovem started from the need and will of the local population to engage in cooperative work, involving different agents, from the public sector (municipality, schools, and social action assistance) and private sector (companies and industry). Mutual synergies were identified as fundamental for robust and sustainable development of community initiatives.

However, despite the involvement of different entities external to the neighborhood, the community and involved entities continue to identify the lack of dissemination and social valorization of successful community initiatives as problematic (Turnhout et al. 2020). Ana Semblano, a social action technician from the Balteiro neighborhood, explained during one of the interviews that “normally, the social area is not very publicised” (Personal Interview,

May 4, 2022), noting that the community work that can be developed in these contexts is generally difficult to measure and, consequently, to disseminate and replicate.

In response to this problem, we sought to explore the capacity of the design discipline to lead multidisciplinary projects and to work beyond its boundaries, using research tools and methods from other disciplines. In this case, we worked on the articulation of design with anthropology, through the adoption of the ethnographic documentary as a tool for diagnosis and communication, as will be discussed later in this article, in the Methodological Framework section.

Therefore, in order to understand this difficulty in overcoming the limitations of the dissemination and eventual replicability of this kind of initiatives, we adopted a social and anthropological perspective. In this case, it was a matter of understanding the visible and invisible borders of these social housing neighborhoods in relation to the city where they are located.

Contextualizing Balteiro: Social Housing and the Production of Space

Social housing in Portugal is one of the public authority's key policies to provide (or aid in the provision of) housing for families and individuals who cannot afford to rent or buy a house on their own. To ensure the basic right to housing (Antunes 2019), buildings, houses, and housing complexes are built and made available as temporary solutions for citizens and families in vulnerable socio-economic situations. However, there are countless families that remain in these houses for several generations, creating bonds and roots in these neighborhoods, such as in the Balteiro neighborhood (Drago 2017).

The president of the Balteiro Jovem Association, José Moreira (Figure 1), is one of these cases. In addition to living in the neighborhood since he was born, his children and some relatives also continue to live there. For fifty-five years, he has witnessed the difficulties and challenges of different generations in the neighborhood—including those related to drug addiction and violence—and from this, and his affective ties with that place and the other residents, mainly the children and young people, he wanted to be at the head of this initiative to act on behalf of the community, or the “collectivity,” as it is referred by him in the various interviews (Personal Interviews, from May 2022 to January 2023).

In other words, taking into account the particularities of each social housing neighborhood and the conditions and community relations of each specific context, a sense of belonging is recognizable on the part of the residents of these places, even if they do not own these houses and have not chosen to live in these areas of the city (Mee 2009). The spirit of collectivity that emerges in some of these contexts, as in the case of the Balteiro neighborhood, is based on the social authority of the residents with respect to these spaces and on the relationship created between neighbors over generations. Cultural and social microcosms are formed.



Figure 1: José Moreira, President of the Balteiro Jovem Association
Source: Nuno Martins

In this sense, we approach the concept of “island city” (Roberti 2020). These are “urban islands” that emerge—and are created—with their own environment and way of life amidst a complex city fabric. It is the recognition of appropriation and the production of meaning (Lefebvre, 2000) by those who occupy these islands, and the consequent idea of social authority (Carlos 2019), that help to ground this concept. That is, when designing a social housing neighborhood, a logic is imposed, the people and groups that inhabit these places, in turn, appropriate them, giving them their own meaning. They are cities within the city (Roberti 2020).

Despite the creation of these affective and social bonds, the emergence of islands and their way of life is not only a choice of their residents, but also a social and economic imposition of the city where they are inserted. They are psycho-geographical hinge points (Costa 2020), where the distances that effectively separate two regions of a city have little to do with physical distances (Debord 1958).

There are, therefore, two distinct sides that are part of the same context. On the one hand, there is the social life of the inhabitants, which produces meaning and shapes the space as their own, creating their own dynamics that result in distinct types of microcosms. And, on the other hand, there is an isolation from the rest of the city in which they live. Overcoming this distance, or perhaps even isolation, is not a recent challenge but continues to lack concrete solutions.

In the case under study—and within the scope of the “island city” concept—this barrier is formed mainly by the stigmatization and use of these spaces and the people who inhabit them and give them meaning. It is common for pre-formatted discourses to be propagated about these socioeconomically fragile places. One discourse treats the islands in a paternalistic way, emphasizing the need for people living there to be “taught” or supported by people from outside the community itself (Khadilkar and Jagtap 2021). The other discourse insists on the fragilities and problems related to violence and illegal activities, which, in some cases, may be an internal problem of these places, in other words, these territories end up incorporating important “symbolic dimensions” (Fernandes 2002). In other examples of social housing neighborhoods in nearby cities, such as the Sobreiro neighborhood in Maia (Portugal), there is a common discourse in this sense—verbalized both by the elderly and by the younger population—which contributes to perceive this stigma. In Sobreiro, “the residents believed that the neighborhood was always seen with an outsider’s perspective and that for many years they had carried on their shoulders the stigma of living in [...] a social housing neighborhood” (Roberti, Santos, and Brandão 2021, 148).

The ECHO project seeks to work precisely in this direction: to contribute to dispel this sometimes stigmatising, sometimes paternalistic stance on these urban islands, through the valorization and dissemination of self-initiated movements and projects emerging in these contexts. To fulfil these interests, social design (Nold et al. 2022; Tromp and Vial 2022) and visual ethnography (Pink 2007) were chosen to act in these scenarios, through audiovisual creation—with documentary pieces concerning each case study—and the creation of a website, where the documentaries and other complementary information about them are made available.

Thus, in addition to disseminating an alternative discourse from the already referred in this article, we intend to contribute to inspire and instruct—through the examples of success presented—other practices in other social housing neighborhoods, or similar community and socioeconomic contexts.

Methodological Framework: The Rationale of Ethnographic Filmmaking

As Henley (2000, 210) notes: “The apparatus may be indispensable but it is not in itself sufficient: a theoretical rationale is also clearly necessary if ethnographic filmmaking is finally to be accepted as a worthwhile academic activity.” In line with this, we now present the rationale for the methodology adopted in this research, namely, the main reasons for having chosen ethnographic film as a methodological tool (MacDougall 2022a).

The ethnographic documentary was used to obtain a portrait on the history and social impact of the Recreational Association Clube Balteiro Jovem in the Balteiro neighborhood. The objective was to value and recognize these practices on behalf of the community and contribute to their dissemination in analogous contexts.

Ethnographic film is a significant domain within anthropology and, although this project is not a purely anthropological work, or carried out in an academic context that canonically follows these principles, there are, naturally, fundamental bridges that enrich its multidisciplinary (Pink et al. 2022). Studying stigmatized populations, with their own culture and very particular interpersonal relationships, demands a gradual and cautious approach. The crossing of design with ethnography is very common in projects of this nature, since, as Pink et al. (2022, 3) describe, it “promotes an approach that is committed to interdisciplinary practice and understanding. It also recognizes that this might have multiple forms and orientations. Although single-discipline approaches produce crucial insights, their narrowness inhibits their ability to bring about effective approaches to change.”

In this research, ethnographic film was developed as “filmic ethnography” (Ruby 1975; Vailati and Villarreal 2021), that is, not treating it as a mere instrument, but as a practice articulated with other disciplines, such as design and anthropology; and as a form of knowledge, interpretation, and communication.

Since the 1970s, Jay Ruby has explored and defended the ethnographic documentary as a scientific tool capable of documenting, interpreting, and disseminating content related to varied case studies (Vailati and Villarreal 2021). Ruby proposes alternatives or complements to ethnographic films that, like the one developed in the ECHO project, seek capabilities in the discipline of design to better manage and communicate these contents: online platforms, photographs, texts, video, etc. The author argues that, unlike realist documentary and broadcast journalism, ethnographic film benefits from this multiplicity, seeking different sources: cinematographic and artistic techniques, theories based on fieldwork and the field of ideas, etc. (Ruby 2008).

Ruby supports the idea that ethnographic films should not have as their sole or main purpose the commercial medium, and compares the practice, for example, with the publication of books through universities (Ruby 2008). In the ECHO project, in addition to the academic purpose and the communication of the scientific knowledge acquired, we are interested in the dissemination and understanding of the content produced through the documentaries by a wide range of audiences. Namely, residents of other social ventures that are starting up similar initiatives, or that have the intention of doing so. These ventures may house a wide variety of residents—age, gender, level of education, areas of interest, etc.—so we advocate that the documentaries and the website itself should not feature enclosed content within the scope of scientific language but should adopt a language that allows them to circulate among different media and audiences with the help of other communication tools and channels.

Like the documentary itself in a broader perspective, the ethnographic film is porous and diverse, precisely so that it is able to suit each case study and its relationship with each documentarian or researcher. There are, therefore, different styles, languages, and ways of

documenting (MacDougall 2022b), which, although malleable and adaptable according to the context, may have pre-defined classifications as inspiration and theoretical basis.

According to Nichols' (2010) analysis, the structure of a film has dominant characteristics of a certain mode. Thus, this author defines and groups characteristics that result in six subgenres, discussing the time when they emerged and what he considers to be the advantages and disadvantages of each one of them. These six documentary modes are: poetic, expository, participatory, observational, reflective, and performative. However, as the author himself argues, a single work may, and probably will, have a relationship with characteristics of several of these subgenres.

By analyzing the styles defined by Nichols more objectively, it is possible to argue that the present work has more links with the participatory sub-genre, which emerged more prominently in the 1960s. This aspect was explored mainly due to the importance of the interviews and the direct relationship between the director and interviewer with the subject—people linked to the Association Balteiro Jovem—throughout the fieldwork, in addition to the use of archive images to illustrate and recover the history of the neighborhood and the emergence of the sports initiative. In this sub-genre, the viewer perceives, more directly, that the final narrative depends fundamentally on the nature and quality of the relationship between the filmmaker/filming team and the subject/persons involved, and not on generalizations and pre-established perspectives on the subject (Nichols 2010).

Nichols describes the nature of each film as a fingerprint, which gives individuality to the director (Önen 2021). By characterizing this own voice, he recognizes the authorial character of the documentary, legitimizes its plurality, the different possibilities of approaching a theme and making a snapshot on a certain reality. This openness allows the diagnosis and analysis of each case study to be made in order to adapt the methodology to the subject and, consequently, influences the editing of the final object/documentary. In this case, it was crucial to avoid a discourse that reinforced the stigma often faced by these social housing neighborhoods and their residents. Instead, this relationship with the subject should allow the people of the neighborhood themselves to have an active voice in the accounts of their history, challenges, overcoming and future perspectives, as argued by Henley (2000).

Empirical Work: Making the Documentary

Converging with Henley (2000), in order to make a didactic but also inspiring portrait of the reality under study, our proposal was to develop, through design and audiovisual documentary (Pink et al. 2022), methodologies for a gradual approach to the subject. In this case, the subjects are the people involved in the creation of the Recreational Association Clube Balteiro Jovem and, more broadly, the residents of the Balteiro neighborhood.

The information gathered in the fieldwork resulted both from pre-conceived questions drawn up for the interview scripts and from more spontaneous moments during interaction

in the field. It was a process of listening to and learning from these people in order to then build a coherent and informative narrative that could circulate and have a positive impact outside the boundaries of the social housing neighborhood.

To this end, preparatory work was carried out to identify and gather information from the municipality about the Balteiro neighborhood, including images (Figure 2), after which fieldwork could begin. Based on the fieldwork work, key characters were identified in the emergence and viability of the Association, this identification process was carried out throughout the entire period of image capturing. Next, the script for the semi-structured interviews was prepared, which underwent necessary adjustments throughout the process. During the phase of conducting and recording the interviews, the daily and exceptional activities of the Association were also filmed, including regular training, football tournaments outside the neighborhood, and daily activities in the facilities and in the gym. Finally, we proceeded to the decoupage and editing of the documentary narrative, as well as the subsequent dissemination, through face-to-face screenings and dissemination on the ECHO project's website and on the Association's social networks. Below, we present the filmmaking process in more detail, divided into topics.



Figure 2: Balteiro Neighborhood
 Source: *Gaiurb* 2015

Fieldwork and Interviewing

The preparatory work helped to get to know the Association in a generic way and to prepare for fieldwork. The fieldwork and interviews lasted approximately twelve months and aimed to: identify, get to know better and obtain the testimony of the different people involved, namely the Association's protagonists and participants, the neighborhood community, and social action technicians; and to understand the genesis of Balteiro Jovem, its history and its

impact and involvement with the community inside and outside the neighborhood (Coutinho 2013; Hammersley and Atkinson 2019; Mata and Fernandes 2019).

The process of contact and relationship with the protagonists and the community was gradual. The first objective was to build a relationship of trust where we tried, through a series of exploratory, fluid, and non-recorded conversations, to get to know the people, their daily lives and to present the project itself and its objectives. The time dedicated to this initial phase, of approximately two months, was necessary for the creation of this close relationship.

The process of approach was also gradual in the recordings made. First, only informal and exploratory conversations were carried out, followed by written notes. Second, audio recordings were used with the concern of keeping the conversations long and fluid, to soften and disinhibit the presence of the recording equipment and always respecting requests for breaks. Finally, audio and visual recordings of the semi-structured interviews were implemented, supported by a script of questions, to obtain systematized material for the documentary.

All interviewees were always previously informed of the project's objectives and were assured that the most sensitive information would not be published or, alternatively, their anonymity would be ensured. Furthermore, all content to be published would be previously validated and authorized by the interviewees, through duly signed informed consent.

For the semi-structured interviews, a script of questions was used, aligned with the objectives of the project (Bryman 2012). The interviews did not follow a rigid model, and the script of questions was adapted throughout the interview, according to the interviewees' answers, in order to explore particular issues or questions that were considered relevant at the time. This freedom to respond to interviewees was a permanent concern, but care was also taken not to distance the interview too much from the research topic and objectives (Coutinho 2013; Coutinho Pereira and Chaves 2002; Freixo 2012; Hammersley and Atkinson 2019; Mata and Fernandes 2019; Sousa and Baptista 2011).

Video Recording

Direct participant observation had a great influence on this work, which was based on ethnographic documentary and social design principles. This approach refers to Nichols' classification (Bradbury and Guadagno 2020) of the participatory documentary, according to which the degree of participation and interaction of researchers in the reality under study varies depending on each visit and interview carried out in the fieldwork.

In the context of this project, the "encounter with the other" (Colusso 2017) is considered a crucial point to avoid the risk of exoticizing or reinforcing the stigmatization of the universes included in the representations built about them. Thus, cautious and patient interaction with the other can build the necessary understanding of how to collect information and audio and visual material relevant to the specific contextual research.

Although there is interest on the part of the people involved in participating in the ECHO project—either because of the pride in sharing the success stories, or because of the benefits of publicizing the initiative for the Association itself—they have their own agenda and daily routine, which goes far beyond the concerns and expectations of the work that is done by the researchers, or is even related to it. For this reason, based on this agenda, we adapted, whenever necessary, the actions previously planned for the fieldwork.



Figure 3: José Moreira (on the Right) During an Interview, Held In Front of the Football Pitch of the Balteiro Jovem Recreational Association in Balteiro Neighborhood

Source: Daniel Brandão

The president of the Association, José Moreira, a central figure in the documentary (Figure 3) due to his active role in the community, was a great help in adapting the research team to the local reality. José Moreira always showed great availability and proximity to the team, which was decisive in establishing a relationship of trust with the community and in guiding and making different decisions during the work.

One of the examples that illustrate this relationship was the decision, based on José Moreira's indication, not to film inside the houses of the neighborhood's residents, the athletes, and their families. People were willing to collaborate, but not in the private sphere of their own homes. For this reason, some of the planned filming that involved capturing images in those private and intimate environments was rethought, thus avoiding possible discomfort.

These deliberations informed the choice to focus on the sphere of collectivity, with an immersion in spaces shared by the residents of the neighborhood and the club itself. The

club's spaces each had an important meaning in their history and daily lives. The synthetic football pitch was a transformative element of the local reality and concrete proof that the struggle of the president and the young people was worthwhile. The gymnasium embodied the club's first achievement through direct contact with the responsible council office. The "dirt football field" was an empty space without structures in the neighborhood, but, before the construction of the synthetic pitch, was occupied and adapted by the children and young people of the neighborhood to play football and hold tournaments. The office where the social support technician carries out appointments with the local population, the clubhouse, and the streets and cafés of the neighborhood.

Immersion in these significant and collective spaces of the neighborhood was fundamental to understand and portray the history of the Association and contextualize it within the neighborhood in which it emerged and is located. But also, and not least: to meet residents with whom we would otherwise have no contact; to explain the ECHO project to them; hear stories; understand the daily and social dynamics of the neighborhood; and to observe what the presence of the president of the Association was like in the neighborhood, known to practically everyone we came across.

The filming team and material present in the fieldwork—both in the isolated interviews and when recording the neighborhood, football tournaments and training sessions—was selected taking as criteria the minimum necessary to ensure technically satisfactory image and sound quality, but also, and mainly, to ensure the comfort of the people who would be portrayed. The type of equipment used for capturing sound and image was therefore chosen to be the least invasive possible. The smaller amount of equipment allows fewer people to operate it and greater mobility in its transportation, facilitating adaptation to different spaces and situations and making the filming process more flexible. In this way, the team found it easier to follow the action and the characters, and avoiding the opposite, contributing decisively to the naturalness of the moments captured. As Wiseman (2001) states, in this way, "you are always prepared, ready to start, and the whole idea is to take advantage of chance." Considering that some of them were recordings of sporting activities—in this case, football—these technical options were especially relevant when capturing quick movements and changes in the focus of the action to be caught by the camera in a considerably wide space.

In general, the fieldwork visits were almost always made by one or two people and, in some cases, by three, in order to create a relationship with the neighborhood and the people and to build the documentary. Throughout, choices were made chiefly with the intention of creating a closer and more natural relationship with the people, while still trying to have room to make an imagetic and sound recording coherent with the reality found among them.

This reduction of the team and of the material did cause, however, some restrictions. In some interviews, for example, the camera remained static, on a tripod, so that it was possible to develop a dialogue focused on the interviewee, abstaining from other aesthetic visual concerns that could distract during the conversation.

Video Editing and Design

In the context of the final editing of the documentary, we highlight some aspects that were considered fundamental to the final design and objectives of the resulting audiovisual piece: script, archive material, initial sequence (introduction) and final sequence of the video.

The style adopted in the documentary production of this project recognizes the script as an important tool in the organization, design and construction of the final narrative, but one that remains open until the end of the video editing (MacDougall 2022a). In the case of fiction narratives, it is common to have a script of the narrative structured and detailed before filming begins due notably to restrictions in budget and production schedule. In this case, although we defined the fundamental bases and objectives of the general structure of the film at the very beginning of the project, the narrative script was built and fed gradually, as we met the characters and conducted the interviews, but also, and mainly, during the actual process of decoupage.

Despite the differences—structural, but also objective—between the development of a fiction script and a documentary script, one genre can use and adapt methodologies and approaches from the other. For Slugan and Terrone (2021, 107) “the fact remains that the current consensus in documentary studies is that the documentary/fiction distinction is a matter of degree rather than that of a firm boundary,” that is, the border between the two is permeable and changeable (Ellis 2021). Thus, although a pre-structured script was not used, as in the case of fiction, it was divided into four main blocks, which were fed with content from the fieldwork, collected throughout the process, without losing sight of the rhythm of a narrative arc that was coherent, informative, and inspiring (Pearlman 2019). Briefly, the four script blocks are: a) history and emergence of the initiative, where a contextualization of the neighborhood and the main characters are presented; b) main problems faced during the club’s history and the current challenges; c) how people overcame the problems to get where they are today, and what motivated them; d) advice for other people and associations who want to create similar initiatives in weakened socio-economic contexts; and e) testimonies and personal impact, future projections and continuity.

This previous division of themes also helped in the elaboration of the interview script and in the guidance of the types of images to be filmed, identification of characters and systematization of the archive material. On this last aspect, and in accordance with the participatory documentary sub-genre highlighted earlier (Nichols 2010), this element was of great importance to illustrate the club’s story of overcoming and potentially inspire people and associations in similar situations. Through the president of the Association, we had access to a vast archive of photographs and videos concerning more than a decade of stories linked to the Balteiro Jovem Association (Figure 4). These ranged from the process of cleaning and rehabilitation of the current clubhouse and gymnasium, done by the hands of the neighborhood residents themselves, to the winning of prizes and trophies in different

tournaments inside and outside the neighborhood. Intense organization and systematization were necessary to work through this large volume of content that, although rich and fundamental, was not previously ordered.



Figure 4: Rehabilitation of the Clubhouse and Gymnasium of Balteiro Jovem
 Source: *Balteiro Jovem Association's Archive 2015*

Besides the script divided by thematic blocks, we will discuss two important points in the editing of the video: the opening sequence and the closing sequence. The introductions in the documentary have received, in general, little attention in the theoretical scope, but not because of that they have a less important role than in the case of fiction film productions, where there is already a long discussion and theoretical basis about them (Nichols 2022).

The video's introduction was built not to summarize what the Association is, but rather to set the tone of the narrative that would follow, to present its essence, which translates into the people of the neighborhood who had their lives transformed by it and, consequently, how they themselves have transformed that community. This introduction is composed of rhythmic music, faster cuts, outdoor images of the neighborhood and the football pitch, and short statements by the president of the association and some young people who are, or were, part of the club. The audiovisual elements are exposed with the intention of portraying tension and conflict, arousing the curiosity of the viewer about what we are talking about and why the life of that neighborhood and of those people has changed. Immediately afterwards, we move on to the phase of contextualizing the theme of the documentary so that, little by little, the viewer can understand who the main actors of that initiative were,

what challenges they went through, how they managed to overcome them and what advice they have from their own experience.

Usually more used in the performative subgenre of documentary (Bradbury and Guadagno 2020, 91), we can consider that the beginning of this documentary is about “evoking a mode.” As we highlighted earlier, although the performative documentary as defined by Nichols (2010) is not the category that best describes our film, it is always possible and welcome to allow some influence and mixture between different documentary modes.

In turn, the final block of the documentary returns to the beginning, causing an ending in the design of the narrative. Not with the same images, but with the same characters, in the same setting—the football pitch—and with the same style and composition: faster and rhythmic cuts according to the statements and music, and the demonstration of a great affective character common to the young people who speak in voice off, or to the camera. This time, the spectator feels that he already knows the Balteiro Jovem Association, the neighborhood, and part of the community in which it is inserted. The story returns to those who started it, but now the testimonies are about the importance of transmitting motivation and knowledge to new generations, and the future expectations for that collectivity and for those who are part of it.

Return(s) to the Community

In the scope of the objectives established for this project, it is fundamental to guarantee that all the people who enter the documentary as relevant actors for the understanding of the case study have access to and are able to benefit from the documentary itself. As Castañeda (2006, 86) states, the “fieldwork has meaning and value for those who have allowed it to happen in their midst.” However, as has already been pointed out, our purpose is also for this content to reach other people and communities with other disadvantaged backgrounds or context, with the aim of inspiring and guiding other interested people in this type of community work.

In the case of the Balteiro Jovem Association, despite having considerable success in football tournaments outside the neighborhood—where players gain some visibility and are contacted, for example, by federal football clubs to pursue their careers—in interviews and exploratory conversations, interviewees claimed that they find it difficult to make the Association’s work known. The only communication channel used by the club is Facebook. However, this has been a communication that is essentially based on sharing photographs of training sessions and matches of the Association’s teams, which, even so, are far from representing and making known the real impact that the Association’s activity has achieved in the neighborhood. The documentary came to contribute to respond to this gap. Through video and design, it was possible to build an informative and inspiring narrative that includes several testimonials about the impact that the Association’s work has had and continues to

have on the life of the neighborhood, using a visual and cinematic language adapted to a wide audience. This allowed the communication of a message that is easy to understand.

During this project we realized, through the interviews and fieldwork, that one of the main needs was precisely to give visibility to the positive impact of the work of the Balteiro Jovem Association in the neighborhood. The role of the Association in the education and guidance of children and young people in the neighborhood is recognised by the teachers and students themselves, through first-person testimonies included in the documentary. Highlighting this in the documentary informs about, and pays tribute to, the work of the Association, with the aim of achieving greater visibility and, consequently, recognition, translatable into financial support to improve and expand the activities of the Association.

The return to the local community was accomplished also through the public premiere of the documentary and an exhibition. This process contributed, precisely, to the visibility and, mainly, to value—and the very celebration—the work carried out within these initiatives. To fulfil this objective, the opening event of the exhibition brought together different important stakeholders in this type of social activities: political decision-makers; representatives of the associations; the local authority responsible for the social housing neighborhoods; children and young people who were or are part of the club; academics; members of research centers. With the ultimate goal of disseminating this information beyond the boundaries of the neighborhood itself, the exhibition was built outside the neighborhood, in a central area of the neighboring city of Porto, frequented by different audiences.

Conclusions

This article sought to discuss and demonstrate how documentary and design can be not only a means for recording and building a narrative about a particular reality under study, but also methodologies for accessing knowledge and understanding phenomena. In the specific case of the phenomenon under study, the research focused on a community practice in a disadvantaged social context, the Recreational Association Clube Balteiro Jovem, in a social housing neighborhood. Despite the positive impact of this community practice in the neighborhood being recognized by the community of residents itself, a high difficulty was identified in the recognition of this practice outside the geographical perimeter of the neighborhood. Overcoming this difficulty of dissemination may contribute to the potential replication of the phenomenon in other similar contexts, and thus help inclusion and the reduction of existing asymmetries in the residents' communities of other social housing neighborhoods and in the cities where they are located.

This study has found that the research and understanding of these specific realities require time-consuming outreach on the ground. During the process, systemic problems of high social complexity were identified, but the ambition of this study was never to solve them. In a commercial context, it is common to see cosmetic action, using audiovisual and design

tools and techniques to camouflage problems and make a product or idea profitable. The aim of this work avoided that practice. This work used the potential of design and audiovisual, firstly, as tools of research and knowledge and, consequently, as means of dissemination of that knowledge in order to contribute to the guidance, development, and inspiration of other citizens, motivating them to replicate, in their communities, such altruistic initiatives for the common good.

The objective of the study was fulfilled in the recognition by a set of entities involved in a public dissemination event for the documentary, in the center of the city of Porto; and in the adoption of the documentary by social action technicians as a tool for inclusion and stimulus of community work.

Studying the context and dynamics of social housing neighborhoods in Portugal was fundamental to better understand the case under study. Lefebvre's (2000) cultural study about social authority and the production of meaning in space, as well as the deep experience shared by those who occupy it, was also an important contribution to this reflection.

In this same sense, we crossed the concept of social isolation and urban microcosms of the "island city" (Roberti 2020) with the stigmatizing idea of the concept of periphery and the psychogeographic territories of Guy Debord (Costa 2020). In these two references, physical distances are unrelated to the social distances that separate different areas of a city. Or, in the specific case under study in this article, the borders between social housing neighborhoods and the city in which they are inserted.

Based on these concepts, the interdisciplinary character of ethnographic design was explored to broaden its operative horizons (Pink et al. 2022). In this sense, the immersion in the field and the participant observation methodology adopted in the process of collecting video and sound material for the documentary, were key factors in the approach to the theme and design of the filmic narrative. Direct contact with the community and social institutions allowed us to identify the specific problems of the phenomenon under study and cross-reference them with other sources, such as academic literature.

The ethnographic documentary was studied through filmmakers and authors such as Nichols (2010) and Ruby (2008), in order to ground the creative and ethical process of the work developed. Furthermore, the dissemination potential of the audiovisual piece (on websites, online platforms, social networks, etc.) and its ability to reach a wide audience, with different degrees of accessibility and literacy—fundamental to achieve the objectives of this project—were decisive in the use of this tool.

The systemic complexity of this type of reality in social housing neighborhoods requires multidisciplinary research involvement and a resistance to the eagerness for quick results. Although this study focuses on the area of Design, the team included researchers from areas such as Psychology and Anthropology, allowing a plural reading of the problem and a better notion of its effective complexity.

This study arose within the scope of an exploratory research project, which's initial mission of identifying, registering, and disseminating community practices was fulfilled. However, the fact that this is a starting point, rather than an endpoint, should be highlighted. The identification and dissemination of successful community practices is very far from being a solution to the problem of inclusion and stigmatization in social housing neighborhoods. The ECHO project intends to deepen the study and identify more community practices, as well as involve more areas of knowledge and organize events that foster interdisciplinary debate.

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Informed Consent

The authors have obtained informed consent from all participants.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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