DESIGNING BELONGING: SPECULATIVE PRACTICES IN CONTEMPORARY MUSEUMS

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Resumo | Abstract

This paper explores how emerging practices, especially speculative design workshops, can foster new forms of belonging to architectural and museum heritage. Positioned within a PhD in Museology titled *Museums as meeting places: learning from educational spaces*, the research focuses on the museum's threshold potential —both spatial and relational— where interactions among diverse *actants* create shared meanings and experiences. The study employs an interdisciplinary methodological framework that combines ethnographic methods, spatial analysis, and affordance theory to examine how museum environments support or limit different types of engagement. Using three case studies of contemporary art museums in contemporary architecture, the research investigates how micro-narratives formed through everyday interactions expose the social microcosms embedded within these spaces. These narratives play as situated practices actively shaping heritage meanings.

In this context, speculative design workshops serve as participatory tools to generate future-focused imaginaries. By involving participants in co-creating possible scenarios, these workshops uncover latent needs, challenge dominant narratives, and reshape relationships among the audience, spatial configuration, and the institutional framework. Drawn from a more-than-representational perspective, this approach opens reflections on broader social dynamics regarding the role of the museum as a well-being activator.

The findings demonstrate that speculative design can serve as a critical and creative methodology for heritage interpretation, enabling more inclusive and process-oriented forms of engagement. This positions museums as an architectural and social domain in which heritage is continuously co-created by their publics, professionals, and material presence, thereby informing new approaches to museum engagement and to the idea of heritage as a dynamic, negotiated practice.

Palavras-chave | Keywords

Contemporary museum; threshold; speculative design; micro-narratives; participatory practice.

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Resumo biográfico | Short biography

Fabiana Dicuonzo — Architect and curator based in Porto, Portugal. My work spans architectural heritage and museology, exploring how built spaces and curatorial practices shape cultural memory and collective experience. Currently a PhD candidate in Heritage Studies (Museology) at the University of Porto (FCT scholarship 2022.11710.BD) and a collaborator at CITCEM, I investigate the relationships between wellbeing, architecture, and audiences within contemporary museological practice. I have been a lecturer at the NODE Centre for Curatorial Studies since 2024 and am the co-founder of both the curatorial project Antilia and PROFFERLO Architecture (PT–UK). My background in architecture, heritage, and museum studies informs a reflective, cross-disciplinary practice grounded in the intersections between space, narrative, and audience experience.