

Redesigning the Visual Identity of Non-profit Organizations: The Case Study of Escola Oficina



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Abstract This article seeks to analyze the importance of Corporate Visual Identity (CVI) for non-profit and social solidarity organizations. It starts from the case study of Escola Oficina (EO), where an evaluation and consequent redesign of its CVI was developed. This study, developed within the ECHO research project, funded by the Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia (FCT), arose from a problem, identified by EO itself, that consisted of making known the activity developed and, above all, to minimize the generalised distrust of consumers regarding its products. EO is a social project located in Vila Nova de Gaia, in northern Portugal, and its main goal is to empower and prepare unemployed citizens, namely from vulnerable communities, for a future integration into the labour market. This chapter is based on a Case Study methodology, supported by a literature review and exploratory interviews. The main results were the development of a new corporate visual identity solution for Escola Oficina, in response to the problems identified in this study.

Keywords Visual identity design · Communication design and branding · Social design · Logo design · Non-profit organization

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1 Introduction

Escola Oficina (in english *School Workshop*) is a social project, created in 2015, in the Balteiro social enterprise in Vila Nova de Gaia, with the goal of enabling assistance for local citizens who are in a situation of professional precariousness, providing training, occupation and employability. It is a community practice that has as its philosophy the promotion of environmental sustainability and economic development, having as its principle the circular economy, giving to unemployed people social integration opportunities in the labour market. The organisation maintains a system of self-sustainability, financially supported by the commercialisation of the products it develops. It is a recognised success story, both in the training and empowerment of unemployed citizens and in their integration into the labour market [39].

The trainees of this school are qualified in different areas, with the main focus on sewing and cardboard. The knowledge they gain is exploited in a practical way in the workshop, starting projects in a real work context, which translate into the transformation of non-hazardous industrial waste and residues, provided by textile and waste companies, into final products with added value.

However, Escola Oficina's (EO) external communication has been almost non-existent, which has naturally hindered the dissemination of its activity and, above all, the sale of the products that the EO develops with its trainees. Moreover, the EO's managers feel that customers have a generalized mistrust of its products' quality, given that they're produced by unemployed trainees.

So, the insufficiency of its communication strategy and the possible less positive reputation identified by the institution's management may constitute an obstacle to sales' growth of EO's products; to the growth of the added value of its products; and, consequently, to the increase of the needed revenues to ensure the sustainable development of the organisation.

This study arises, therefore, with the goal of answering to these problems. We believe that Design can be an important tool that helps to overcome difficulties such as the ones identified in EO and that, generally, are common to this type of organisations that operate in the social environment. Through this case study, it is intended to present an effective action methodology and the potential replication in other similar cases. From this article arises an analysis of relevant themes regarding identity design in non-profit and social organisations and the presentation of the solution designed for EO.

So this article starts with a literature review about the Brand concept and the influence that its valuation (branding) may have on the customer, where the perspectives of Wheeler [41] and Keller and Lehmann [22] are analysed. The main adversities common to Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs), which constitute themselves an obstacle to the development of their brand, are identified according to Grau's beliefs [18]. The article also explores the concept of Social Design and visual communication for social change, studying the points of view of several authors [6, 14, 17, 20,

23, 25, 31, 36, 37, 38]. Also in the mentioned literature review, it is sought to define the concepts of Identity, Image and Corporate Visual Identity [5, 9, 11, 26].

Finally, the new Corporate Visual Identity (CVI) proposal designed for EO is presented, based on Design Thinking methods [3, 7, 8, 13, 34].

2 The Brand

In a study of this nature, it's important to have a full grasp of the key concepts, as well as asking the right questions. In this case one has to ask:

What does an identity brand represent? This question is not interested in what the brand objectively "is", but in what it means to the public [11, p. 83].

A Brand enables organisations to create strong connections with consumers. People fall in love with brands, trust them, and believe in their superiority. The way a brand is interpreted influences its success, both in a Non-Profit Organisation (NPO) and a product [41].

It is, therefore, necessary to understand some of the attributes of brands and, particularly the elements that affect communication and how the brand will be perceived by stakeholders. Among these attributes are brand identity and positioning.

A Brand's identity is tangible and appeals to the senses. It fuels recognition, amplifies differentiation, and makes big ideas and meanings accessible [41].

Positioning a brand or making a strategic choice that seeks to give a credible, different and attractive position of its offering in the minds of consumers [12] in order to make it irreplaceable, requires a constant and methodical will: Branding is a process used, in order to create awareness, attract new consumers, and expand consumer loyalty [41] by employing the distinctive characteristics of the brand, forming an engagement with the target audience while mirroring the mission and values of the organization [18].

According to [22], branding has become a priority in the management of companies due to the growing perception that brands are among the most valuable assets (resources) held by organizations. One of the topics explored by the authors is *brand intangibles*, which they define as means of differentiating it and adding value to its physical products. Intangibles can encompass various types of associations to the brand, related to its identity. However, they do not involve physical and concrete, as the name implies, tangible attributes.

Notwithstanding the obvious opposition (tangible versus intangible) between the way Wheeler and [22] present their definition, their associations regarding identity are, in fact, literally intangible. However, the tangibility characterised by [41] is targeted to the consumer's perspective, because through the exploitation of these intangible assets, the mental image that a brand may have, will influence the consumer's decisions towards products or services that, effectively, may be tangible. In other words, since "brands mirror the complete experience that consumers have with products" [22], through the tangible experiences associated with the brand, the

human being is able to identify this materiality by the connection that he creates (via his senses) between the brand and the product.

The brand is developed by designers, marketers, brand managers and other professionals, but it lives in people's minds [18]. It can be described as the idea that lives in consumers' minds and that emerged from all their impressions with them: they are emotional connections between the institution and the consumers based on a consistent delivery of quality and trust [18]. Thus, "it seems that the brand increasingly belongs to the public and less to the company" [35], while branding seems to belong more to the institution and its employees, because it corresponds to the brand's development process.

EO is a brand that belongs to the social sector. The social segment of brands has shown a paradigm shift, where activities such as marketing and branding have become, in recent decades, methodologies used more often by Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) to achieve their mission and goals (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004). This change is related to the increased competitiveness in this sector. According to [1], Non-Profit Organizations not only value, but also deploy more capital in their image when they find themselves in a more competitive environment, where they perceive that the public has a hard time distinguishing between different organizations and what they represent [18].

EO, similarly to these NPOs, did not initially give importance to its image and visual identity, but with the gradual evolution of the organisation, it faced the need to review the strategies used [28].

The management of the EO assumed the almost non-existence of external communication with its potential audiences. This shows that the idea that underlies the work developed by the school (identity), its interests and how it wants to be perceived by the public (positioning) is not passed on. This situation causes consumers to spontaneously create, in relation to their products, their own idea, little or not conditioned by the decision-makers of the organisation [12].

Thus, the organisation does not establish a connection that allows showing what the brand is (such as, for example, the values of sustainability and circular economy; and the production quality of its products), thus being limited to the image of being a solidarity institution that supports people in a situation of professional precariousness.

Creating a convergent perception in consumers' minds with the brand's values requires a studied and continued work. It is, therefore, necessary to establish in EO tools that are traditionally explored by branding.

3 Branding in Non-profit Organizations

In the organisational context and in the literature, branding is often associated with commercial goals. However, "*Branding can be as important to nonprofit organisations as it is for large for-profit companies*" [18, p. 33].

Notwithstanding its importance, branding in the social sector has adversities that are different from the ones faced by organizations in the for-profit market. These adversities, characteristic of the social environment, increase the difficulty in the institution evidencing process, of the brand's branding. Grau [18] identifies some of the reasons underlying these difficulties:

1. **Complexity of target audiences:** It is common for a NPO to have both clients and beneficiaries of its programmes and services, who generally have different relationships with the organisation (although there are cases where these audiences overlap). These different audiences require different communication methods, their own messages, appropriate to their connection with the organisation;
2. **Nature of programmes and services:** Many of the programmes and services that define NPOs are complicated to explain and this does not favour audiences to identify with the NPOs' mission and goals;
3. **General perceptions:** The public positively accepts NPOs and understands that they are worthy of support because of their role in the community. However, this can have a negative impact because when organizations assume that they are socially relevant due to the service they provide, they neglect branding needs and are subject only to perceptions spontaneously generated by the public;
4. **Branding costs and requirements:** Apart from the large NPOs, most small and medium organisations do not enjoy the advantages that companies benefit from and boast, be they monetary advantages or advantages at the level of human resources and their skills.

Like EO, a large portion of Non-Profit Organizations lack the capacity to sustain the expertise that is essential to build and maintain their brand. In the reality of a NPO, human and financial resources are limited and, at the same time, they still have to strive to achieve their mission [18]. As a result, they end up neglecting the potential of their brands' specific traits and personalities, which are essential for brand enhancement and to strengthen the emotional connection with the public.

According to Huang and Ku [21], NPOs should use their brand as an identification system in order to differentiate themselves from other organisations [in agreement with [18]]. They should devise branding strategies to create the intended brand image.

Focusing on the benefits of institutional image enhancement, [18] adopts the Interbrand (a global brand consultant company) method for classifying the value of brands worldwide, with the aim of exploring in more detail the aspects that can enhance their development.

This model is made up of three components: financial analysis (revenues); the role of the brand (estimation of how important the brand itself is in the purchase); and *brand strength* (the strength of the brand). In *brand strength*, there are several attributes, with internal dimension factors: clarity; commitment; management; and responsiveness; and external dimension factors: authenticity; consistency; differentiation; *engagement*; presence; and relevance.

These factors are important considerations for an NPO's management, that should, therefore, be weighed up by the EO in order to: strengthen its brand; extend its competence [18], and genuinely represent the brand's core.

The brand's core is the vision of the organisation and includes the mission, purpose, values, actions and principles. This vision is the basis of what makes an organisation of great value. However, as noted above, the brand needs to stand out. Like other institutions, NPOs' brands have personalities (set of characteristics that reflect their vision, mission, values, etc.) and it is relevant that the brand is not only attractive but also unique [18].

In general, the foundation of managing an effective brand's image is consistency. It needs to be communicated to stakeholders consistently, over a long period, in order to form, not only an intellectual relationship with customers, through knowledge and understanding of the organization, but also by the emotional bond [18].

It is easily understood that the core of EO's brand is unique, within the geographical, economic and social universe in which it is integrated. We argue that its communicational inconsistency demotivates the latent emotional bonds, leaving gaps in the image it intends to convey. The idea that consumers feel compassion for the trainees' situation may be overlapping with the representation that EO intends to preach [supported by the idea of generalised perceptions referred to by [18]]. However, only the institution itself can take the initiative to make the paradigm shift achievable.

4 Social Design in Identity Design

The social landscape is one of the defining aspects of responsibly conducted Design: current societal challenges (such as environmental crises, inequality, ageing, etc.) put pressure on the discipline of Design and its professionals to integrate goals and indicators of success that go beyond profits [20].

As mentioned before, EO is inserted in a universe of its own, with challenges typical of an organisation of this nature. The type of Design service that is developed, particularly in EO's ecosystem (organisation-community), is part of the so called Social Design discipline. Social Design is the broad term used in the academic literature that seeks to highlight design practices that aim at social change or social improvement rather than (solely) financial gain [20]. So, the change in the public's attitude towards EO is the expectation that best meets the goals of this project.

As Social Design is a subject of multiple nuances, it was important to understand, in this study, how this subject is academically interpreted and approached.

Koskinen and Hush [23] explain different concepts within Social Design. They divide social Design into three categories: utopian, molecular and sociological.

Utopian social design stems from convictions and desires for utopian social change [25, 31].

From another perspective, molecular social design stems from the idea that many designers working on social topics prefer to move away from utopian and revolutionary ideals. These designers accept that they can contribute to "the improvement of the world, albeit a little at a time", regardless of whether these "few" add up to a large-scale change. This is [6] and Frascara's et al. [17] point of view.

In Sociological Social Design, design is guided by sociological theories. It is based on social sciences' knowledge, which makes it different from utopian design. This definition contemplates both previous categories of Social Design. In it it's accepted that design can be molecular in its strategy, as it can also seek to aim at changes in structures that concern persistent social problems.

These different categories demonstrate and prove the large depth of the Social Design topic. However, for EO, design might not be the solution to achieve major changes in the structures of society. This project is therefore a resource that will try to answer to a social challenge.

Thorpe and Gamman[38] clarify that design challenges are complex, and characterised by factors that, sometimes, may be competing among them or even contradictory. Adding to these factors, there are still scenarios in which there may be more than one right solution to answer to design problems. The aforementioned complexity requires designers and other actors in the design process, to be responsive to the context in which the design activity is integrated. Given the context (with its own resource requirements, goals and needs) it is important to consider and, mainly, to decide which factors should be prioritised in what will be the design answer.

The authors also point out that designers not belonging to a particular community should keep in mind that it is not necessary to take responsibility for solving that community's problems. The approach to the problem, as a designer, will be to do whatever is within his reach, working with social factors to leverage community assets, in order to provoke positive change in the community.

EO's ambition, in wanting to implement new communication strategies, goes beyond the financial gains these can bring. The basis of its self-sustainability is the support that EO brings to the citizens. Support which, without doubt, is the organisation's priority. It was, therefore, crucial that this philosophy had been intrinsically present in all the stages of this research work, in the same way it is present in EO.

For this project, Identity Design will be the means to give EO a new way of being identified in the community where it intervenes, as transparently as possible. The inherent complexity of a design project for the social environment requires a responsive connection between the Designer and the constituents of the Institution, in this case EO (Management, trainees, employees, etc.).

As one of the significant agents in the transmission of an organisation's identity, Identity Design is deeply grounded in and aided by Visual Communication, topic which we will address in the next section.

5 Visual Communication

The willingness to improve the EO's inconsistent communication was demonstrated by its management. Admitting that, initially, communication was not considered relevant, given the size of the project, EO is now in a different situation: it is the brand of a self-sustainable project, covering the metropolitan area of Porto; it has already trained hundreds of citizens and aims to train even more; it manufactures

a wide variety of products, but still has no means to communicate with its public. The public forms its perceptions based on the tangible messages transmitted by organisations: if these perceptions differ from reality, this is then the consequence of an ineffective strategy or it means that the perception of the organisation itself needs to be modified [4].

According to Argenti [4], the rhythm in the production of messages and the speed with which they are communicated give greater importance to Corporate Communication. On the other hand, as the same author underlines, people demand and are more suspicious of corporate messages, and so there are new approaches. On the other hand, we add that every year more companies are created and that markets and communication are more international, global and digital.

Taking into account that the current means of communication, between organisations and their publics, are grounded in the visual communication field, we conclude that the visual branch is symbiotically linked to the corporate image. The purpose of transmitting information through the visual format (photos, videos, illustration or graphic design) is grounded on the principle that it is fast and efficient. The dynamic nature of the visual medium is the result of the fusion of technology with forms of visual expression (photography, cinema, television and, lastly, the internet) [24].

Visual Communication as an object of research isn't recent. Munari [29], already in the sixties, identified the basis of the aspects of Visual Communication in a single characteristic: objectivity [idea reinforced [14]]. The author explains that if a message isn't objective, it has a lesser chance to visually communicate something: it is necessary that the used image is legible and visible to everyone in the same way. Otherwise, there is no visual communication, but visual confusion. Human beings are subject to seeing and disseminating visual artefacts. What we see has an effect on what we do, feel and even in who we are. With experience and experimentation, the perception of the 'visual world' continually grows simultaneously with its influence [32].

Virtually everything we see is Visual Communication: images can take on different values depending on the context in which they are embedded, giving different information. However, there are two distinctions between the messages that reach our eyes: they can be casual or intentional [14, 29].

We can assume that, so far, the message conveyed by EO has not always been intentional. As already mentioned, that message was, for years, predominantly spontaneous, spread through word-of-mouth. Communication resulted from what was done or said, of free will by the people who related to the EO, without the visual segment of communication being structured or prioritised. This is reflected in the scarce materials that EO has at its disposal (discussed more specifically in Sect. 6.1).

In addition to this broader vision of visual communication, the OE needs to prepare its Visual Communication strategy for the social environment in which the organisation lives. This environment, with its own needs, corresponds to the space where the message will be disseminated.

5.1 Visual Communication for Social Change

The communication intended for EO should achieve an image readjusted to its claims and, thus, consolidate the interconnection with the community. As discussed in Sect. 4, we must take into account that we're in the presence of a social nature brand, as mentioned by nature brand, as mentioned [36]. In the process of socially driven design, when working in order to achieve results targeted at a particular community, the intrinsic factors of that community must be taken into account. By allowing these characteristic factors to work for and with a community and by giving them the necessary focus, the found design solution can become more accessible to the audience and, thus, achieve greater effectiveness in communication [36, 38].

Shea [37], proposes relevant strategies in the development of design solutions for a given community, which can be applied in combination (with each other) or restructured according to the needs of each project. They are the following:

1. engaging with the community;
2. building trust;
3. promising only what can be delivered;
4. prioritising the process;
5. facing controversy;
6. identifying the community's strengths;
7. using local resources;
8. creating with the community's voice;
9. maintaining commitment with the community.

Visual Communication Design alone certainly cannot eradicate crime, narco-dependency, accidents or unjustified discrimination. However, concerted strategies, including communication, can help reduce the intensity of these problems significantly [17]. Frascara infers that the visual dimension of visual communications should always be contextualised within the pragmatic dimension in which it is found [in agreement with [14, 29]], that is, it enacts the communication event, which takes place on the part of the audience [17]. Bearing in mind the previous statement, it should be noted that *"In graphic communication, the message is prefabricated and carefully crafted before it is sent, so there is no improvisation which is typical in a dialogue. Ambiguities and visual noise are, as far as possible, avoided or abolished by the designer, who seeks a clear message, a game of unambiguous meanings, with which he intends to ensure the correct transmission-comprehension of the overall meaning"* [11, p. 56].

In building effective communications, it should be kept in mind that the goal of all visual communications is to produce a change in the audience's knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. For this change to happen, the communication has to be detectable, discriminable, attractive, understandable and convincing. It has to be built on knowledge of visual perception, cognition and human behaviour, and bearing in mind the personal preferences, cognitive abilities and value systems of the audience [17].

Furthermore, it is also important to refer [33], who indicates that the human being attributes a symbolic value to the “product”, (as a result) of the design: the ability to have meaning, which provides an additional value to the communicated message.

From this literature review it is possible to conclude that the importance of design is associated with the ability to communicate visually, in a homogeneous way, the values and convictions of an organisation-community. Consequently, it is possible to strengthen the emotional connection established, or intended to be established, with the audience.

It is, thus, assumed that the effectiveness of the Design, as a tool for connecting the organisation and the interested parties, through the development of identity signs (exclusive and long-lasting), will be correlated to the quality (the ability to transmit them with fidelity to the institution’s characteristics) and to the memorability of the mental image it will imprint in the target audience’s mind, which is so necessary in EO.

6 Identity and Image

Once identified the need to improve the impact of EO’s Brand and its communication, it is important to take into account the concepts of image and Corporate Identity. These concepts are transversal to this study, so it is important to understand them in order to clarify their nuances. Fetscherin and Usunier [16] makes the analysis of the evolution of academic literature in the field of corporate branding over the past decades, and reports a diffuse terminology in this medium. The author uses the example of the term identity, in which he finds more than one terminology: identity can both be defined as the unique and specific attributes of an institution and it is also used to designate the visual solution of a Corporate Visual Identity. Having said this, in the analysis of these subjects, it is relevant not to leave this concept’s definition and interpretation dubious and make it as clearly described as possible.

Identity and Image (corporate) are concepts that, although they seem equivalent, they are, in fact, two different things that work in a symbiotic and complement way.

Identity is a network of concepts internal to the organisation, which can be selected (for their value) to characterise the brand’s identity and which can be communicated. So, *“The term “identity” has a strategic cultural meaning. It is what makes each company different from the others, unique and unrepeatable. It is a matter of company management, like administration, organisation, production, staff relations, etc. However, identity is invisible and much less variable than those other aspects of organisations, but at the same time more substantial”* [11], p. 87).

According to [11], in the identity lies the future potential that is in the essence of the organisation. It is, therefore, “a valuable potential, but intangible” [11]. To substantiate the identity of a company, making it noticeable and memorable, it is necessary to create unique and lasting symbols: a set of elements that combined in a particular way are the constituents of the company’s signs (symbols that belong to the image of the organization). These iconic signs communicate in a universal

language, focusing on functions of remembrance, aesthetics and empathy with the public.

Corporate identity is fundamentally the reality of what an organisation is, i.e. its strategy, philosophy, history, business scope, type of products and services offered, and its formal and informal communication [26]: the substance in its institutional nature [11].

Costa [11] also makes clear the difference between identity images (visual) and mental images: The company image is not precisely a set of visible figures, but the general image that it raises in the collective memory.

The corporate image is not only a function of what design conveys, but above all what the overall conduct of the organisation reveals: it is what is perceived. “In short, the identity is what the company ‘is’ (whether it knows how to transmit it or not) and the image is what we think it is” [11], p.88). Therefore, we observe that the image that EO raises in the collective memory is not being properly understood, which means that there are difficulties in the transmission of its identity, as referred by [4] in Sect. 5.

In the line of thought of [40], and subscribing to [11] identity principles, a CVI is then a well-considered visualisation of an organisation’s strategy. And in that way, it is a tool that communicates the desired identity of an organisation [40].

6.1 *Corporate Visual Identity*

Communication and Visual Identity are the bases of the relationship between the organization and the public. [26] makes its segmentation into four categories: Corporate Communication, Uncontrollable Communication, Architecture and Location; and Corporate Visual Identity (CVI) [26].

Regarding the physical and graphic dimension of corporate image, the notion of CVI emerges. [27] simplify this concept proposing that it consists of:

1. corporate name [the first element of a corporate identity to pay attention to. The whole identity revolves around it, as the logo is the name designed [11]];
2. logo and/or symbol;
3. typography;
4. colour;
5. and slogan.

In this study, we found that the EO had an implemented CVI. This CVI included a logo, two main colours and several typographies used regularly in the communication materials it communicates with (Figs. 1, 2, 3, and 4). But, even so, this CVI is limited as it is not graphically very flexible and, above all, it is visually inconsistent, given the vagueness of its guidelines. Although there is a visible improvement in the graphic design materials that EO has recently developed for its communication (catalogues, brochures, etc.), this effort and limitations highlights the weaknesses and deficiencies of EO’s CVI system.



Fig. 1 Current EO's corporate image. Source Escola Oficina (2021)



Fig. 2 Example of EO's corporate image. Source Escola Oficina (2021)



Fig. 3 Current EO's logo



Fig. 4 Flyer with EO’s CVI. Source Escola Oficina (2021)

Taking into account the subjects analysed throughout this article and the need assumed by those responsible to renew EO’s CVI, our project then proceeded or moved forward into the renewal and Design of EO’s new CVI.

According to Bosch et al. [9], a new CVI can be considered the first step to build organisational reputation. For these authors, the development of a new CVI begins with the process of discovery, thus revealing the organisation’s current corporate identity, its roots, culture, strategy and structure. Once the essence of the organisation is known (what it stands for, what it seeks to be, and how it differs from others) the design process can begin, with the intended outcome being a CVI system that is appropriate to the organisation as it will be developed to represent it (Bosh et al. 2005).

The fundamental principle of CVI is differentiation (the fruit of identity). Both the verbal name and the visual signs must possess a high degree of differentiation from

their competitors. The more a CVI possesses this distinctive and exclusive value, the faster it is distinguished and retained in memory. Differentiation and recallability are the essential principles of good identity design, and it will not turn its back on the target audience [11, p. 89].

The signs that [11] refers to are iconic symbols that communicate a visual language that is universal, where its translation is not necessary. These attributes focus on “the functions of remembrance, aesthetics and empathy with the public”. As we have seen previously, and in convergence with this author, the success of Visual and Identity Communication is united to the emotional connection that it awakens or promotes [26].

Corporate Identity is the basis of the communication strategies of an organisation [5] and in this identity the vision of the institution should manifest itself with consistency in all identity elements, from the logo to the behaviour of employees [4].

The challenge for designers is then to create design solutions that are aesthetically appropriate and visually appealing to the target audience, but at the same time possess functional readability and support the coding of communication messages so that they are decoded as intended [30].

The literature review we conducted addressed theoretical issues that are essential to a design project such as the EO’s one. Given the context of EO, an organization that operates in the social environment, it is important to decide which of its characteristics should be highlighted by the Design in its answer to the identity problem [38]. The following section describes the process of building the proposal for the new EO’s CVI.

7 Development of EO’s CVI

To guide this project of renewal of EO’s CVI, the methodology of Design Thinking was adopted, which is present in all stages of the iterative process that is the Identity Design. Considering the points of view of different authors regarding Design Thinking [3, 7, 8, 13, 34], a similar structuring of this methodology was found among them. However, and notwithstanding the different delineation of its stages, [7] presents a simplified terminology of Design Thinking, defining the procedure in only 3 stages (but keeping the principles):

1. **Inspiration:** stage of information gathering, analysis and problem definition;
2. **Ideation:** stage of idea generation, improvement of creative solutions and their respective prototyping;
3. **Implementation:** execution stage, where the design is developed into its final state.

Ambrose and Harris [3] and Pressman [34] highlight another stage (which suits this type of design project), called validation, where the critical evaluation of the final product is performed. This step helps to improve the performance of the designer,

who should seek feedback from the target audience (his or her client) to understand whether the design solution has achieved the defined goals [3].

We then began with the first stage (which includes the preceding literature review), where the problems were identified and an attempt was made to empathise with the institution and its community. In line with [36] and [37], design achieves better results when the factors specific to a community are taken into account.

The main problem observed during the study and found in the analyzed visual identity (see Sect. 6.1), was the discrepancy between the brand core and what the identity elements represent. The authors [11] and [4] point out that the brand always has an identity, but sometimes it fails to present it properly to the public. Moreover, EO, as a non-profit organization, has its own personality [18], but it is still subject to these problems. It was therefore necessary to clearly understand the core of the EO brand, so that the new elements of its identity could transmit it objectively and, above all, intentionally. This step is crucial, and its inadvertence may cause a disconnection between brand identity and brand image.

To this end, and given the relevance of this step, interviews were conducted with EO's coordination; visits were made to the establishment, during working hours; and internal discussion meetings were held within the working group responsible for restructuring the means of communication of EO (ECHO project Research Group). From these interactions, it was learned what this social project genuinely was, how it operates, its roots, ideology, vision, values and mission (which determine the core of the brand [18]). The factors that best characterise this brand and that contributed to achieving the most faithful representation of the nature of the institution to the public were thus recognised. These factors that define the conceptual foundation of the new CVI of EO are as follows:

1. Openness to the community (capacity to receive);
2. Humanity in relationships;
3. Recreation/Renewal;
4. Inclusion;
5. Sharing/Union;
6. Cooperation;
7. Sustainability and revaluation;
8. Circular economy;
9. Modernity/Innovation;
10. Minimalism/Simplicity.

7.1 Graphic Brand

After identifying the basic characteristics of the EO's brand core, which allowed the concept to be defined, we moved on to the project's ideation. In this stage different possibilities for the design of the new EO symbol were explored.

The developed symbols will be a means to represent the brand (Bosh et al. 2005), but its distinctive capacity is what will dictate its retention in the public's memory [11].

As Costa [11] points out, symbols communicate a universal visual language, where no translation is required. The new EO symbol's design went through several iterations. This was the procedure that required a longer and deeper work, aiming to optimise the clarity of the transmission of the ideas, defined in the concept.

After meeting with the work team, it was considered that the following graphic model would be the interpretation that best suited the above concept:

The basic shape of the graphic brand is a circle, representing the circular economy and unity (Fig. 5). The pair of hands symbolises the human side of the institution, the cooperation and sharing it fosters. The hands, which can also be interpreted as arrows, stand for the connection to the sustainable side of EO. They are the symbol of recycling and the mark of recreation (Fig. 6).

In addition to the symbol, other elements were decided upon: the typography and the chromatic palette (Figs. 7 and 8). All these elements should work in harmony, thus forming the foundation for the graphic resources of this CVI.

Two topics commonly highlighted by authors in the field, as fundamental features to consider in the development of an effective Visual Identity, are consistency and



Fig. 5 Set of symbolic and explanatory elements that support the concept of the new graphic brand proposal for EO. *Source* Own formulation (2023)

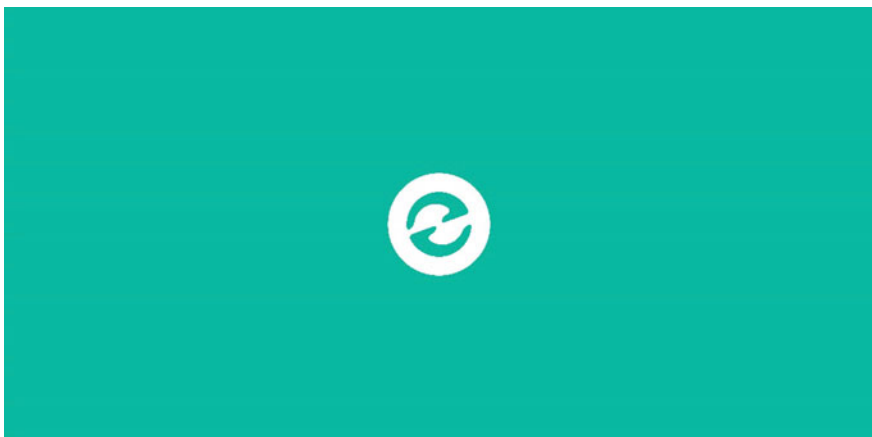


Fig. 6 Proposed symbol for the graphic brand of EO. *Source* Own formulation (2023)



Fig. 7 Proposed graphic brand (symbol and logo). *Source* Own formulation (2023)



Fig. 8 Proposed graphic brand for EO, tested on and against different colour backgrounds. *Source* Own formulation (2023)

distinctiveness [4, 11, 18, 41]. In the opinion and point of view of these authors, and as discussed in the literature review, consistency and distinctiveness are directly related to the emotional bonds that are intended to create with the public: the consistency of the image of a brand goes beyond visual and graphic elements, and should manifest itself throughout the institution.

The typography stipulated to complement the graphic brand is the so-called Montserrat font. This not only allows the values of the identity to shine through, but fundamentally improves the consistency of the Visual Identity, giving concrete options for its future use in different media and situations (one of the inconsistencies found in previous CVI applications). It’s a typography without serifs, sober, simple and modern; it works both in analogue and digital form; and it has a range of 9 weights, from *Light* to *Bold* weights, therefore increasing the flexibility of contents’ graphic management, which is obtained through contrast and hierarchy.

As for colours (Fig. 9), they influence human beings and their behaviour, both physiological and psychological. The same colour can arouse different feelings, which is directly related to the context in which it is used, i.e. there is a dependence on the other colours with which a particular colour is applied [15, 19]. The chromatic solution found for this project consists of a main colour (turquoise green) and a



Fig. 9 Chromatic palette. *Source* Own formulation (2023)

secondary colour (blue), paired with black and white. The colour green is the colour of nature and sustainability. Used together, these colours can symbolise harmony, confidence, security and tranquillity [19]. It is an analogous palette, and in the same way as the typographic choice, this one is simple and prepared for the digital medium.

8 Conclusions and Future Work

The success of EO, an NPO, is based on the social contribution (employability, training, etc.) to the community where it operates (Porto Metropolitan Area). Notwithstanding its social importance in that territory, difficulties were observed in advertising itself to the public as a brand: not only by what was observed during the research, but also identified by the institution's own management [28].

The vagueness of the image presented by the institution's communication department, as well as its inconsistency, resulted in heterogeneous communication, which hindered the growth of the brand's reputation and may even be a factor conducive to unintended generalisations [18] by the target audience (such as the generalised distrust of EO's products): the organisation can only be what it shows it to be.

Considering the aforementioned weaknesses of the brand (lack of identity signs, unstructured and inconsistent communication) the EO was not objectively transmitting to customers the way it wanted to be perceived, which meant that its identity was not being materialised through the emotional connections that the brand could create with its target audience.

In short, it became necessary to revitalize EO's communication, through a visual support (the identity symbols of the new CVI) that had versatility in its application, consistency and distinguishability, but kept clear its interconnection to EO's brand core. Moreover, it should be noted that, despite the visual change, the essence that portrays EO was maintained.

Taking into account that this is a social project, the process of building the new visual identity was approached in accordance with the philosophy of Thorpe and Gamman's Social Design [38], which explains (as mentioned in Sect. 4) that due to the complexity of the challenge, designers and other actors involved in this process should work together, without the burden of responsibility to eradicate the problem, but only with the aim of leveraging the community's assets. Alongside the principles

of Design Thinking, these factors determined the stage of extensive research and continuous collaboration between the institution and working team.

The graphic solution developed in this project was presented to the people involved and responsible for EO. Proposals for the new website and a mobile application for textile waste management were also presented, in order to expand the means of communication. The remaining proposals were developed by members of the research team, where the new graphic image has already been implemented. The proposal for the renewal of EO's Visual and Corporate Identity, developed in this study, was well received, approved and authorised for implementation by EO's managers.

For the future progression of this Design project, it will be essential to continue the implementation stage and subsequently measure and validate the results of its use, namely as audiences beyond those involved and those in charge of EO. It will be important to understand if the conclusions of the study are really in tune with the interpretation of the EO's publics, or not.

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