Towards a Design Observatory: crafting a distributed approach

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FIGURE 1

Application of the search criteria and results obtained per database.

FIGURE 2

Differences between the original and the curated results.

The DesignOBS project aims to collect, map and interpret data about the Portuguese Design Ecosystem, providing more robust and reliable information that may support the creation of strategies and policies for its promotion and evolution. To operationalize the project, a three-step Design research iterative process was put in place:

(1) Development of a preliminary observation process based in particular on the analysis and comparison of Design ecosystem models in use at the European level; interviews and in-loco visits with leaders of key international Design centers and the application of the reflection-action process proposed by Schön to refine the observation approach;

(2) test the observation approach through its application on a preliminary and manageable case about design doctorates to create a "first portray" of the status quo of national scholarly Design research. Results showed important disparities in the number of Design theses concluded (variations of about 25% registered in different databases), and dubious quality of information. The lack of curation of the information presented in institutional databases makes it difficult to create a reliable map about Design. These results led to the development of guidelines and calls for action which were presented and discussed within the REDE community (national Design schools meeting) in late October 2019. These results and methodology, already published in an international outlet, were evolved to understand some foundational aspects of doctoral research in Design and also the reproducibility of Portuguese research in this field of knowledge.

(3) Refinement of the iterative reflexive and distributed observation approach based on the results obtained in stage 1 and 2.

This process is now being used to approach other research topics such as the characterization of Design companies in Portugal using databases such as SABI that can provide some information to facilitate the creation of preliminary representations.