Empowerment by Design
GJOKO MURA TOVSKI

Socially Responsible Design to Rebuild Cultural Self-Confidence: A Case Study on the Design of a Village Revitalization Project
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Volume 2

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One of very few books to bring together business and design, this collection features essays on topics ranging from branding and sustainability to business-driven design education. The centerpiece of the volume is an essay on simplicity in design by Per Mollerup, a distinguished Scandinavian designer, professor, and author. Bolstering this are transcripts of two interviews with the former global art director for Nike for the 2012 London Olympics, paired with a paper on Nike’s design and marketing strategies for the Olympic Games.

Other features include a transcript of an interview with Dan Formosa, a New York-based design consultant, design researcher, and founding member of the iconic Smart Design Studio; a study of greenwashing, sustainability, and communication design; and a case study on the design partnership between the hearing aid company BHS and the design studio Designworks that has revolutionised a healthcare sector.

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EDITORIAL

GJOKO MURATOVSKI
Editor-in-Chief

Empowerment by Design

The role of design as a strategic resource goes beyond the corporate sector and design is increasingly being seen as an agent of positive social change. Governments from around the world, as well as some of the most influential global non-government institutions such as the United Nations and the World Bank, are already placing design in the context of global politics and welfare. Leading not-for-profit organizations such as the Rockefeller Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Clinton Foundation are also following suit and are now regularly referring to design in the context of social innovation, sustainability and international development (Muratovski, 2016, pp. 132–35).

Being a fast-changing discipline, design – with particular reference to design thinking, service design, scenario design, co-design, and all participatory design practices – is showing high responsiveness to societal, market and economic transformations. This is the reason why design is today acknowledged as a driver for transformation (Cautela et al., 2015, p. 108). With its systemic thinking and sense-making abilities, design has the potential to deal with issues related to organizational change, new economies, sustainability, social change, and with setting up or scaling innovations by encouraging people to invent solutions together (Meroni and Sangiorgi, 2011; European Commission, 2013; Sangiorgi, 2014; Zurlo and Bohemia, 2014).

Then again, the ability of design to build capacity by ‘empowering people’ is perhaps one of its most important characteristics. If we assume that these capabilities are already a part of the regular job of a designer, the next natural
step is to combine design with principles of incubation and scaling (up or out) of socially beneficial practices that can be largely assimilated to services. That is why today this activity is an important part of design activism in all its different shades (European Commission, 2013; Cautela et al., 2015, p. 109). In this issue we will explore some of these practices further.

The first article in this issue, ‘A socially responsible design to rebuild cultural self-confidence’, is written by Fang Xu (University of New South Wales), Fujian Mo (Guangxi Arts Institute) and Yuanyuan Chen (Tencent). Their article examines a socially responsible design approach through a remote mountain village’s revitalization project in Tongguan, Guizhou (China). The Village Revitalization Program (VRP) was initiated by the central government in response to many constraints that have resulted from China’s modernization over the past decades. Its objective was to protect these remote villages by maintaining their physical artefacts, sustaining their cultural essence and historical memories. Although various types of projects have been completed, the majority of them have brushed past the complicated by-products of urbanization, such as young generations leaving villages, children being left behind, and rural hollowing out, which have developed into a cycle threatening the sustainability of the community. Their study diagnoses the critical issues neglected by previous revitalization approaches and initiates a new practice of socially responsible design to end this ‘vicious cycle’, achieved through rebuilding the cultural self-confidence of the villagers. From an operational perspective, this article provides a three-step process: diagnosis, formulation and implementation. The new approach challenges the end-product-oriented method, questions the top-down approach and highlights the significance of direct involvement by end-users. From a theoretical perspective, this practice examines the various forms of socially responsible design, and redefines the multiple dimensions, which village revitalization projects should address. Following two years of effort by volunteers and villagers, the project was realized in the form of a Villagers’ Center in Tongguan. This product not only satisfies the interests of its current end-users in both the short and long term, but also provides an innovative, functional example of revitalizing values from within the village itself in order to rebuild the cultural self-confidence of villagers.

The next article, ‘Fiskars village’, is by Pia Tamminen (Aalto University School of Science). This case study focuses on the design-oriented organizations in Fiskars Village (Finland) and examines them through the lens of affordances – perceived opportunities for action. These affordances build a common ground for collaboration of organizations, and in this case they are viewed at community and individual levels. The aim of this study was to raise awareness of the potential that exists in an environment of a heterogeneous group of design-oriented people. The findings build a methodological bridge between the collaborative activities and affordances and provide new insights into themes that support the perception of affordances in this community. The theoretical contribution of the article provides suggestions on how the existence of affordances could be emphasized and developed further to support creativity and collaboration. This study highlights the key elements that are needed when building long-term collaboration in a design-oriented community.

Ian McArthur (University of New South Wales) and Martin Tomitsch (University of Sydney) have written the third article in this issue – ‘Diagnostic design’. Their article examines how participatory design, data visualization and urban informatics can be combined to add long-term social, cultural and
economic value to urban planning in Australian cities. As smart cities, Internet of Things (IoT), urban screens and media architecture attract increasing attention globally, researchers, governments, urban planners, curators and designers are questioning how they can support sustainable urban development, civic innovation and economic productivity through community engagement and social participation. However, the long-term social, cultural and commercial potential of urban media to vitally augment precinct development is dependent on cities having the tools to engage stakeholders with a sense of participation grounded in openness, transparency and inclusion. The current problem, as the authors point out, is that these tools do not yet exist in any consolidated form. However, research conducted at The Concourse in Willoughby, NSW (Australia), suggests that meaningfully engaging, interactive polling content deployed on a combination of tablet interfaces for data entry in concert with live screening of the public interactive space can create an effective balance between private and public aspects of civic participation. Based on the findings of this study, the authors propose a framework that enables participatory citizen engagement in order to foster thriving urban communities and ‘smart’ development. In addition to this, the article outlines how participatory urban media can also benefit local businesses, which are also key community stakeholders. This diagnostic approach builds sustainable value for all stakeholders, allowing for a closer alignment between the objectives of new developments and the preferences, needs and expectations of the citizens who will live and work in them.

The fourth article, ‘The role of design innovation in the Papua New Guinea balsa wood industry’, is written by Nathan J. Kotlarewski (University of Tasmania), Blair Kuys (Swinburne University of Technology) and Christine Thong (Swinburne University of Technology). Papua New Guinea’s (PNG) balsa wood industry is a major source of employment for a significant number of individuals in the East New Britain (ENB) Province. The PNG balsa industry previously relied on China’s renewable wind energy industry for rotor blade manufacturing, which was claimed to be the largest consumer of processed balsa from PNG. However, since the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) the Chinese demand for PNG balsa has significantly reduced, resulting in a mass over-supply and under-demand for the PNG resource. A lack of design innovation has added to the current market conundrum and left many smallholders unable to sell their balsa, leading to widespread financial hardship. It has come to the attention of the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) and to many other stakeholders that if there are no new applications for balsa there is no point continuing to grow the resource for a market that no longer exists in the scale it once did. Design innovation generated through research-led industrial design practice is argued as a key element to value-adding to the PNG balsa industry and smallholder businesses. The use of research to inform the design process and generate design innovation is demonstrated through a case study as an attempt to rectify the current over-supply and under-demand – and ultimately help the local businesses and communities who depend on this industry.

The fifth article, ‘The Bee Lab project’, is a case study written by Robert Phillips (Royal College of Art), Michael Brown (University of Nottingham) and Sharon Baurley (Royal College of Art). As the authors point out in their study, design content creation traditionally sits within professional practice and manufacturing industries. However, the design landscape today has evolved to empower non-designers and communities outside the professional
industry to create physical content. Two new trends allow for this to happen – Open Design (OD) and Citizen Science (CS). OD utilizes accessible fabrication, enabling lay users to create and re-appropriate content. CS encompasses activities where communities gather contextual environmental data for scientific or community purposes. The paradigm combination provides opportunities for communities, grassroots projects and social initiatives with opportunities to create ‘products’ addressing personal and global issues. Social design combines OD/CS practices, empowering responses by fostering social innovation. In line with this, their article is focused on a social design case study that applied OD/CS to beekeeping. The article presents lessons for opening design processes to lay users for citizen science purposes, defined through practice. The Bee Lab project empowered participants to construct their own data-gathering devices that could be shared with others. The case study aided motivated participants to address local/global issues, facing *Apis mellifera* (the honey bee). The work engaged volunteers, design agents and/or conservation agents for analogous activities. The project yielded insights of motivation, community leveraging, public engagement for social good and more. Insights have been distilled into repeatable stages for analogous activities. The results offer applications for communities, design agents or organizations wishing to address the burgeoning challenges facing ‘social responses to nature’.

Finally, we have also included a bonus feature in this issue – the article ‘Bridging the gap between marketing strategy and design teams’ by Janneke Blijlevens (RMIT University) and Charlie Ranscombe (Swinburne University of Technology). While this article sits somewhat on the outside of the overall theme of this issue, it sets the tone for the upcoming Volume 3 of the *Journal of Design, Business & Society*, which is coming out in early 2017.

This article tackles the issue of the age-old rivalry between marketers and designers. In order for styling (creation of a distinct visual identity for a new product) to be successful in the market, design decisions need to be aligned with marketing strategy decisions. As the authors point out, previous research supports a styling strategy model that focuses on the goals of styling (capturing attention, providing recognition, or endowing symbolic meanings) through considering the degree and direction of differentiation from the products in a current portfolio, the succession of product generations, and by taking into consideration the product competitors. This strategy is intended to help product designers align their styling decisions with the marketing goals. However, according to the authors, research has shown that, while product designers and marketers work towards the same goals, they have different rationales for what each side considers to be an appropriate styling decision. This in return causes difficulties in communication, rationalization and subsequent joint dismissal of ideas by the involved parties. While marketers believe that knowledge upon which styling decisions are based should be measurable and generated from competitive analysis and consumer insights, product designers on the other hand rely on intuition, experience and observations. With this research the authors aim to bridge the gap between marketers and product designers in order to improve the decisions related to the styling process. Through a case study with Crown Lager (Australia) beer bottles the authors have developed a quantitative method that measures changes in styling compared to previous product designs, while taking into consideration differences in styling compared to current competitors. The findings are then benchmarked to market data such as revenue and changes in market share.
The study shows that the combination of these data sets can help design teams develop styling strategies that are better aligned with the goals of the marketing teams, and, in return, this can facilitate improved shared understanding between the two sides.

This issue concludes Volume 2 of our journal. We hope that you will enjoy reading these articles as much as we had and we look forward to seeing you again next year.

REFERENCES


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