

# Social Economies: Enterprise and a New Cultural Geography

**Conference description of the topic:** Thomas Friedman's 2005 book proclaimed, "The world is flat." Friedman asserts that technology and economic shifts in the distribution of production and manufacturing have leveled the global playing field. While how to sell American products in other countries through culturally-sensitive motifs and messages once occupied much of our attention, the question today is how to collaborate with others in increasingly co-dependent relationships.

Urban studies professor and economist Richard Florida, on the other hand, argued in a 2005 article in the Atlantic Monthly that "the world is spiky;" that there are hills and valleys in the distribution of economic potential and that we cannot think of places as being homogenous in their culture or opportunities. Florida describes three sorts of places in the world that have less to do with geopolitical boundaries and more with potential in the confluence of resources: 1) those that can attract global talent and create new products; 2) those that manufacture the world's goods and support its innovation engines; and 3) those with little connection to the global economy and few immediate prospects.

Both views of today's social economic landscape have implications for design and design education:

- a Is it any longer possible to separate a concern for the "social" from a concern for the "economic"? If not, how does this influence our definitions of "socially-oriented" studio projects and what students should know and be able to do in socially responsible practices?
- b If Florida is correct, what responsibility does design have to those who live in the "valleys," as well as the "hills," and how do we sensitize students to other cultures and socio-economic realities?
- c If the health of the economy depends on the social, then what is the nature of collaboration and workflow technology (i.e. the design of tools, methods, and environments) that allow people with different incentives, cultural behaviors, and value to collaborate successfully? How do we prepare students to understand these differences at a variety of scales?
- d What role do ethnographic methods play in opening students to alternative aspirations and points of view?

**The following prospectuses were submitted for consideration and their authors were selected as co-authors for the October 2010 AIGA Educators Conference – New Contexts / New Practices – at North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC.**

**Co-authors:**

Alyson Beaton/ Gary Rozanc  
Laurie Churchman  
Kenneth Fitzgerald  
Marie Hannigova  
Svetlana Kasalovic  
Angela Norwood  
Debra Riley Parr  
Ruki Ravikumar  
Elizabeth Resnick  
Maria Rogal  
Ricardo Sosa

**Moderator:**

Alice Twemlow

## Social Economies: Enterprise and a New Cultural Geography

---

Alyson Beaton and Gary Rozanc / Columbia College

The future economy based on design and community (global & local)

**TREND DRIVERS:** The resurgence of the maker is coming back to the forefront of design. The human is at the center of what is being produced. The producer is struggling to find a value in what is being produced in order to make a livelihood, and the consumer is struggling to find a connection and meaning in consumer goods. The new trend in education is to make socially minded designers but can institutions like universities and colleges support the needs that this new curricula will demand?

The futures of our global economies are completely dependent on new emerging practices that are local, built at a micro scale, but that can also, at the same time serve global communities. These global communities will function as cooperative places of idea exchange where ownership of ideas does not exist; instead, ideas will be generated for the common good –they will no longer be driven by traditional corporate, multi-national agendas. Through the entrepreneurial, citizen designer this decade will see the end of the “corporation” as we know it. So, where do our design students fit into all of this?

If we look to Curitiba, Brazil and the monumental work that Jaime Lerner accomplished as Mayor, we can learn how designers can be civic-minded and leaders in communities (at a micro scale) at the same time. This is a grand example of effective design leadership, which at a global scale informs designers how they can do the same in their communities. The dilemma facing many design programs is how best to tap into community in a truly productive way. The citizen designer’s job is to push society forward in meaningful ways through the understanding of community (ideally starting with one’s own). This would happen through the re-introduction of the college-age generation into communities to form valuable relationships within them. For example, if a design studio were to take place on site, as a laboratory, for an entire school year the students would be working, literally in the community they are serving/observing.

This re-introduction could be achieved through a major shift in the education of the designer from what traditional programs consider “profession ready” teaching to what a new pedagogy calls into necessity, one that trains the design thinker in a liberal design program model. Through a curriculum that is based on who the citizen designer is in the world and to the world, design students would gain a better understanding of how to engage in the world. This shift is largely research, historical and service based. All design students would be encouraged/instructed to find ways to plug into community as citizens before even considering design.

For example, the student who once focused on merely compositional technique and design aesthetics, in such a program, would now largely focus on learning and understanding systems inside and outside of themselves and local communities (micro) in close conjunction with practical, site specific implementation of design skills. Students would gain understanding of civic responsibility by attending local events and community meetings not only as designers but as active citizens. When design students engage locally in this capacity, the community will flourish from this involvement and it will give meaning and functionality to the design work being produced. The student will benefit as well, discovering that he or she has a place in a larger community outside of the university structure, connecting to the world beyond their classroom. The outcomes of the studio will be published, ongoing, in online communities that will allow for idea exchange on a global scale and classes can be run in conjunction with other universities and colleges dealing with similar issues.

Some points and questions to consider are: •Where will the university place itself in conjunction with community to affect change?

- Will the university curricular structures be flexible enough to allow more room for student laboratories to work within communities?

- Will design pedagogy be willing to shed the constraints that currently exist in a 3-hour class module etc... • A college student should know how to make, manage, think and collaborate for the social good, not solely the consumer good.
- Design education is not about wielding communities but being a part of them.
- Being a future designer requires more than skills, it requires human connection and real understanding and leadership within existing communities. •As designers we have an opportunity to tap into the problems of this global society including sustainability and future economic growth through a flexible creative educational model.
- Is this an integrated design model or is it discipline specific?
- How do you introduce design ethics, cultural history, grounding in design philosophy and understanding of the global market within a design education model?

## Social Economies: Enterprise and a New Cultural Geography

---

Laurie Churchman / Izmir University of Economics, Turkey

TREND DRIVERS: Educators in emerging countries such as Turkey are in a unique position to shape curricula with an entrepreneurial focus that will influence how the country produces, markets and exports goods and services.

George Friedman in his book, *The Next 100 Years; a Forecast for the 21st Century*, predicts that Turkey will be a powerful force, a major player, in the 21st century. So much so that he states, "...the relationships among these four countries [Japan, Turkey, Poland and the US] will greatly affect the 21st century, leading, ultimately, to the next global war." Turkey is the 17th largest economy and one of the few countries that grows enough food to feed all of its citizens.

According to Florida's taxonomy, Turkey has been a country that manufactures the world's goods and supports its innovation engines. But this can, and should be, considered an outdated model. Turkey is poised to become an innovator and influencer. Turks are an industrious and nationalistic people, however, historically not ones to use design thinking or the power of design to innovate. The country has an abundance of high quality raw goods and materials, along with a colorful history, and a powerful location for easy. Given this, the opportunity in design education, in countries such as Turkey, is to develop and support curricula that challenge students to leverage their country's resources and strive to introduce them to the world.

While emphasizing authorship and entrepreneurship in design education is not new, what's being proposed is a critical look at design innovation specifically related to the assets of an emerging region or culture. Not typical "feel good social issue projects" or "another groovy product iteration" but really "spiky" "how can we leverage what is unique/abundant/culturally rich/historically important/scientifically advanced about our culture" innovations. And how can some of our traditions, cures, or ways of living benefit others?

Some obvious ways to advance innovation are to develop strong collaborations between university departments, government agencies and industry and remove any barriers to communication, such as language. But more critical is to channel the strong pride of the country's business owners into meaningful entrepreneurship. Facilitating the ability of students to recognize the richness of their resources and to develop new uses and systems with them, can improve the country socially and economically.

Channeling pride may seem an unlikely pedagogical approach for design studies but there are several reasons it enhances an entrepreneurial curriculum, especially in emerging economies. The first is that it allows students to historically ground concepts while developing an argument for their future impact. Turkish students take what could be considered an overload of Turkish history and this is a way to use that strong bank of knowledge in new ways. Two, students can draw on the abundant goods, materials and crafts that are Turkey's pride by introducing, branding, and expanding their use for long-term awareness and new markets. Three, they can concentrate on experimental projects that create "firsts." Instead of mimicking successful case studies and existing systems in the world, they can enjoy the pride of being first creators using their own goods and traditions. And fourth, emerging economies are often made up of many small producers and multi-generational businesses that take pride in their work and are eager for continued success—and may be nimble enough to implement innovation.

On the other hand, the greatest challenge to this approach is being able to change the focus from producers to innovators. Countries like Turkey have been successful as innovation supporters, creating hesitation to step outside of that business model. So, in the context of this conference, this could be seen as a dilemma not a trendsetting topic, although I believe countries such as Turkey will rise above the challenges and become trendsetters. And this is where design education can provide the bridge. Educators can identify assets of the country that can be realized in new ways and form the necessary alliances. Students can be educated to be the innovation engines and designers of change. And schools can engage the older generation of producers to share their knowledge (pride) through collaboration, fostering change from within.

## Social Economies: Enterprise and a New Cultural Geography

---

Kenneth Fitzgerald / Old Dominion University

DILEMMA: That “the International Association of Societies of Design Research reported that only 10% of the paper submissions came from Americans,” doesn’t necessarily demonstrate “that the US is behind other countries in the generation of new knowledge.” The only definite inference from this fact is that American design academics are underrepresented. It may be that the majority is simply unaware of the organization and its activities (and this lack is also open to differing interpretations). An alternate reading is of a “critique by absence”: that the organization fails to represent the majority of research activity that is present. American design academics may find the “knowledge” recognized by this institution to be based on archaic and industry-determinant concepts. The goal of “engagement with industry” is taken as a given. The vibrancy and immediacy of graphic design and culture are largely absent from consideration and investigation. The described situation might indicate the necessity for design to form alternate forums to disseminate its knowledge.

Critiques of the existent structures for design research should be a component of this discussion and an ongoing process in academia. Design should construct methods that reflect its unique nature. Established cultures can provide guides for a nascent design culture but shouldn’t overdetermine its direction. At the same time, as a burgeoning research culture, design is positioned to explore new directions. For instance, academics in all disciplines are confronting the implications of the Internet on research. Due to its relationship with the web, could design set a substantive example on how it can be used in research? Additionally, many academics wish to engage with more popular forums (blogs, newspapers, commercial magazines) but are constrained by the lack of recognition for such activity by tenure committees. As a popular medium, could design also lead the way to academia having a wider contact with society?

Design research culture should be new—and represent its status as a young discipline. As such, it should build from scratch—but not the way it is meant in the topic description. The “scratching” that design culture needs to be built upon should be inspired by the technique innovated in hip-hop music. This technique of manually manipulating vinyl records has disseminated widely through popular music. Ultimately, the concept of scratching is meant as metaphor for a new perspective on what researchers should consider to be meaningful design activity, and how researchers might approach sources and inspirations for analysis and expression. Despite its widespread presence in culture, scratching would not be considered “music” in traditional estimations. Scratching is also a sampling: it repurposes, revitalizes and recontextualizes existing music. Design’s new research culture might do the same for other cultures.

The design culture that ultimately emerges must be substantive, rigorous, diverse, and committed to challenging and expanding what knowledge is. The goal of a meaningful design research must aim higher and address these larger issues.

## Social Economies: Enterprise and a New Cultural Geography

---

Marie Hannigova / University of the Pacific

### Crossing Cultural Boundaries to Support Communities with Design

**HOTSPOT:** Globalization has opened ways for designers to distribute work beyond national boundaries in unprecedented ways and exposed them to visual trends from other cultural backgrounds. It also allowed designers to work crossculturally and collaborate with designers from different cultures. Communities and non-profit organizations in developing countries do not often have access to quality design and their voices go unheard as a consequence. Design education could tap into this need by putting students in contact with needy communities and add a significant asset to its curriculum.

UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity states that “as a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature”<sup>1</sup> placing a strong emphasis on preserving cultural diversity. Designer 2015 Competencies expects design graduates to be able to “work in global environment with understanding of cultural preservation.”<sup>2</sup> Collaboration with communities in developing countries would expose students to diverse cultural stimuli and prepare them for culturally, socially and ecologically sustainable cross-cultural design and collaboration.

Collaboration with communities or non-profit organizations in developing countries presents a number of specific opportunities for curriculum development, including:

- Exploration of culturally, environmentally and socially sustainable design practices;
- Development of understanding and appreciation of different culture and its values and how culture influences design;
- Increased social awareness and responsibility designers have to society;
- Dedication to task at hand and adjustment to primitive working conditions;
- Experience in the dynamics of production teamwork and learning management skills; and
- Communication with designers and non-designers in a multi-cultural environment.

The project’s scope empowers students to practice the tenets of sustainable design practices that support and promote the uniqueness of different cultures. They apply design theory and their technological know-how to give voice and international presence to a disadvantaged group.

Highly functional systems like eco-systems and human communities are resilient because of their diversity.<sup>3</sup> The same applies to communication design. Messages and communications need to be imbedded in the local culture, values and aesthetics to be relevant to its audience. When communicating to an audience outside of one’s culture, the designer needs to get immersed in the culture’s aesthetic values and way of thinking to understand its design needs. Where possible, one should try to collaborate with the culture’s natives and empower the local designers and artisans to create designs of their own.

Similarly, the students should to immerse themselves into the culture of the community and understand its needs and values. This is best achieved by visiting the community and collaborating with locals on developing design solutions. The work of graduate students of the University of Art and Design Helsinki in Namibia is a fine example of that. Design Institute in Netherlands, Polytechnic University of Hong Kong, and City University of Hong Kong have also developed in projects developing countries.

I have had the experience of working with Dimen village that belongs to the Dong minority group in China. As a coordinator, I sent nine different groups of students and teaching staff to document the cultural heritage of the Dong in Dimen. The project resulted in several exhibitions in China and in Hong Kong and a multidimensional documentary archive, which included film, photographs and audio recordings. A significant part of the Dimen

cultural heritage has been preserved for future thanks to the students' efforts. The project allowed students to apply what they learned in a classroom to specific tasks in a challenging environment of an unfamiliar culture.

It may be challenging for individual educators and smaller schools to find international collaborations. I propose to create a database where educators can match themselves to communities and non-profit organizations that are in need of design solutions. Once the contact is made, there are precedents that can be used to model programs upon. These could be part of the same resource database.

In conclusion, it is important for the design students to experience culturally, socially and ecologically sustainable cross-cultural design and collaboration. Design for communities in developing countries offers an opportunity to achieve that.

Endnotes: 1 The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, Article 1. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001271/127160m.pdf> 2 Designer of 2015 Competencies, Competency #10. <http://www.aiga.org/content.cfm/designer-of-2015-competencies> 3 The Living Principles for Design, Center for Sustainable Design, AIGA. <http://www.icograda.org/smallbox4/file.php?sb4af09cf098f13>

## Social Economies: Enterprise and a New Cultural Geography

---

Svetlana Kasalovic / Moorpark College

**HOTSPOT:** This paper addresses the question on how to prepare design students to understand the nature of collaboration that allows people with different incentives, cultural behaviors, and values to collaborate successfully, and how do we prepare students to understand these differences at a variety of scales, by suggesting that we use the conceptual and practical framework known as the Activity Theory. Whilst the first generation Activity Theory built on Vygotsky's notion that the relationship between humans and the world is mediated by artifacts, and the second generation built on Leont'ev's notion of activity system, the third generation builds on the idea of multiple interacting activity systems focused on a partially shared object. As design schools gradually begin to organize their courses around socioeconomic themes, Activity Theory suggests a new and potentially useful vocabulary to design education:

**RE-MEDIATION** Artifacts in multiple ways mediate the relationship between humans and the world. Design could be framed as a change, or a re-mediation: providing a new functionality, finding a new form to make an artifact more attractive, inventing a way to produce it more economically. The "mediated relationship" could become an addition to the design research vocabulary, because all design activities are according to Kari Kuutti [3] in a way or another related either to understanding or changing that relation. The concept of mediated relationship might offer us a way to comprehend what is general in the specific artifacts. Mediation obviously calls for empirical research of the historical development of some particular relationships. "If we eventually grasp the origins, direction, and speed of the changes in the artifact mediated relationships between humans and world, we are also approaching the dynamics of the whole human life from a fresh perspective – a noble enough challenge for design research." [3]

**BOUNDARY OBJECTS** In The Learning Challenge in Children's Health Care in Helsinki, Yrjo Engeström and his team used the Boundary Crossing Laboratory method to host a collaborative redesign effort among the three contradicting activity systems. These activity systems included the Health Center, the Children's Hospital and the Patient's Family. The Children's Hospital had a reputation of monopolizing its patients and not actively encouraging them to use the Health Center. The issue at stake was organizational, not resolvable by a sum total of separate individuals. The long cycle of expansive learning led to the formulation of the concept of care agreement. This Boundary Crossing Laboratory process and the concept of care agreement Boundary Object informs about the conceptual and practical framework for collaboration that educates people with different incentives, cultural behaviors, and values to collaborate successfully. [2]

**OTHER CONCEPTS: EXPANSIVE LEARNING, WILDFIRE ACTIVITIES, KNOTWORKING, RUNAWAY OBJECTS, AND COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY** Nordic Conference on Activity Theory and FISCAR 2010 brought together an international community of designers, psychologists, engineers, medical doctors, and philosophers that share an interest in the Activity Theory oriented research. Presented design projects based on the Activity Theory brought the ideas in "a form of political and cultural imagination that can guide societies as they seek to manage change" [5]. M.P. Ranjan presented bamboo as a sustainable human development resource and a way out of poverty in India; Susanne Bødker showcased three applications that help citizens help each other and improve interaction between citizens and municipalities through web 2.0 in Denmark; E. Nagakami Yamaguchi presented community collaborative art project in a hospital in Japan - "not marginalized to the decor to the place of suffering, but a potential wildfire activity" (comment by Y. Engeström). It is important that students understand design as an agent of socioeconomic change early in their education. The segmentation of design education to traditional vocational categories is going to give way to a more global-scoped practice of design. Design educators must strive to give a true international, not the globalized dimension to design curriculum. Activity Theory provides a useful framework as it illustrates how the object of designing becomes a tool in the cultural context of the user. Activity Theory suggests a new and potentially useful vocabulary to design education, on creation of new artifacts, production of novel social patterns, and expansive transformation of activity contents. Design education and Activity Theory share the solid common ground:

- share an interest in artifacts that are rich in context
- are integrative and cross disciplinary

- see the object of research as evolving and emergent
- use interventionist and participatory methods
- share practical and utilitarian orientation

## Social Economies: Enterprise and a New Cultural Geography

---

Angela Norwood / York University, Canada

DILEMMA: “They have basic needs. Design can’t help them. It is superfluous.” - foreign national master of design student referring to her home country prior to leaving the program to pursue a degree in social work.

“No, thank you. We do not need design. It is for the foreigners. Ladakhis do not need design. We can rely on each other.” - Ladakhi participants of a workshop in which they discussed graphic signage, advertising artifacts, maps of their region and drew cognitive sketch maps of their home villages.

If design, defined as both the artifact and activity, is viewed as a Western enterprise, then what is the role of designers and design researchers in foreign situations where the people whom we wish to benefit do not want what we have to offer? What lessons can be incorporated in the design classroom about defining audience and identifying actual design “problems?”

Students increasingly want their design activity to “make a difference” in peoples’ lives and they seek motives beyond corporate profit for their work. However, as students they are ill equipped to identify either the nature of the “difference” they wish to make or devise an appropriate practice model for doing so. To meet student demand — and spark engagement — various course projects are developed around asking the student to identify social issues of interest to them, then respond to those issues with design tools and methods.

Often, student responses resonate with Friedman’s “flat” world model in the form of web sites, environmental graphics, message campaigns or “coffee table book” presentations which convey stylized information about the issue or place. When challenged to identify the ways in which their projects will “make a difference” students most often cite the potential for income generation by outside interests.

Students convince themselves that as designers, their role is apart from the people affected by the issue, their solutions can be merely invitations or incentives for (Western) money.

The statements at the top were gathered through ethnographic means and refer to a geographical region that Richard Florida would likely describe as “having little connection to the global economy and few immediate prospects.” Ladakh, in the state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) in northern India, is one of several regions worldwide which have identified tourism as a key economic driver for the coming decades. Ladakh has been open to tourism and commercial trade only 35 years. Earlier cash-less-ness rendered the people virtually unrecognizable on the world market. In a consumerist sense, Ladakhis remain materially poor. The influx of tourists and new residents has brought about a new cash-based economy and an acceleration of visual culture primarily in the forms of retail signage and western-style image-based product advertising. The emergence of this material culture and reliance on tourism has undermined the ecologically sustainable ways of life known to have been well “designed” before western exposure. Recent devastating flooding in the mountainous desert region, which usually gets no rain, has forced people to reconsider the relationship between their built structures and the environment. The tourism infrastructure has been compromised. They are in the midst of a complex design problem.

The statements at the top are at once both challenging and inspiring to this designer/researcher/educator who believes in the presence of a role for design that builds upon local knowledge and supports rather than undermines local value systems and has challenged her students to devise more empathetic responses for their social issues projects beginning with consideration of the geography, cultural and political history of the people at the heart of the issue. This prospectus cites a specific locale and suggests that the study of it and places like it has broad implications for design education and research.

## Social Economies: Enterprise and a New Cultural Geography

---

Debra Riley Parr / Columbia College

If design has always been a critical discourse, posing questions and intervals of reflection on contemporary culture, it is now very visibly part of an expanding field of criticality and designed action. From the time of William Morris in the 19th century, the practice of design historically has relied on designers possessing a full knowledge base of the cultural geographies of their moment in time. Understanding social trends, economic drivers, and political contexts—as well as aesthetics—are all imperatives for designers especially in this moment when design can no longer be captured in virtuoso software performance, nor in discrete typographic skills. When Elliot Earls, head of the graduate design studio program at Cranbrook Academy proclaimed at a recent Design Inquiry session that designers should pursue a life of merit he signaled a contemporary hot spot concerning value and integrity in design actions. For Earls, this life of merit in educational contexts demands a refusal of bankrupt pedagogies and structures of teaching all too prevalent in the academy. This prospectus will examine various instances of bankruptcy: curriculum that continues to perpetuate the notion that design is properly concerned with technique, curriculum that does not allow for meaningful thought and research; curriculum that reproduces a sequence of courses designed to support outmoded Fordist notions of divisions of labor.

Several questions emerge for those who are engaged in rethinking design curricula:

- How has design built worlds in which design knowledge and technique is now necessary to challenge these very worlds, to construct new ways of doing business, new ways of designing?
- How can design as a critical discourse emerge in programs where technical virtuosity is valorized over the social contexts in which design is practiced?
- What sort of designed actions might instruct students in the impact of design decisions? [see for example the work of Natalie Jeremijenko, [howstuffismade.org](http://howstuffismade.org)]
- What are the boundaries that define what is visible in current design regimes; and how vested is the academy in policing or re-producing these divides?
- Can Jacques Ranciere's concept of the "distribution of the sensible" assist in mapping the perceptual coordinates of current design practice and pedagogy?

This prospectus, therefore, will raise questions regarding the current portents in design thinking, designed actions and designed curriculum. It proposes that a new cultural geography shaped variously by ecological and economic imperatives will demand new thinking by and new practices of design, designers, and design education.

## **Social Economies: Enterprise and a New Cultural Geography**

---

**Rukmini Ravikumar** / Central Oklahoma University

**HOTSPOT:** Anyone watching the news and the economy knows that the world is getting smaller, if not exactly, as author Thomas Friedman puts it, “flatter.” Trade, migration, pandemics, global warming, and a radical shift in wealth from the West to the East — all of these factors and more indicate that we’re living in a world of global challenges that will require global solutions. Today’s graduates need a mind-set to match the world around them. As educational institutions begin to stress the development of global competency skills for students to be better prepared to enter and succeed in the global market, it is an opportunity for design educators to promote design thinking and creative problem-solving techniques for use in core level curriculum. It is the opportunity to merge the realities as presented by Friedman with the ideas of Daniel Pink and Nigel Cross to finally bring design to the forefront as a valued profession and discipline.

Educational institutions and industry both discuss the importance of global competencies, but they each do so with different intents and emphases. Industry focuses on qualities such as adaptability, cultural awareness and resourcefulness; while Education focuses on the development of language skills. Language requirements and study abroad opportunities have been a part of the educational landscape for a long time, yet companies do not believe recent graduates are adequately prepared for the global market. The design of new technologies has forged the way with multi-sensory solutions to bridge language gaps, design educators can follow this lead and move forward education institutions with global competencies. The need to adapt, research new products and ideas and work and work with clients from different cultural and social backgrounds has always been part of a design student’s training.

This conference can explore teaching techniques that emphasize the learning of concepts over language through creative problem-solving, experiential learning, observation, tactile and metaphorical exercises, the many techniques design educators have used and continue to use to develop design skills in new designers. These approaches could assist instructors to develop more inclusive and transformative environments in their classrooms where students from various language and cultural backgrounds have the opportunity to become engaged learners, build life-long learning skills and gain the confidence to solve complex problems at local, national and international levels.

As teachers, a significant perceptual shift is required of us—a shift in our perception of ourselves; our disciplines; the way we view the world and most importantly a shift in the way we approach teaching. Such a shift is necessary to transition education to the next level.

## Social Economies: Enterprise and a New Cultural Geography

---

Elizabeth Resnick / Massachusetts College of Art and Design

**HOTSPOT:** Short-term study abroad programs may be just as effective in promoting global awareness as the traditional semester abroad experiences. They are generally more affordable than longer programs and appeal to students who might not be able or willing to commit to a semester or a year abroad. These programs allow students in highly structured professional programs like Graphic Design to study abroad without falling behind in their programs or adding extra time to complete their coursework.

Should they be included as an integral component of a degree course in Graphic Design? A recent research study at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities suggests that the duration of college studies abroad does not really matter. Karin Fischer, writing in the February 20, 2009 Chronicle of High Education, states that, “students who go overseas for a short period of time, four weeks or less, are just as likely as those who study abroad for several months or even a year to be globally engaged.” She suggests the ramifications of the Minnesota study could be immense. If academic goals, including global awareness programs, can be achieved within a shorter period of time, the traditional “semester abroad” could be replaced with more affordable alternatives and be more available to students from all economic backgrounds. Students who have spent even two weeks immersed in the culture of another country report a greater understanding and appreciation of other cultures and customs, a heightened awareness of their country’s identity and reputation from an international perspective, and to a greater degree what it means to be a ‘global citizen’: “Travel courses are a vital component in gaining insight into different cultures, by immersing yourself, you not only grow as a student, it affects the way you visualize things in general. The growth, knowledge and not to mention experience that you acquire from a travel course is not only memorable but also paramount in expanding ones horizons. For graphic design students in particular, visiting other cultures offered a unique perspective on design, we learned the customs and trends in another country. Books and the Internet can only teach you so much, experiencing things personally enables a student to synthesize it into their reality. This experience can later transition into inspiration when returning home to continue studying within the graphic design curriculum.” Adrianna Gonzales, travel course participant, spring 2009.

The notion of adding a ‘required’ study abroad travel program (semester course) presents number of specific opportunities for curriculum development, including:

- The development of faculty-led programs (rather than exchanges with foreign institutions or professional tour-programs). Here faculty members would develop and ‘define’ the thematic thread of the travel course plus its deliverables, while ensuring that the course curriculum and its objectives are closely integrated with the students’ primary coursework.
- The notion of creating ‘new paradigms’ to deliver ‘global’ learning outcomes would enable students to gain an in depth knowledge of a geographic area or culture while developing, through primary and secondary research, a process of learning about new cultures and places to apply what the student has learned;
- New curriculum initiatives provide the opportunity for students to develop an appreciation and understanding of the impact of cultural, economic, political forces on international communication design strategies.

The notion of incorporating such programs into all existing graphic design curriculum presents a number of challenges. First and foremost is affordability for all students if the travel course was a required component of their course work. Each institution would need to provide or assist students in obtaining any necessary financial aid in order to meet this requirement. Another challenge would be to define a number of options for when a study abroad travel program or study abroad travel course plans its travel component without interfering with or disrupting a students’ course work.

In conclusion, this prospectus suggests that short term study abroad travel courses might be identified as a hotspot in moving forward the development of curricula that respond to the question of ‘how do we sensitize students to other cultures and socio-economic realities?’

Fischer, Karin. "Short Study-Abroad Trips Can Have Lasting Effect, Research Suggests." *The Chronicle of Higher Education* ("Today's News") February 20, 2009.; Donnelly-Smith, Laura. "Global Learning through Short-Term Study Abroad." Peer Review, *Association of American Colleges and Universities*. Fall 2009, Vol. 11, No. 4

## Social Economies: Enterprise and a New Cultural Geography

---

Maria Rogal / University of Florida

### DESIGN FOR THE SOCIAL GOOD: THE WORLD DOESN'T NEED ANOTHER POSTER FOR PEACE

The past few years have seen design for good/ a social cause/ sustainability/ etc ... become fashionable. However it is often disconnected from its audience, client/partner, context, and has little to no impact on anyone but the designer him/herself. As I often tell my students, “the world doesn’t need another poster for peace.” So what does the world need? And what can designers do about it?

Having lived in developing countries and having worked for a grassroots development organization, I had a unique opportunity to see ways marginalized people were using design and visual communication to improve health, education, and the economy, preserve culture, inform people about their rights, and so on. While in some ways rudimentary, the work I saw was an honest effort by local people to make change in their communities. Having been influenced by the success of these and other grassroots development projects—those that acknowledge poor and marginalized people know what they need best, need the tools, skills, and advice to do it—I am a firm believer that these kinds of spaces and situations, which for so long have been ignored by professional designers, are excellent laboratories for design and design education.

Cynthia Smith’s book, *DESIGN FOR THE OTHER 90%*, which documents the exhibition of diverse solutions to everyday problems that affect people’s survival, along with Paul Pollak’s book, *OUT OF POVERTY*, elucidate ways designers can develop intelligent, economical solutions when tasked. Pollak himself advocated designing for the other 90%, stating it is a mistake to ignore this market. The majority of projects presented in these books are with and for marginalized communities in developing countries. For most design students in the US, the prospect of working, living, and learning in a developing country or marginalized community is about as far afield from the studio classroom one can get. However, given what I know now from my experiences working with students “in the field,” I advocate integrating design research and ethnography into every student’s design process, and get out of the studio and work with people in marginalized communities (or simply communities that are different from one’s own) and other disciplinary experts on projects as the stage of conception. Learn by doing (with preparation, of course).

My strategic and tactical explorations to this end resulted in the creation of design for development, a fieldwork initiative that provides a framework where students can interact, live, and work with people in Maya communities in southern Mexico—ie, people from different economic, cultural, and disciplinary backgrounds—while learning to conduct fieldwork that is modeled primarily on cultural anthropology’s ethnographic methods (and products)—to inform all project participants. So, in their learning how to learn ethnography students interact directly with project partners and local people—learning concepts, theories, and methods before arrival with the chance to implement them on the ground. Observing, listening, reserving judgement, or evaluation, and experiencing quotidian life—even for a short time—placed students in a frame of mind much different, with more awareness and sensory stimulants than that which could ever occur in the studio classroom. The ability to interact (on equal terms) with the project partners and users really gave students a much better understanding that design has a purpose, has meaning, has implications, and that they have a responsibility. It opened up their minds to see there are so many more possibilities available to them, if they choose, than just another poster for peace.

Having this experience shaped each student’s thinking about design, culture, economy, language, and difference in many ways—some positive, others challenging. It also shaped project partners’ understanding of what design is and how it could affect change. As a whole, this experience confirms what AIGA’s *Ethnography Primer* advocates: designers “need to observe the people they are designing for in their own environments.” So, this is one way—over six years—that I’ve explored teaching students to be culturally competent and socially responsible. Many of the competencies of the designer of 2015 are outcomes we achieve in design for development.

What I'm curious about and committed to finding at this conference and in general:

- What structure can get students out of the classroom and into the field?
- How can we change expectations (students, faculty, professionals, collaborators, the public) that design is not only about the product or portfolio piece but about articulating systems, developing processes, strategies, and so on?
- How can we create a framework and space where designers can learn the multiple what's necessary to think and work in a world of change?

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

Polak, Paul. 2008. *OUT OF POVERTY: WHAT WORKS WHEN TRADITIONAL APPROACHES FAIL*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Smith, Cynthia E. 2007. *DESIGN FOR THE OTHER 90%*. New York: Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Organization.

## Social Economies: Enterprise and a New Cultural Geography

---

Ricardo Sosa / Tec de Monterrey, Mexico

Social nudges and Sumak kawsay: systemic and sustainable design

From an education viewpoint, the term ‘sustainable design’ seems misleading. As educators, we are influencing those who will be shaping the environment in 2050 and beyond; therefore we should be considering all design (and our behaviour in general) to be congruent with life.

Design education needs to go beyond beautifying the term ‘design’ with green labels. Beyond the semantic implications, new opportunities are emerging to articulate what we mean by design being sustainable -beyond the abstract concern for future generations or the deceptive use of certified or recycled materials. We need to build, test and teach actionable principles to future designers. In professional settings where commercial and political factors rule, the term ‘sustainability’ has come to mean: “harm less by doing/thinking more of the same”. Design educators need to acknowledge that a good deal of their own education and professional experience throughout the twentieth century are of little value (or counter-productive) to today’s challenges. We can’t just try to lower the impacts of what we have been doing all along.

This does not mean that for design to promote and sustain sustainable living, all of the existing knowledge and experience needs to be dismissed. Nonetheless, it is clear that some of the underlying notions and principles of how/what we design need major revision. Change seems inevitable for some of the fundamentals of what we cause by designing: what behaviours we promote, what values we perpetuate, what relations we impede or facilitate. The world has changed significantly since the early twentieth century, and our understanding of the world has also evolved in non-trivial ways. In the meantime, much of design practice and education has remained unchanged. As the world’s income has increased, people consume much more, their life-span has increased, yet paradoxically all this seems to have little impact on their happiness, while our natural and cultural resources have been depleted. Design teachers and students need to develop systemic frameworks that enable and provide structure to their rethinking of what/how design should be. Clear efforts have emerged in recent years, from participatory methods to meaningful technologies and renewable materials. All these as well as other new methods and tools need to be taught, developed and tested in design schools. However, the challenge today demands more than that. It requires a re-making of the reasoning paradigms. Complexity theory, systemic thinking and evidence-based socio-bioeconomic sustainability are themes that design students and teachers ought to explore and draw from to redefine their contribution to society.

Thaler and Sunstein’s recent book “Nudges” represents a trend that may enlighten designers: systemic interventions that are explicitly aimed at yielding people towards informed and responsible choices without sacrificing their everyday ‘guilty pleasures’. Funtheory.com is an initiative that embodies this effort incorporating a sense of humour. The recently designed Federal Constitution of Ecuador follows the Quichua principle of sumak kawsay or “good living”, a nature-centred and value-based philosophy of what makes people live sustainably and happily. At Tec de Monterrey in Queretaro, Mexico we have been running Design Studios where systemic thinking is promoted in interdisciplinary groups (product designers, electronic engineers and entrepreneurship majors collaborate throughout the semester) working in complex real-life projects. The results are incipient, but we can already see the potential in shifting the design paradigm of our students, while still complying with all the industry expectations of design skills in our graduates.

There are numerous dilemmas involved as well as very pragmatic trade-offs to be made in designing the next generations of designers, who nonetheless need to be competitive and employable in today’s far-from sustainable world.

References:

Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein. Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness, Yale University Press, 2008.  
Republic of Ecuador Political Constitution of 2008, Political Database of the Americas. Available online: <http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Ecuador/ecuador08.html>  
The Fun Theory, An initiative of Volkswagen: <http://thefuntheory.com>