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Diseño y Cultura

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Contenido

Local Impact Design:
best global practices

How can design have a positive impact in
local communities and economies?

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Master and P.h.D in Industrial Design and Multi-media Communication at Politecnico of Milano. Work as designer and researcher with a special focus on local impact design and social innovation, use the action-research method developing projects that merge research, teaching and professional activities.Worked in different countries: Italy, Germany, Nederlands, Brazil and India. Collaborate with several private and public institutions, such as Politecnico of Milano, Poli.design, Ard&nt Institute, GD Goenka University of New Delhi, teaching and developing international and national researches.

Abstract

How can design have a positive impact in local communities and economies?
Several groups, universities, and incubators are now working in local impact projects all over the world, creating local brands and sustainable productive chains with projects that are merging teaching, research and professional activities.

This paper evaluates some local impact projects in different countries and continents such as Brazil, India and Ghana delineating a methodology that can be replicated.

Local Impact Design is a branch of design practice that is now ready to emerge from the praxis to the theory in order to share tools and methods for the development of a global network.

Keywords: Design, local impact, India, Brazil.

Resumen

¿Cómo puede el diseño tener un impacto positivo en las comunidades y economías locales?

Varios grupos, universidades e incubadoras ahora están trabajando en proyectos de impacto local en todo el mundo, creando marcas locales y cadenas productivas sostenibles con proyectos que están fusionando la enseñanza, la investigación y las actividades profesion-ales.

Este documento evalúa algunos proyectos de impacto local en diferentes países y continen-tes, como Brasil, India y Ghana, delineando una metodología que se puede replicar.

Local Impact Design es una rama de la práctica del diseño que ahora está lista para emerg-er de la práctica a la teoría para compartir herramientas y métodos para el desarrollo de una red global.

Palabras clave: Diseño, impacto local, India, Brasil.

Introducción

How can design have a positive impact in local communities and economies ?

To answer this question one must first define what design for local impact is. Design for local impact is a branch of design standing between Social Design and Design for Social Innovation, that in the latest ten years is emerging from practice to theory.

Several groups, universities and incubators are working in this direction all over the world, creating local brands and sustainable productive chains with projects that are merging teaching, research and professional activities.

These projects are becoming a driving force for the local development of productive com-munities by allowing them to progress valuing local traditions and cultures, and create eco-nomical value and new jobs.

Data from Brazil, Mexico, India and Ghana analyzed in this study are meant to be prelimi-nary to a larger study aimed to define a replicable methodology in the design learning pro-cess and design for local impact to be used by universities, incubators, and research centers.

Design context and theoretical references

It is important to contextualize the theoretical framework of the concept of "design for lo-cal impact" upon which is based the controversy between social design and design for so-cial innovation and between theories of local development and territorial capital.

The structural differences between social design and design for social innovation are best outlined by Ezio Manzini who defines social design as "a design activity that deals with problems that are not dealt with by the market or by the state, and in which the people in-volved do not normally have a voice" and the design for social innovation as "everything that expert design can do to activate, sustain and orient processes of social change toward sustainability" (Manzini, 2015, 65).

Cameron Tonkiewise in his Paper "Is Social Design a Thing" seeks to overcome the idea of social design as a traditional design action applied to social contexts and to consider social design as a social activity, leading to socioprotection based on new networks para-digms in collaboration with governments and non-governmental organizations, to respond to expressed and unexpressed social needs by creating a social change.

At the same time, in the theoretical debate on sustainable design, there is a branch that in-vestigates the relationship between design and territory and how design can influence local development and trigger community-based innovation processes.

At the Politecnico in Milan, authors such as Giuliano Simonelli, Marina Parente, Stefano Maffei and Beatrice Villari made important contributions to the design for territories, based on concepts of local development, social and territorial development, human capital en-hancement and communities of practice, collaboration with local districts, regional innova-tion systems, territorial clusters.

These concepts, that involve an action research methodology in the field of local impact design, are the starting point of many of the projects analyzed in this paper and the basis for defining the concept of local impact design.

The theme of Social Impact is gaining ground in the international debate on new forms of local development involving collaboration between private investors, public administra-tions and third sector entities.

Social Impact is defined by the center of social impact of the Michigan University "A sig-nificant, positive change that addresses a pressing social challenge."[1]

"It means the consequences to human populations of any public or private actions-that alter the ways in which people live, work, play, relate to one another, organize to meet their needs and generally cope as members of society. The term also includes cultural impacts involving changes to the norms, values, and beliefs that guide and rationalize their cogni-tion of themselves and their society."[2]

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1 Social Innovation Academy: Social impact definition, Accessed Jun 24 2019 http://www.socialinnovationacademy.eu/project/social-impact-defini-tion/

According to the GIIN[3] definition, the term "impact investing" refers to the realization of investments in organizations, companies and founds that are linked to measurable and in-tentional social goals that can at the same time generate a return on investment for inves-tors.

Projects of territorial enhancement, creation of territorial brands, exploitation of local busi-nesses, creation of business networks are the actions in the design projects for the local impact that generate a social impact by potentially creating projects that can be funded by the impact investing world.

Global research Context

This section defines the context of research that involves several countries and continents and different types of organization. The selection criteria of the cases are: geographical distribution in different continents often in emerging countries, the involvement of a uni-versity or educational institution in design, the presence of real companies involved in the process.

In this paper, case studies occurred in four different continents: Europe, South America, Asia and Africa involving processes of design, training and action research.

The qualitative analysis of such studies allows not only to compare methodologies and practices, but also to evaluate theoretical contributions on design by junior authors from different countries belonging to the specific field of not always known internationally.

In particular, the theoretical framework of this project brings together some concepts on design and design education in India with those on social and sustainable design and the experience of incubators in Italy and Brazil.

The theoretical roots of Indian design are described in the Indian report written in the 1958 by Sr. Charles and Ray Eames outlining the features characters of a Design Institute adapted to the Indian reality.[4]

The Ahmedabad Declaration on Industrial Design for Development[5] of 1979 is also a key moment of the discussion on design in developing countries addressing the pitfalls of de-sign for development and making recommendations for design policies, government action, international cooperation, and access to information, education, and training.

In the Balaram idea of design as interface between tradition and innovation (1998), lies the definition of contemporary Indian design, that has its strong roots in the rich iconographic and craft tradition but is also projected in a global, interconnected word with cross cultural contaminations from other countries such as Italy in this case.

According to Margolin[6], design for development needs to broaden its brief from an empha-sis on poverty alleviation to include the strategic creation of products for export, and thus the project has to focus on the development of exporting processes aimed at creating job opportunities locally.

Bonsiepe[7] has consistently urged developing countries to include design in their manufac-turing sector to better integrate in development theories multiple factors of trade, technolo-gy transfer, and cultural expansion that affect the condition for development. Design edu-cation may contribute in the progress of a country or a region by:

- Creating a connection between design students and productive realities making the students interacting with real projects with a real impact
- Identifying and using visual elements of visual local identity to improve the value of local products and promote the country

Design acts as mediator and orchestra director of the new value constellation, generating value for all stakeholders, not just customers.

2 Quizlet, Socila Impact Assessment flash cards, Accessed Jun 24 2019 https://quizlet.com/331593398/social-impact-assessment-flash-cards/
3 The GIIN Investor Forum is the largest global convening of leaders in the impact investment industry.
4 Charles Eames, (1958) The Indian Report, New Delhi, National Institute of Design.
5 Singanapalli Balaram, (2009), Design in India: The Importance of the Ahmedabad Declaration, Boston: The MIT Press
6 Victor and Sylvia Margolin. (2002). A 'Social Model' of Design: Issues of Practice and Research, Design Issues, vol. 18, No. 4.
7 Gui, Bonsiepe (2004). Peripheral Vision. (Rio de Janeiro: Escola Superior de Desenho Industrial) (ESDI).

In Brazil design is also an instrument for social change, developing new methodologies and educational frameworks.

Important is the experience in Brazil of the ITCP (Incubadoras tecnologicas de cooperati-vas populares), organizations acting in the universities to gather students from different faculties to start cooperatives involving of people with low income.

A group of students from the Faculty of Economy, Psychology, Agronomy, Design and Engineering work together to develop projects of local development in a community with low income and popular companies, starting from the creation of business model and end-ing with the commercialization of the products. These way students are involved in a real project and can transfer the academic knowhow to a real situation, contributing to improve the quality of life of cooperative workers.

The contribution of design in this process is to help defining a business model, the corpo-rate identity of the company, and the products through processes of co-design, and organiz-ing the participation in fair and sales events.

Most of the analyzed projects are effective in emerging countries, sometimes in connection with the global market sometimes focused on the internal market. The Indian perspective of design for development is really interesting because it preserves and promotes the local identity and improves the manufacturing sector.

In the Brazilian approach on design and education, design students work in collaboration with local companies to improve the competitiveness of local territories.

Case studies

Four case studies were selected in really different settings but sharing the idea that design educators and students can improve the social condition by interacting with territories and local communities.

The cases involve different universities and institutions such as Politecnico of Milan, An-halte Schule of Dessau, Gd Goenka University of New Delhi, the Universidade Presbiteri-ana Mack Kanzie of Sao Paulo and works with students at universitary and university and senior students in Brazil,

India, Africa and Germany.

The features that make these case studies similar and significant for the local impact are:

- Involvement of different actors: students, producers, and local communities that together can accomplish mobilization and innovation processes
- Working with companies that in some cases are also social enterprises and the generation of new branches and jobs
- Promotion of local cultural identity
- The launch of businesses in new markets and of commercial opportunities

Cases will be analyzed at a qualitative level to enhance their common replicability.

Name

GD Goenka University

Address

GD Goenka Education City, Gurgaon Sohna Road, Sohna, Haryana, India

Website

http://www.gdgoenkauniversity.com

Years of activity/Foundation

2013

Context

GD Goenka is a private University providing recognized degrees in Bachelors, Masters, and PhD programs. The university has 10 schools including Engineering, Management, Design, Architecture, Humanities, Hospitality, Communication, Law, Medical and allied sciences, and Education.

Number of workers

Full time faculty of the entire university: approximately 150

Number of users/beneficiaries

Students – about 2000

Number of volunteers

Visiting professors: > 20

Overview of the organization

The GD Goenka Education City is set on 60 acres near the high-tech Millennium City, Gurgaon and the National

Capital Region New Delhi. The dogma of GD Goenka University is that novel ideas in the areas of teaching, learning, research and training are pivotal to forge good students.

The University goes beyond the classroom to teach how to use education to solve real-life problems.

Focusing on providing quality education, GD Goenka University has engaged the best and brightest faculty to guide students, and broaden their perspective. This is done by creating systematic opportunities for students to interact with a broad range of industries and ser-vice sectors. This provides multinational companies the opportunity to learn about GD Goenka University and recruit its students. The University has the best of facilities, equipment including laboratories, dedicated video conference facilities, virtual learning facilities and fully equipped conference rooms. The hardware is superbly backed up by able counselors who can inspire students to express themselves.

Most important project

GD Goenka university is engaged in many programs with each of its schools, including research projects, industry projects, and collaborations with industry as well as academic institutions- both from India and abroad.

The School of Fashion & Design established a live project with an Italian firm Canova-home, in which design students visited Italy and participated in creating design ideas for carpets and rugs to be sold in the Italian market.

In the Canovahome project Indian students worked with the head of the company, its de-signer, and also members of the faculty of Politecnico Di Milano and GD Goenka Univer-sity. The students visited the carpet manufactu-rers in India to understand the manufacturing process, and learned to make the carpets as per the manufacturing specifications with the assistance of the carpet design sof-tware 'Galaincha'. The students with the help of the fac-ul-ty guides visited retail centers, museums, exhibitions, and other areas of cultural interest in Milan, Florence, Venice, and Turin. The team focused then on generating new de-signs at the Politecnico campus under the faculty guidan-ce. The concepts were given feedback by the company head and the chief designer of Canovahome, and helped the students to final-ize their ideas in the correct direction. Finally a carpet design workshop was held with a great success. Over 15 students presented their designs, and 5 de-signs were selected to be sampled by the Italian company to show to their clients. The finalized designs were sam-pled in Bhadohi (India), and Kathmandu (Nepal). The-se carpet designs were then dis-played at the Canovaho-me showroom in Milan. The students who participated in the work-shop were given certificates of attendance by Ca-novahome, along with a money prize. In addition the stu-dents of Communication, Interior, and Product design at GD Goenka uni-versity developed a set of solutions to com-municate, exhibit, and retail the Canovahome products.

Relevant results

This complex project is aimed at merging teaching and professional action by giving the students the opportunity to consult the companies.

The main results of this project are to:

- Enhance the relationship between universities, companies, students, and producers operating in a cross-cultural perspective in two different countries
- Allow students, teachers and producers to work together in a real not just academic project
- Create a local visual identity, based on Indian traditional skills used both in the rug's manufacturring and in the communication projects

Plan development for the next 5 years

The next stages of the project will include in the workshop more students from India, try-ing to merge the Indian tradition with Italian style to create interesting and saleable designs. Italian students will be visiting India to take inspiration from the rich indian culture and combining it with the Italian sensibility. The project can also be extended to other compa-nies with different range of products, which may use the expertise of Indian students.

Business model

The business model will involve a commercial agreement with the partnering industry that will include a salary for the students involved. The university will charge to cover the planning of the project and for the involvement of the faculty and resources. The industry will be able to commercialize the outputs of the project after giving due credit to the stu-dents and the institution for their involvement. The institution will be able to use the pro-ject case study as part of its marketing exercise.

Contribution to the design field

This cross-cultural method of working has the potential to produce totally new directions of design inputs for a given market. It will also promote the spirit of understanding and cooperation between industry and academic institutions. The students will have the oppor-tunity to see how the work is carried out in the industry and gain valuable experience from working with design experts. They will also enhance their understanding of design through the practical feedback. This new breed of designers is the future of design. Making design-ers more skilled will help the industry and society in the long run. What be learned from these projects will also become valuable case studies that will have an impact on future projects as well as educational methodologies.

Image 2. Design in Ghana, prof. Mark Kwami with craftmans