

Essay

Design Strategies for Local Development

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ABSTRACT

In the western part of the world, the concept of design is increasingly perceived as a central means of how we organize the world and imbue it with (cultural) meaning, rather than a quality attached to material objects. In this article we are interested in what concept of design is implied in typical design training activities in different cultural contexts (Morocco, India, Thailand, Mexico, and Singapore).

Inspired by the questions that have arisen in connection with project experience and research done by the authors in many countries, this survey outlines approaches and efforts to establish design competence with a particular paradigm to the fostering of sustainable economic and cultural development in local communities. Having worked with development projects involving various aspects of design, we have chosen to study projects with clear design goals as examples of how diverse the interpretation of the concept of design can be.

These observations may stimulate an awareness of the important impact of notions of design in terms of innovation and cultural diversity and may even give rise to more research into these issues.

Keywords: Design education, design methods, cross-cultural design, cultural diversity, cultural and creative industries

DESIGN STRATEGIES FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT—A SHORT OVERVIEW

Development projects in the 60s and 70s focused on supporting industry as a driver of development, and a focus on design was part of this effort. In 1977, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID) signed the Ahmedabad Declaration on Industrial Design for Development. The Plan of Action promoted design competencies as an important element in socio-economic development while emphasizing the role of design in preserving and promoting local cultural traditions. UNIDO and also United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) supported the Ahmedabad Declaration by commissioning research and chairing meetings that brought together a wide range of professionals to seek design-based solutions to practical challenges related to, e.g., the establishment of rural health centers or schools. These activities also stimulated more academic discussions of cross-cultural design practices with contributions from people like Victor Papanek (1971), Gui Bonsiepe (1977, 1991) and Ashoke Chatterjee (1977).¹

In the last decades, however, this dialogue has had a much smaller impact on what is actually happening in development programs and design education in many countries of the world. The cross-cultural design debate today tends to focus on high-profile projects and mainstream developments. Hence it is clear that while advanced economies have been exploiting design as an asset for their economic advantage, developing countries mostly have disregarded design as a tool for economic and social development (see Raulik, Cawood, and Larsen, 2008).

The 2013 Papanek Symposium: Emerging and Alternative Economies of Design, which discussed the explosive growth of design and innovation initiatives in China and social dimensions of design and design policies in emerging economies with speakers such as Sulfikar Amir (Singapore), Vinay Venkatraman (Denmark), and Xu Ping (Shanghai), is a refreshing exception to this trend. In recent years, issues of design have also increasingly featured as an aspect of cultural diversity and sustainability agendas. The specific conditions that led to the emergence of the modern concept and practices associated with the notion of design in industrialized societies have not existed in many of the countries and cultures we are considering in this article. Many poor areas in the world have in fact not experienced industrialization at all, but are now entering directly into a post-industrial economy requiring a very different way of doing things. While the fundamental, core elements of design exist in all human creation, the lack of the western concept and practice of design as a methodology is a logical consequence of this development. However, as emphasized in the Ahmedabad Declaration, design competences provide a useful perspective for development of craftsbased industries that may help negotiating the gap between traditional practices, new technology, and the market.

In general, design practice and product design capabilities for local development appear under-researched in many countries. There is of course a language issue involved due to our limitations vis-a-vis local languages (which may be one reason that India has taken a prominent role in alternative approaches to design). The best source of information is therefore, at this time, case studies and UN reports rather than pure academic research.

Development, Design and Cultural Industries

Cultural industries have increasingly become a focus of enterprise and investment. The shift towards knowledge-based production is not only a shift from one kind of product to other goods and services; it is a fundamental shift in the way in which production/ businesses are organized and in the way we live and understand ourselves. Changes in the field of education and the variety of occupations stimulated by the introduction of new technology are therefore part of this shift. Increasingly, the development of cultural industries is adopted as a strategy for local economic growth in poorer regions. In very poor and rural communities these efforts are often, though not always, focused on development of crafts-based industries.

In this context, the notion of design is almost totally absent—and where the term is known and used, it is primarily thought of as synonymous with fashion design, perceived as a purely aesthetic phenomenon closely related to modern mass media and consumer culture. Whereas design (and entrepreneurship) could potentially bridge the gap between traditional practice and knowledge, new technology and the diverse demands of the market place.

Concepts of quality

The introduction of new technology and new working procedures is an aspect of cultural industries development. All too often, the knowledge and skills and the spirit needed to underpin this transformation are lacking, as they are neither taught in schools nor included in the training offered to professionals working within cultural industries. Clashing with proven traditional practice and knowledge, new products therefore tend to exist in a space in which traditional notions of quality no longer apply, presenting a serious challenge to value, innovation, as well as to the preservation of cultural diversity. The crafts industries are characterized by the degree in which design determines the quality and value of produced goods and services. Derived from evolving cultural knowledge and expressions of culture and heritage, the competitive edge and quality of designed products is linked to the innovative potential of a diversity of cultural expressions. In this respect, there is no fundamental difference between traditional arts and crafts and the more modern expressions of design that constitute a continuum of products stretching from the traditional to the modern. As a creative capital, traditional art/crafts are embedded with the knowledge, worldview, and the technical disciplines of a specific culture, and so ensure the distinctive basis for skills development and innovation that is necessary for the successful participation in a global market - not only in the area of crafts but also as an entry-point to other aspects of the creative economy.

While the influence of cultural industries on cultural diversity is indisputable, it is not always positive. It is vitally important not to overly simplify the matter by for example copying training or business models mindlessly from one place to another. Cultural industries cover a wide range of different products and activities and because of the link to culture the context must be considered seriously when planning for the sector's development in a particular place.

While there is nothing wrong with innovation and simplification based on traditional designs, the specific cultural knowledge and its expression through symbols, colors, design, and ways of doing things are often underpinning the creative quality and originality of a product. Hence the important consideration here is how to keep the cultural knowledge that is embedded in more traditional products and practice alive, so that it will continue to provide a source of inspiration and guidance – a creative capital for future creation and product development. Training/education relating to design knowledge as a field of technical research is therefore emerging to meet an urgent need in places where only rarely has it been represented in the local tradition. The need to identify specific training needs, curricula, and related practical institutional support mechanisms suitable to this context is a challenge we need to take on. As described above, we are neither the only ones, nor the first, to point to this situation but the call for a design policy and more structured approaches to the application of design skills remains unanswered in most developing countries.

So how do we define design and design competence in a context that transcends the European cultural experience?

We are looking at design as a conceptual aspect of creation; design as a skill – aspiring to the sublime or the artistic. When it transcends itself it becomes art. If we define design as the articulation of the relationship between materials, functions and beauty (aesthetics) we may agree that although the conditions for the articulation are often embedded in a European cultural context, this context may change depending on the designer. We may also agree that the conditions for the articulation of materials, functions and beauty have been fundamentally altered by the technological revolution. Another important and variable factor is the perception of the designer's individualism as opposed to his/her role as a catalyst for a more collective design process. The essence of designing as a process, however, remains the same—reflecting a fundamental aspect of the way human beings live and build a way of life, their aspirations. It is in this way design is also a powerful tool/ skill to negotiate change: evolving economies, social conditions, new materials, norms, aesthetics etc.

What concept of design?

During the recent decades, in the European context, the concept of design has become increasingly abstract. Originally describing the process of giving form to matter, the trend is towards design as a tool or methodology used to plan and control the creative process, in order to ensure the quality and replicability of individual products in a dialogue with the market and its demands. 'Controlling standards to achieve individuality' as a design concept has proven so useful that this way of design thinking has entered almost every area of our lives and has become an indicator of quality in itself. However, the concept of design is increasingly perceived as a 'way of thinking' – a means to organize the world and imbue it with (cultural) meaning.² The modern practices and concepts of "design" are the result of a particular historical development and context; it emerged with the systematic application of market and industry mechanisms to production and the subsequent division of labor and specializations on the assembly line. Over the last decades, the concept of design has evolved to mean different things in different contexts.

The specific conditions that led to the emergence of the modern concepts and practices associated with the notion of design in industrialized societies, however, did not exist in the countries and cultures we are considering here. Many of the poorer areas in the world have in fact not experienced industrialization at all, but are now entering directly into a post-industrial economy requiring a very different way of doing things. While the fundamental, core elements of design exist in all human creation, the lack of the concept and practice of design as a methodology is a logical consequence of this development path.

The successful achievement of culture-based commercial production and cultural preservation/ development is a highly complex affair in which cultural diversity is more often threatened than cultivated. Caught between traditional practice and market demands, the development of commercially viable products does not necessarily contribute to a deeper understanding of a specific culture. Indeed, it is often only skimming the surface of the wealth of intangible, cultural knowledge embedded in excellent examples of traditional art and crafts. Design education may be one way to strengthen the awareness of how cultural identity and cultural diversity may enrich modern design.

Trends from Development of Design skills outside Europe

The application of western training curricula to developing countries is fraught with difficulties and we are slowly recognizing that it only works if models are not copied but used for the elaboration of similar activities with proper reference to local knowledge and cultural values. Entrepreneurship and design are concepts that increasingly are used in development projects to denote a more holistic approach to business development and to represent the embodiment of an approach or attitude to education and work. Drawing on project experience from many countries and our on-going research, the following will very briefly outline and discuss some well-tried approaches and efforts to establish design competence in various cultural contexts (Morocco, India, Thailand, Mexico, and Singapore).

These case studies reflect different trends in the management of creativity as a strategy for economic and social development and implicitly represent various concepts of design. These variations may in turn further a discussion of how design competences support the integration of sustainable socio-economic change and impact on creativity, innovation, and cultural diversity vis-à-vis local development.

Case	Ownership	Characteristics			
MOROCCO	NGO project	Grass-roots			
		Training—indigenous			
		Business support training			
		Network re-enforcement			
THAILAND	Government program	Top-down approach			
		Cluster development			
		Business support structure			
MEXICO	Individual project(s)	Entrepreneur			
		Art-based and story telling			
		Business development			
		Community development			
SINGAPORE	Government program	National needs-based framework approach			
		Mapping and planning (skill-set) to facilitate skills/competence building for individuals in areas that have been identified for their economic market potential			
INDIA	Individual program	Classic institution			
		Training approach			
		Research, dialogue			
		"Hold hands"			

Table 1. Strategies and methodologies

MOROCCO: WOMEN DECISION-MAKING AND PUBLIC LEADERSHIP

Background

Cultural industries like crafts, furniture making, and handlooms, play an important role in many communities. With proper policy attention and investment, they hold significant growth potential for the cultural industries sector in many developing countries. Over the years, a number of projects have been designed around this potential, harnessing the crafts production and cultural tourism centered on heritage sites as a motor for economic development among poorer segments of the population.

In general, these kinds of business activities are the focus of individual projects driven either by entrepreneurs or as part of development projects funded by the Government, external international assistance, or by NGOs. More often than not, the activities fail to maintain the projected economic growth as soon as external support stops. Often this is due to restraints in terms of lacking infrastructure or inadequate funding resulting from the relative invisibility and the low status of the handicraft and artisan-based activities in public policy and planning.

Some of the most successful of these projects are cluster-development projects. There is therefore a nascent understanding that more structured and comprehensive strategy development is needed to realize the potential of these industries for economic development and poverty alleviation.

Methodology

In 2008, The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Design received economic support from development organizations towards developing and implementing a dialogue approach to project



Figure 1. Women from the Femmes Artisanes Marrakech develop new designs based on traditional practice and patterns.

Photograph: Gitte Young



Figure 2. Hayat and Khadija working with ornament patterns to be used for embroidery.

Photograph: Sine Stenbek Andersen

formulation for economic empowerment of women based on craft manufacture. "Empowerment through design" is a collaboration between the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Design and the Danish Centre for Gender, Equality and Ethnicity (Kvinfo), Planet Finance, College Lasalle and Réseau Femmes Artisanes, working towards empowering crafts women in Morocco through the upgrading of their traditional crafts activities. The project dialogue is based on fundamental *rapport* and the potential for dialogue and trust based on understanding between women who—albeit from different cultures—share the practical experience of being handicraft producers. Hence the core of the project is a two-way teaching-learning experience.

Based on an initial dialogue, design students from Denmark support the members of the Moroccan all-women's cooperative in the identification and training of skills and tools necessary not only for product development (using design tools that enable the women to develop new designs based on their own traditions) but also to take control of all other aspects of the production (incl. purchasing, organizing production, sales and marketing, budget control, and communications), which have normally often been undertaken by the men in the community. In short, the women in the cooperative learn to handle all of the jobs connected to running a business, so they are not dependent on outside middlemen to do the purchasing and sales and they can control where the profits go. By gaining first-hand insight into the commercial aspects of handicraft production, the women gain a deeper understanding of market demand and of the issues of price and quality, which then feeds into a more successful and realistic production plan. The need for building the training capacity needed to transfer these design and business skills to more women in the future is an aspect of this support.

The Danish students, on the other hand, acquire new skills and get hands-on experience related to the dynamics between cultural traditions and market demand, and how design skills may be applied in different cultural contexts – all of it useful knowledge to bring back to working in a globalized design market.

Design paradigm

The project is quite similar to very many other projects being implemented that focus on women, on participation (a grass-roots approach), on upgrading of skills and products, and emphasizing the need to reach a market through product development, technology, and marketing skills. This project, however, is interesting because design knowledge and business knowledge are integrated not only within the same training process but also as equally important skills to be acquired by each participant. Trainers who also have dual competences in design and business teach this skillset. Not only, then, is design and business perceived as equally important aspects of the same process but the project makes a conscious effort not to separate this knowledge in terms of the people involved.

This extension of the concept of design corresponds to the concepts introduced in the European design colleges during the 90's and is very closely linked to the needs and perspective of trade and competition in open-market economies. It was greatly influenced by the experience and needs of large-scale corporate companies vis-à-vis the "global market." However, in this context, the paradiam is being brought into a more local context where the ownership of production is in focus in the effort to empower the Moroccan women involved by making them more competent in the commercial dealings related to their production and using this new insight for product development. The Danish design students could re-connect with the forces that drive creativity in relation to the production of unique, artisanal crafts aimed at a smaller, local market. Through the dialogue between different cultural and social experiences, new ideas may emerge not only in relation to products, but also in terms of new approaches and business models.

In order to design and develop marketable quality products evolved from existing traditional skills and knowledge, new skills and knowledge is needed. Identifying these new skills and ensuring that they are available is part of the challenge. Some of the problems that have been identified in this respect include:

- Lack of specialization (no division of labor);
- Lack of standard measurements and of quality;
- Lack of scale and volume of the production;
- Lack of technology and technical skills;
- Difficulty in identifying and meeting market requirements;
- Lack of training institutions and political perspective.

The concept of design is used to refer to at least two rather different aspects of creation. On one hand, it refers to design as a tool or a skill to negotiate change: for example changing work conditions (technology), changing materials, new functions, different norms and values, etc. – and to identify creative solutions that satisfy demands for both functionality and beauty within these new parameters. Within this understanding, design can also function as a method for analyzing and discussing the relation between form and function within the context of traditional cultures and to identify standards of different kinds. The concept of design is, on the other hand, also used more narrowly as a skillset used to plan and control the creative process, in order to ensure the quality and replicability (prototype) of a product.

Design knowledge in both senses as described above could be useful in seeking solutions to the challenges posed on one hand by traditional culture and knowledge and, on the other, the changes that a modern globalized world economy imposes on that very culture itself.

THAILAND: OTOP Background

The One Tambon One Product program was established in Thailand in 2001 with inspiration from the Japanese One Village One Product movement (tambon means sub-district). The objective of OTOP is to improve the standard of living of farming families through a nationwide program of support for artisan-based entrepreneurship. The objectives are similar to the Morocco project but the approach is different:

OTOP principal objectives

- To contribute to the identification of local natural and cultural resources with potential for the economic revitalization of regions;
- To be a factor in the promotion of culturally value-added products;
- To encourage value addition, with unique regional features, in local primary commodities;
- To encourage production of products that are traditionally village-specific and to promote self-respect in villages and regions;
- To contribute to creating regional brands competitive in the global market;
- To be a factor in the promotion of good leadership (a crucial factor for success);
- To contribute to the promotion of rural entrepreneurial development and networking.



Figure 3. Thai design Photo: Pernille Askerud

Design paradigm

The OTOP program has undoubtedly had an enormous impact on the style and kind of handicraft products produced today in Thailand and has also promoted creative industry development more broadly by recognizing creative skills and production.

The OTOP program does not explicitly state principles for turning traditional handicrafts into marketable commodities, nor has the concept of design been discussed in this context. However, the products produced under the program feature a common design quality that has been achieved through the identification and application of a series of quality standards related to materials, sizes, packaging, colors, etc. This "brand identity" is enhanced through certification and monitoring procedures, allowing the products to be produced and sold in great quantities in the domestic and foreign markets.

Even though design is not discussed explicitly, the program has created a methodology for wide and rapid application of new techniques and skills and a standard that carries with it a concept of design not

Methodology

Applying local knowledge and skills handed down from generation to generation, OTOP products must be hand-made, using locally available materials and resources to manufacture goods that are, or will become, competitive in local and export markets. These specialty products are based on the originality, culture and tradition of each rural locality.

The project does not provide direct subsidies, but rather technical assistance to improve product quality and support for marketing. Today, thousands of tambons (village sub-districts) have been incorporated into the project that is now operating in most of the provinces of Thailand.

Typical OTOP products are handicrafts, textiles, cotton and silk garments, pottery, woven handicrafts, artistry items, gifts, fashion accessories, household items, food crafts and many other articles indigenous to each community. The program is considered very successful; however, it remains unclear exactly how sustainable the program model is, how cost-efficient it is, and how much it actually benefits the local producers.



Figure 4. Thai traditional design features Photo: Pernille Askerud

unlike Western models. It is a model closely tied to the commercialization and competitiveness of the products.

The extent to which the OTOP program actually supports the conservation of traditional knowledge related to particular products or procedures of craft production is questionable. Some would argue that the simplification or stripping of cultural meaning from the products in the long run would make these designs less appealing and thus eventually less competitive.

MEXICO – MATA ORTIZ Background

Craft communities centered around one or more excellent artists represent a very different model for the development of successful cultural industries based on crafts – and especially the training and transfer of skills and knowledge in this respect. But here also, design and product quality are the keys to successful commercial enterprise.



Figure 5. Mata Ortiz design Photograph: Barbara Adler



Figure 6. Mata Ortiz design Photograph: Barbara Adler

Mata Ortiz, a small village in northern Mexico, has recently seen a revival of an ancient Mesoamerican pottery tradition inspired by pottery from the ancient city of Paquimé. Largely due to the efforts of Juan Quezada and his extended family and neighbors, the old production methods were explored and craft skills redeveloped, enabling the use of ancient shapes and patterns of ornamentation as inspiration in new and individual expressions. The pots are hand-built without the use of a potter's wheel and the materials and tools are from locally available sources and the kiln is fuelled with cow manure or wood chips.

Design paradigm

Young potters from the area have been attracted to the Mata Ortiz revival and have joined Quezada and his family. New potting families developed and the art movement continues to expand. A vibrant flow of new ideas, freed from the restraints of traditional practices or gender appointed functions, has enabled the pottery of Mata Ortiz to avoid derivative repetition common to many folk art movements. This blend of cultural expression, economic need and artistic freedom has produced a unique artistic movement in the community, contributing to keeping cultural traditions and diversity alive.

SINGAPORE

Singapore has taken a very different approach to the development of creative industries. By pinpointing the lack of knowledge and skills considered obstacles to economic growth, Singapore has developed a competency framework aimed at identifying and developing the creative competencies needed in the future by businesses and industries, including the related occupational profiles in terms of sets of skills needed for successful employment.

Methodology

The Creative Industries Workforce Skills Qualifications (CIWSQ) is a national Continuing Education and Training (CET) framework for professionals working in the most important sectors of the creative industries in Singapore (see Table 2, page E1.10page E1.10). A joint effort by the Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA), the Ministry of Information, Culture and Arts (MICA) and industry players, the CI WSQ is a national credentialing system that trains, develops, assesses, and recognizes the creative industries workforce for competencies needed to stay employable. Offering qualifications at all levels, CIWSQ include 3 defined sectors:

- Arts and Culture Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ);
- Design Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ);
- Media and Communications Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ).

The framework approach is especially important for the creative industries because so many aspects and skills needed in the cultural and creative industries are not recognized when it comes to formal employment categories and therefore have largely remained invisible in connection with strategic planning and support. This, combined with the strong dependency on new and rapidly evolving technologies, results in the fact that many professional specializations are not well known and the skills and competencies involved in these sectors have not yet been well defined.

The Singapore framework is based on a systemic identification of skills, paths, and occupational profiles. Compared to the other cases we have discussed, this approach is fundamental and inclusive. It opens up the field and through this openness encourages participation and innovation. Because it creates awareness of the mechanics of the relationship between skills and jobs, it also enables individuals to find their own path towards employment.

Design paradigm

Ideally, a framework like this would include creativity and define skills relating to creative jobs and design, including the potential for transferability of skills. However, in the case of Singapore, design—one of three qualification areas of creative industries—is again divided into five categories of technical disciplines and skills: fashion, graphic, exhibition, interior and industrial design. Compared to the definition of design found in the other strategic approaches discussed in this paper, the Singapore Framework represents a very narrow understanding of the concept of design and is in many ways fundamentally different from the trend in other places.



Figure 7. Street Ornamentation in Singapore. Photo Pernille Askerud

Arts & Culture WSQ								
WSQ Qualifications	Technical Theatre	Performing Arts	Events Management	Visual Arts	Creative Practice			
Graduate Diploma		•	•	•				
Graduate Certificate								
Specialist Diploma	•	•	•	•	•			
Diploma/Professional Diploma	•	•	•	•	•			
Advanced Certificate	•	•	•	•	•			
Higher Certificate	•	•		•				
Certificate	•	•		•				

Design WSQ								
WSQ Qualifications	Exhibition	Fashion	Interior Industrial					
Graduate Diploma	•	•	•	•	•			
Graduate Certificate								
Specialist Diploma	•	•	•	•	•			
Diploma/Professional Diploma	•	•	•	•	•			
Advanced Certificate	•	•	•	•	•			
Higher Certificate	•	•	•	•				
Certificate								

Media and Communications WSQ								
WSQ Qualifications	Media	Advertising	Direct Marketing	Public Relations				
Graduate Diploma	•	•	•	•	•			
Graduate Certificate								
Specialist Diploma	•	•	•	•	•			
Diploma/Professional Diploma	•	•	•	٠	٠			
Advanced Certificate		•	•	•	•			
Higher Certificate	•	•	•	•	•			
Certificate								

Media and Communications WSQ, continued									
WSQ Qualifications	TV/Film/ Radio	Music	Games Develop- ment	Animation	Interactive Media	Publishing - Books	Publishing - Web	Publishing - Magazine	Printing
Graduate Diploma	•	٠	•	•	•	•	٠	•	٠
Graduate Certificate									
Specialist Diploma	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	٠
Diploma/Professional Diploma	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Advanced Certificate	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	٠
Higher Certificate	•		•		•	•			•
Certificate									•

INDIA – NEW APPROACHES TO DESIGN THINKING

In projects focusing on entrepreneurship development, the introduction of design thinking and the analytical approach of design thinking could possibly offer training elements that would make entrepreneurship programs more sensitive to cultural context and thus more effective. Tools are needed to facilitate the development of appropriate solutions bridging the gaps between traditional practice, knowledge, and values; new media and technology; and the market.

Here a note of caution is needed: design education programs have been introduced, for example in India and China, with almost the opposite result of what may be needed. Many of these programs have primarily been attracting students from the educational sector rather than from the ancient craft sector, and as a consequence, the introduction of new design education in India has, arguably, strengthened the alienation from the cultural knowledge that was supposed to be the basis for design work rather than contributing to its development.

One very exciting example of a school that has made a concerted effort to cultivate design as a discipline that respects and integrates Indian experience and culture, is The National Institute of Design (NID) in Ahmedabad. Established in the 1960s with the goal of setting up a design education based on broad humanistic principles, NID is now recognized as one of the leading multidisciplinary design institutions in India. NID has played a significant role in stimulating a debate about design and the development of the concept of design in a non-western context.

The Ahmedabad Declaration on Industrial Design for Development (1977) was a manifesto of appropriate design for the developing world. The declaration outlined the principles for design thinking and emphasized the need for a contextualized approach:

- understanding the values of one's society and then defining a quality of life within its parameters;
- seeking local answers for local needs by using local materials, skills, and traditions while making use of advanced science and technology;
- creating new values, addressing priority needs and preserving plural identities.

Taking the lead from these principles, Ghose (1989) discusses the wholesale import of design education models in India and China over the last decade pointing out the link between the modern design paradigm and a particular economic and social model that does not necessarily correspond well to a different cultural and social context as, in this case, India. In order to make design more relevant and effective, Ghose emphasizes the need to reflect the values and knowledge of a particular social and cultural context as part of a design approach:



Figure 8. Field work in India

If design is perceived as an ancient activity that has gone on for several centuries rather than as a brand new profession, then our whole perception of what constitutes Asian design begins to change and, thenceforth, issues pertaining to Asian design assume different forms. The transition from seeing things in terms of continuity to seeing things in terms of discontinuity marks the principal break between traditional design and modern design. (Ghose 1989, p.36)

While institutions like the NID is working along these lines, the practical application of these ideas has nevertheless been less widespread than one could hope. Ghose (1998) refers to an observation of Asoke Chatterjee: "... yet the original inspiration for bringing design to this land (India) remains virtually untouched. Basic needs ... are outside the designer's purview, challenging the conscience of this young profession and its ancient heritage."

CONCLUSION AND CONCERNS

The cases described in this paper contribute, in each their own way, to the discussion of the concept of design. As we have established, each case has a unique perspective as well as variations in the understanding of the term design.

In the Moroccan Empowerment through Design project, the primary concern is the people producing crafts and design and the development of their skills enabling them to have a better life. OTOP Thailand supports the market economy strategy of regional small businesses through design. In the case from Mexico, it is the local artistic design that has enabled community development. In Singapore it is through political policy implementation that design skills would support development of the workforce. In India, research and development in academic institutions support local design development and crafts production. Each of these cases is based on a concept of design that is different in scope as well as in execution. One of the most obvious divergences is the sensitivity (or lack of sensitivity) to the knowledge that is inherent in the cultural setting of the project. Is design development seen as a continuous process from the traditions and practices that exist or is it a framework that is "imported," e.g. standards, procedures, materials or even introduction of market rationale.

In order to design and develop marketable quality products evolved from existing traditional skills and knowledge, new skills and knowledge is needed. Identifying these new skills and ensuring that they are available is part of the challenge. As both technology and new media are revolutionizing the way in which we work and live; creativity, entrepreneurship, and design have emerged as key concepts associated with many professional fields. The establishment of education and training programs is needed to meet the demand for design-led change in businesses, organizations, and communities (see for example Chick & Micklethwaite, 2011). There is no doubt that design education is evolving rapidly in these years and that it will gain importance and become sought after in non-western countries as well.

To effectively support the transition to a very different (knowledge-based) economic system, these competencies also must be integrated within the existing education systems as a new discipline of practical reasoning and argumentation that is particularly suited to cultivate trouble-shooting skills and address cross-sectorial issues. In order to do so, it is indispensable to base the development of new training curricula on accurate information about the actual competencies, skillsets, and needs in a given socio-economic context or situation.

So, how do we define design and design competence in a context that transcends the European cultural experience and allows mainstream design education to become more inclusive and responsive to cultural diversity? Being conscious of any given cultural context, and of the cultural meanings implicit in imported models, we may use those integrative skills of design that support the assimilation of insight and knowledge from different spheres (e.g. cultural traditions, industrial design, engineering, and marketing) into a workable solution to a problem. As these skills may be applied to potentially any matter, they are also powerful tools in the negotiation of change—whether in terms of technology, materials, or wider norms and conditions more broadly.

The cases we have outlined above all represent serious efforts at stimulating creative economic activities for economic and social development. We have tried to put forward the argument that various design disciplines form an important element in the successful implementation of these efforts, and that more research and thought must be given to strengthen this element in culturally sensitive ways.

NOTES

- For an overview of this literature, please refer to H. Alpay Er (1997), "Development Patterns of Industrial Design in the Third World: A Conceptual Model for Newly Industrialized Countries."
- 2. See for example *The Aesthetics of Imagination in Design* by Mads Nygaard Folkmann, MIT Press, 2013.
- 3. This type of programme originated in Japan but has become a flagship of the Thai export strategy in recent years.

This survey is based on questions from the experience and work of the authors. We are indebted to many (often anonymous) people and writers. Listed below are references that have been influential in the analysis as well as those references used directly in the writing of the article.

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