Design for Social Inclusion

Yadira Ornelas* Judith Gregory**

Institute of Design, Illinois Institute of Technology
Chicago, USA
*yornelas@id.iit.edu,
**judithg@id.iit.edu

Abstract: Globalization redesigns society. It creates economic, environmental, social and cultural imbalances that have proven too sudden and complex to resolve with prevailing logic. In the ongoing discourse, economic and environmental aspects have been privileged over the social and cultural effects of globalization. This presents opportunities for addressing and enhancing social equity and sustainability through design. Placing design for social inclusion as the object of research is undertaken as part of the first author's doctoral research and as an extension of the social inclusion research experience of the second author   . The exploratory research inquiry discussed in this paper seeks to provide a frame of reference concerning design for social inclusion, by focusing on the impact of culture in relation to communication and information design in public health campaigns oriented to women living in multicultural societies. This inquiry is inspired by previous research projects in the area of social inclusion by design. A   visual communication project developed for deaf children [12] is the seed for this interest in the impact of design related to vulnerable groups. Although a number of designers have successfully constituted sustainable projects, the vast majority of people on the fringes of society in all regions of the world remain under -served by design. W e argue that a better understanding of design for social inclusion, its relevance and its challenge   s is urgent to encourage design practitioners, thinkers and educators to address the necessity of design projects that foster the inclusion of marginalized and under-valued populations into more equitable and sustainable futures.

Key words: social inclusion, design, culture, sustainability.

Introduction

The *First Things First 1964* manifesto written by Ken Garland urged communication designers to reflect on the value and consequences of their practice [7]. The manifesto did not advocate the discontinuation of consumption-led design, considering this unfeasible; ho wever, it was a call to graphic designers to design for more humanist dimensions and use their skills for endeavors that would improve daily life. The manifesto was revived as *First Things First 2000* to cast light once again on how visual communication is being used in service to mass consumption and to rally communication designers to attend to pressing environmental, social and

cultural matters. *First Things First 2000* has been signed by numerous graphic designers, art directors and visual communicators [7].

From Garland's manifesto to the contemporary field of sustainability , designers have been concerned not only with improving design praxis but also with enhancing the life of those directly affected by their designs. The juncture of communication, information and visual design and design for social inclusion is still relatively new . Design for social inclusion has the distinct intention to engage those involved not only in exercising creative power but also in gaining a sense of independence and the opportunity for a more dignified way of life.

Inspired by Inclusive Design approaches that foster responsibility to include previously excluded users (see Lee & Cassim 2009, in this volume [8]), design for social inclusion recognizes the need for co-design with people from marginalized segments of the population, as 'design partners' in ef forts to create environmental, cultural, economic and social sustainability. Design for social inclusion is about tapping into the richness of communities and the use of local resources in conjunction with entrepreneurial activity and industry to develop products and services that are intrinsically related to social and cultural contexts while also viable and relevant in national and international arenas. Designed artifacts that reflect how people have shaped them also offer tangible possibilities of independence and a sustainable future.

In his essay, 'Design as Practice, Science and Research' [14], Beat Schneider describes fields of activity of future-oriented design. He argues that visual communication designers have the potential to transform design from a market tool to a democratizing agent.

Design Field	Fields of Activity	Examples
Social Design	Inclusion design, participatory design collaborations	Inclusive Design Challenge [8] Design *and* Craft projects [4]
Scientific-Technical and Didactic Communication Design	Information design, knowledge visualization	Healthcare information,wellness self-knowledge Sustainable Design Education [2]
Culturally Sensitive Design	Universal Design, Multi-cultural communication	Creative Tourism Experience Project [11]

Table 1. Visual Communication Design and Future-oriented Fields of Activity.
This table takes inspiration from Beat Schneider's discussion of fields of activity of future-oriented design [14].

The areas shown in Table 1 are certainly not exclusive of each other. Reflective design practice concerned with the transdisciplinary relationships and transnational interconnections amongst them could become a pathway for systematic research that fosters social and sustainable innovation in the field of visual communication. "Inherent in the discipline of graphic design is a historically untapped potential to empower the audience to actively bring about change through their own effort and their own ideas or concepts. In this unorthodox context, the audience rather than the graphic designer dictates which ideas reach fruition and potentially in which form(s) they do so" [1]. As Forlizzi and Lebbon [6] state: "the practice, processes, and methods for conducting user research in communication design are in their infancy, and there are a myriad of ways to talk about conducting research and applying subsequent findings."

This doctoral research focuses on the effects of visual, communication and information design in relation to social and cultural aspects of marginalized groups living in a multicultural society , by examining the iconicity and texts of public health campaigns directed toward women of two different cultural groups in the same urban context. The empirical research takes a contextual approach towards documentation and analysis of women's interpretive interactions with visual communication related to health literacy and self-knowledge, for example for breast cancer prevention and treatment. Special attention will be given to understanding unintended effects of social and cultural exclusion that may inadvertently result from such 'mainstream' information outreach when perceived by women from marginalized communities. Imagery and texts are polysemous. As McCoy writes: "Imagery is difficult to control, even dangerous or controversial—often leading to unintended personal interpretation on the part of the audience—but also poetic, powerful, and potentially eloquent" [10]. Bourdieu's writings on power, social silences and 'the logic of practice' offer theoretical starting points [3]. The interaction of visual communication, culture and society with an emphasis on design as a catalyst for change, sets the context in which this research will take place.
The doctoral research is in its early stage. Initial research questions are:

- How is visual language --both textual and iconic-- used in healthcare information?
- How does gender-inspired healthcare information that is meant to be universal take cultural sensitivities into consideration?
- Does visual language in the healthcare arena have unintentional alienation effects on some women to whom the information is addressed?

Culture *and* Language

Language does not equal culture. Designers need to be culturally aware to understand and respect the differences in ideas, traditions, behaviors, beliefs and lifestyles not only between one culture and another but from one region or one locality to another. "Simply translating a commercial, ignoring cultural relevance in a marketing message, or foregoing research with Hispanics may save time and money in the short term, but long-term competitive advantages comes from research that illuminates key cultural differences" [13]. Disregarding the codes of 'micro-cultures' for communication can exclude groups from the affordances needed to transform information into knowledge.

Language is not the only issue regarding design problems when interacting with other cultures. Images also play a pivotal role in making meaning of a message, when they succeed in situating the intended recipients in a familiar context. Nonetheless, designers cannot focus only on the word-image duopoly that has historically determined visual communications. Media used to deliver messages are part of the context and need to be selected based on understandings of cultural modes of communication. Rather than relying only on the printed word and multi-media broadcasting, delivering information through a variety of culturally attuned channels such as oral storytelling, theater, dance or marionettes, can result in meaningful messages. Designers and their design partners require a profound understanding of a cultural group as a prerequisite to selecting the appropriate words, images and communication media that a specific audience needs to transform information into knowledge.

Design

"Design is a discipline that has room for a depth and breadth of practice and education beyond what is acknowledged by most designers and by society at lar ge" [5]. From an inclusive design vantage point, designers need to support the creative process, adding value to the collaborative ef fort (see Miettinen 2009, in this volume [11]). Relinquishing control of the process may signify compromises at times but these may be necessary to establish reciprocal connections between designers and communities to understand what each other has to offer and translate information, images and other materials into meaningful communicative artifacts. "In this new environment of diffuse creativity, designers have to learn how actively and positively to participate in the social processes where new and, hopefully, promising ideas are emerging" [9; see Dib 2009, in this volume [4]].

"The age of sustainability will give designers a chance to spread their wings at last. No longer relegated to making products merely profitable and appealing, they'll be inspired to imagine the future" [15]. Unfortunately the skills needed for the challenges of sustainability are not commonly taught in design schools (see Bould 2009, in this volume [2]). Some designers have long fought for our field to become a more humane discipline, a field that is more connected to the necessities of mar ginalized communities and that looks to improve the quality of life of groups often for gotten. We stand with the opportunity to make a dif ference on our shoulders. The *First Things First 2000* manifesto ends with a bold sentence: "Consumerism is running uncontested; it must be challenged by other perspectives expressed, in part, through the visual languages and resources of design" [7]. People, places, products and processes transformed by social designers are solid evidence of dif ferent perspectives successfully challenging consumerism through design.

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