



DESIGN and SOCIAL Change

Egypt Context

Why this topic?

Since the 1970s* – idea that designers should contribute to social needs rather than contribute to the creation of ever-changing wants.

Working for social good vs working for consumer society

*Victor Papanek, Design for the Real World, 1972



Second reason:
design students choosing
social problems as topics
- education, health,
gender equality, but get
stuck.

Hope my talk contributes
to thinking about what
kind of design education
is appropriate for the
challenges of now.



Plan of talk

1. Scope of Social Design
2. Connect to Sustainable Design
3. Humanitarian design examples
4. Critique
5. Argument for importance of Theory
6. Argument to focus on causes not symptoms



Scope of Social Design

- User-centered design
- Humanitarian design
- Participatory design
- Co-design
- Social Design
- Social Change



Role of designer changes

- Design Teams
- Facilitator, educator
- Design Thinking
- Post-disciplinary design



Also, connects to Sustainable Design - some examples follow

Sustainable Design

Technology focus

Renewable energy

Solar (pv) street lights

Demand reduction?



Design for disassembly

Design product so it
can be taken apart

Repairable, recyclable
– longer lifespan, less
waste



Social Change Design

Product focus

‘One Laptop per Child’

Failure

- Culturally unacceptable in some places
- Overtaken by IT advances



Social Change Design

Product focus

Hippo Roller

Water carrier for villages

- Partial failure
- Cost
- Legitimized lack of infrastructure



Reasons for Failure

Appropriate Technology-
1970s bicycle powered
radio.

Problem: 'us' designing for
'them'

Poor people don't want poor
products!

Social equity –better
approach



Lack of awareness of social factors.

So, it's not about designing things – products.

Equity, social justice rather than designing for poor communities .

Social Change Design – needs to understand Social Theory



Theories of social structure, of social class and social change – e.g., causes of poverty, beyond the obvious – lack of employment opportunities, lack of education.



(Poverty as a social relation, not just a measure of material wealth. between giver and receiver sociologist, Georg Simmel).

Designers need to understand NGOs thinking

Charity model ('the poor will always be with us')
OR
Social justice model.



Need knowledge of **Theories of Change**

e.g., 'diffusion of innovation' how to identify influencers and influence the influencers.

Social Research Methods interview techniques, research protocols (getting permission, informed consent, etc)



Methods adapted from social science and anthropology are now used by design researchers e.g.,

- Participant Observation
- AEIOU
- Participatory Action Research



The AEIOU method of Structured Observations

Look for:

Activities

Environments

Interactions

Objects

Users

“What are they doing?”



TH301 Design Research Methods
Prof. Anne-Marie Willis







Shift focus – product to system

**Shift focus – product to system
From the poor to the wealthy!**





Designed spaces, designed wants



Designed spaces, designed wants



Too much
designed
stuff?



Difference
between needs
and wants (not
simple).
Designers create
wants.
Result? Too
much stuff.



Conclusion

Design and Social Change

Move the focus from poverty and informal areas to wealth and hyper-consumption.

Challenge: How to make modest lifestyles appealing and socially desirable?

Quality vs quantity

Slow down the through-put of consumer products

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Slow down the through-put of consumer products

References

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