



Resilience in a Convivial Society

Some Possible Innovations, Activities
and Opportunities for Design

Context

Introduction:

Much is changing in the world; our society, economy, attitude to ecology and our way of living is being redefined. In this, design will and must redefine itself to remain relevant and of value.

Here, will explore the values of resilience (Ward & Dixon 2007) and conviviality (Illich 1973) for designing in a society in transformation.

We will, furthermore, seek to determine the role of the Designer as Citizen (Margolin 2008) when working within the flow of our changing lived experience

Introduction:

We will explore the prospect of a more holistic attitude in the designer of empathy, humility and respect.

In manifesting these values and their related contexts we will draw upon analysis and reflection of recently completed “work in progress” design project case studies.

Finally, we will propose an outline of some elements of a new educational approach; the intention being to enable potential for growth and adaption for design activity within society in transformation.

Contextual Frames:

In discussing the values of resilience and conviviality as a foundation on which to build a new role for the designer as citizen it is of value to define the contextual frames by which such an activity may be enacted.

These frames being:

- The built and natural environment
- The experienced environment
- Designing in the flow of living

Contextual Frames – Short Definitions:

Resilience

Resilience is the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganise while undergoing change. In a resilient system, individual nodes – like people, companies, communities and even whole countries are able to draw on support and resources from elsewhere.

(Homer-Dixon 2006)

Resilience thinking is a new lens for looking at the natural world we are embedded in and the man made world we have imposed upon it.

(Ward 2007)

Contextual Frames – Short Definitions:

Conviviality

Illich uses the term conviviality to designate the opposite of industrial productivity. As such his intention was for it to mean autonomous and creative intercourse among persons and the intercourse of persons with their environment; and this in contrast with the conditioned response of persons to the demands made upon them by others and by a man made environment.

He considered conviviality to be an individual freedom realised in personal interdependence and, as such, an intrinsic ethical value.

(Illich 1973)

Contextual Frames – Short Definitions:

The Citizen Designer

In introducing the concept of the citizen designer Victor Margolin is seeing the designer as having three possible ways of using their competences in society:

- The first is by designing, that is making things, as producer
- The second is by articulating a critique of prevailing cultural conditions that elucidates the effect of design on society
- The third is by direct political engagement

(Margolin 2006)

Contextual Frames – Short Definitions:

The Built and Natural Environments

The built environment is that which we, as a society, have constructed solely for our own benefit and refers to the human-made surroundings that provide the setting for human activity. In essence the built environment may be identified as a man-made landscape.

The natural environment, on the other hand encompasses all living and non-living things occurring naturally on Earth or some region thereof.

(Modified from Wikipedia)

Contextual Frames – Short Definitions:

The Built and Natural Environments

It would seem to be reasonable here to argue that most current design practice involves designing within and for the built environment but that by doing so risks the potential of isolation of our biological selves from the natural environment.

We are undeniably a part of the biosphere and the biosphere is undeniably a part of us.

(Restakis 2010 / Eisenstein 2011)

Contextual Frames – Short Definitions:

The Experienced Environment

The experienced environment is that in which we lead our daily lives and it is one that is neither completely built nor completely natural.

It is one in which the experience of living within it is continuously evolving and flowing where experiences may be consistently improvised and ad-hoc.

So, in this construct, we may design in the experience being experienced rather than fit an event around a set of things that have been separately designed and imposed.

Contextual Frames – Short Definitions:

Designing in the Flow of Living

it would seem natural to accept that the experience environment and the flow of living our lives is a natural context in which we may wish to consider designing.

In embracing this we may be more able to situate the designer, design and designing in a more meaningful context for our changing environment: ecologically, socially and economically.

Contextual Frames – Short Definitions:

Designing in the Flow of Living

From this we may be able to better understand that our actions could have better purpose and place - functionally, emotionally and spiritually.

In this contextual frame we could, thereby, through design consider the experiences we live with and by, not as fixed consumables but more as enablers of the lived experience within a meaningful flow of living.

Illustrative Projects, Workshops and Speculations

Designing Environments for Life



Designing Environments for Life

Introduction: Between September and December 2009 we enacted a programme of four workshops on the theme of designing environments for life at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Glasgow. The programme involved some 52 participants.

Outline: Art and design, anthropology and architecture are among a range of disciplines that aim to understand how people perceive and shape the world around them.

Aim: To establish the scope, relevance and potential applicability of research formed through a convergence of approaches ranging from archaeology to engineering and including government, the public sector, business, industry and environmental organisations.

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Designing Environments for Life

Value: The principal value of the programme lay in the opportunities it created for developing academic constructs among the participants, many of whom discovered new common interests.

There were some 41 potential outputs generated by the workshops.

These outputs were diverse and encompassed; public lectures, public exhibitions, academic papers, artworks, direct input into education and teaching, re-orientating research and influencing community and practice projects.

Designing Environments for Life

Affordance: What these workshops and the resulting collaborations has afforded is both a consolidation and broadening of the idea of designing for resilience in a convivial society and the development of the citizen designer in concert with a broad international academic community situated between theory and action.

Designing Environments for Life

To aid moving from the theoretical (intangible) to the practical (tangible) a guiding manifesto was constructed as a context by which design activities moving towards the functionally useful could be visualised.

Designing Environments for Life

Manifesto:

- Environments are inherently variable. Design should enhance the flexibility of inhabitants to respond to these variations with foresight and imagination
- The impulse of life is to keep on going. Design unfolds within constantly transforming life conditions and should open up pathways for creative improvisation
- There is always a tension between hopes and dreams for the future and the material constraints of the present. Design should invite people from all walks of life to join in active engagement around this tension

IAS Workshops, 2009

Designing Environments for Life

Speculation: From this we may begin to draw some characteristics for designers wishing to become citizen designers working in a resilient and convivial society:

Designing Environments for Life

- A highly developed antennae for the changes in our economy, technology and society
- A willingness to challenge and transform outdated traditional design roles
- An ability to generate a rich field of opportunities for the development of design within our changing society
- A strong belief in and skills for working across disciplines
- A desire and ability to use design in a more holistic and co-participative framework
- Long-term ambitions for world wide economic and social transformation and improvement

Transition Town & Low Carbon Living



Transition Town & Low Carbon Living

Introduction: In 2008 we ran a short pilot project in Totnes, in conjunction with Plymouth University, Les Ateliers Paris and HDK Göteborg to explore how we might transform design to work better with communities in transition.

Transforming the Future, Totnes, Devon 2008

From this grew the Low Carbon Living project in 2009. With this project we set out to understand how we may both creatively engage with and take action in the issue of peak oil and energy descent, both as designers and as citizens.

Low-Carbon-Living, GSA, Glasgow, 2009

Transition Town & Low Carbon Living

Aims:

- To understand, explore and visualise social, cultural and design opportunities that will arise in the shift to a post-fossil fuel society
- Bring an awareness to our country and community about how design and designers may act in a transition towards a post fossil fuel society

Transition Town & Low Carbon Living

Objectives:

- To research, form and communicate a perspective on what the post-fossil fuel society may look like in transition to 2029
- To identify opportunities for new social, cultural, technological, economic and design opportunities in the transition to a post-fossil fuel society

Transition Town & Low Carbon Living

Objectives:

- To create outline scenarios visualising potential organisational and/or individual activities within these opportunities
- To develop tools by which to do so that work with an audience not from a design background

Transition Town & Low Carbon Living

Value: What the projects did was to open up the issues and give some perspectives on how it may be possible to build a body of knowledge, map it and draw out opportunities to design from. In essence it produced:

- An understanding of how we may begin to act as Citizen Designers
- A philosophical construct of how we may go about such issues as designers from both an educational and practice based perspective
- The ability to discover, map and tag complex information and visually communicate this to a broad audience

Transition Town & Low Carbon Living

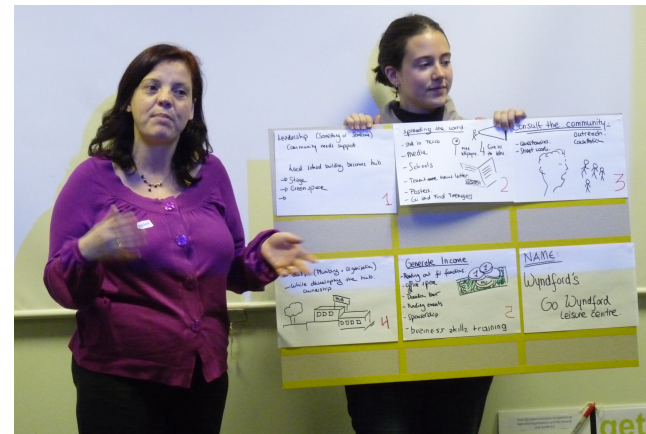
- Construct tools which allow issues and problems to be framed simply and then used in conjunction with tagged information to draw down interconnections and potential design activity
- A methodology of constructing short storyboards to visualise the opportunity for the benefit of the person(s) engaging with the design activity

Transition Town & Low Carbon Living

Affordance: The project explored the potential of an open ended way of working in the flow of our changing environment

It created the beginnings of how design may be of value in a transforming society living resiliently and convivially and opens the potential role for the citizen designer.

Get Go Glasgow & The Audi Design Foundation



Get Go Glasgow & The Audi Design Foundation

Introduction: In 2010, Masters students from the Glasgow School of Art won The Audi Design Foundation Competition, Sustain our Nation for the design of a community based social enterprise

The Project: The students identified that, in order to create something truly sustainable, the community had to be a fundamental part of the process and that they would have to be trusted in the community.

Having identified the Wyndford in The North of Glasgow as a suitable community to work with they then developed, with identified community champions, a robust co-design process to progress the project.

Get Go Glasgow & The Audi Design Foundation

Value: In this project much has been learnt about the role of the designer in developing social enterprise and not least that:

- Community champions are essential
- Trust is imperative
- Consistent engagement over the long term must become the norm
- Presumption and assumption have no place in the citizen designers vocabulary
- Empathy, humility and respect are traits to be cherished when working with people in their own communities

Get Go Glasgow & The Audi Design Foundation

Affordance: It is expected that this evolving model of social design will have significant potential for growth and adaption in designing for resilience in a convivial society, has special value in designing for transformation in our changing society and further opens new roles for the citizen designer.

Refection

These projects have value in evolving the idea of how one might create citizen designers able to work in resilient and convivial societies.

They are by no means perfect but one could propose that that is also the nature of living in the flow of life.

You live; you learn.

it may be said that these activities have extended current best practice in their approach and their usefulness to those that will use them.

I would suggest that we would not have achieved these results had we followed traditional design methodology

The experienced environment in which we undoubtedly live and these types of design activities are not fixed; it is in flow and it is in that very flow that design activity can and should be most useful.

Further reflection and Development

There is a sense in these projects that we maybe designing designers out and that would be inevitable if design were not to further revalue itself.

Two losses that come to mind are the designers individual point of view and intuition. Both are of value when thinking of this way of working and both need transforming to move design and designing from an exclusive activity to an inclusive one.

To explore this we are now running projects where we are embedding students, over time, in social enterprises and exploring how their engagement affords this

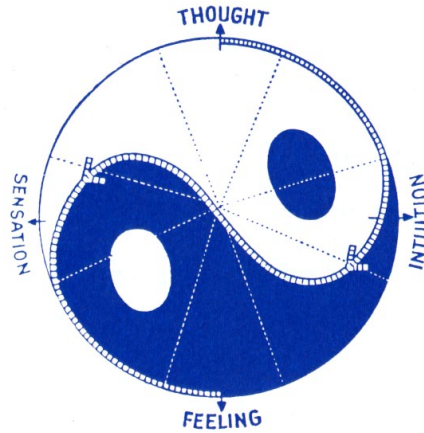
A further issue is a sense that we are still designing too closely to the context we are trying to transform and that we may fall short of our goal

In response to this we have started a Master Degree in Design and Citizenship as a permissive space in which we are better able to explore the future issues facing a society in transformation

The Dictatorship of Sustainment (Fry, 2009)

Ecology	Nature
Economy	Community
Society	Resilience
	Carrying Capacity

Thus we have hope for design, designers and designing acting for the greater good and with demonstrable value within a convivial and resilient society in transformation.



Ian Grout

Subject Leader
Mdes Design & Citizenship
GSA Scotland

0044 141 353 4716
0044 790 063 0275
i.grout@gsa.ac.uk