

Visions of Possible Worlds

Scenarios and proposals for sustainability. A new social role for designers and design schools.

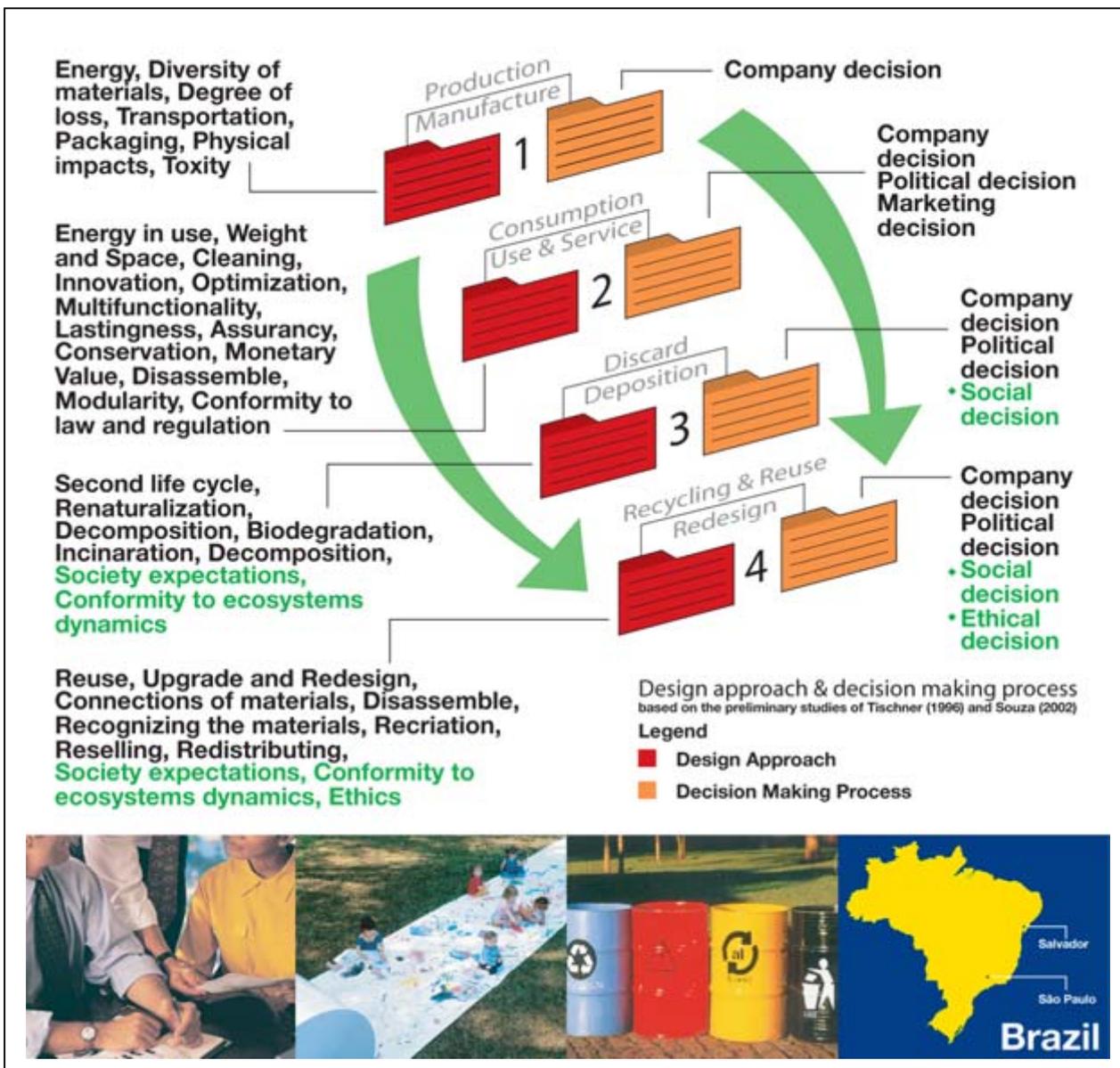
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Changing Design Education in Brazil

Sustainable Design and Social Responsibility: towards ethical and social decisions within the design process

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Summary of the Vision

Design education plays an important role in changing the subject from a technology oriented growth to a humane oriented development, helping the design students to take into account some ecological and cultural principles when performing products and services. Sustainable design and social responsibility work together towards effective positive design solutions and have to be integrated within the education of a designer.

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The main concerns of designers within the design phases, i.e. production, consumption, discard and recycling, have to incorporate ethical practices towards sustainability. The decisions migrate from isolated design team/company decisions to participatory decisions, culminating into ethical decisions, i.e. social responsibility, considering the whole life cycle of matters, society expectations, ecosystems dynamics and ethics overall.

1. Vision Presentation

This research is part of the doctorate program in the field Design and Architecture at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism of University of São Paulo, in Brazil, developed by Prof. Paulo Souza, advised by Prof. Dr. Cecília Loschiavo, sponsored by CAPES/PQI. The role and importance of industrial design in planning the material world is analyzed, facing problems related to the development of societies, particularly in economical, environmental and cultural perspectives. The concepts of sustainability and social responsibility are discussed as a priority within the design process, creating strategies of “achieving our needs without compromising the ability for future generations to achieve their own needs” according to the World Commission on Development and Environment. In this sense, Design Education should expose students to sustainable practices from the very beginning of the learning process, shown as actions strongly focused on reducing, recycling and reusing, considering the whole life cycle of matters and energy in all phases of design.

The activity of industrial design can be understood as a set of decisions aimed to solve specific requirements of a product and/or service, i.e. process (Rose, 2000). Moreover, design helps people doing things better and safer throughout some methods of planning in order to improve the quality of use (i.e. usability) of a product or even a complex system. In this sense, design represents an important interface between industry and consumer, technique and environment, culture and product or service. Consequently, the work of designers influences the whole life cycle of matters and energy, the manufacture process itself and, overall, the way people live and have satisfaction.

According to Souza (2003), the praxis of Industrial Design has traditionally been oriented to performance better products, low cost series, efficiency of production and high profits overall. These proceedings strongly mean producing “mass” and managing the environment and society needs from the isolated perspective of the technology. Nowadays, the need for attending some social and environmental principles during the design phases is rarely taken into account when designing products and services. This implies that design methodologies, particularly in Design education, have to be changed urgently in order to achieve both society needs and preservation of nature. In this terms, the sustainability discourse calls for a dynamic balance between use and preservation of natural resources. Sustainability requires from designers the permanent objective of simplifying the production line and assuming environmental and social demands when planning products and services.

2. Motivation of the Vision

From the sustainable development perspective it is imperative that the design process focus on minimizing the negative effects of the industrial production on nature and human society. Moreover, the decision making process has to increasingly consider the society expectations, according to ecosystems dynamics and ethical principles overall. As shown at the attached Poster, based on the preliminary studies of Tischner (1996) and Souza (2002), the design approach and decision making process should move from isolated company decisions to social and ethical decisions, i.e. participatory decisions. Besides, the main concerns of designers within the design phases, i.e. production, consumption, discard and recycling, have to incorporate ethical practices towards sustainability.

In this sense, Design education plays an important role in changing the subject from a technology oriented growth to a humane oriented development, helping the design students to take into account

some ecological and cultural principles when performing products and services. Sustainable design and social responsibility work together towards effective positive design solutions and have to be placed within the education of a designer.

This can be seen as an extreme difficulty in implementing sustainable practices. The perspective of sustainability imposes new concepts of development, new social behavior and new cultural paradigms. The more we focus on immediate results and traditional methods within design schools the less we can achieve sustainability. In this way, we propose conscience from design students providing opportunities to first understanding community values and principles then interacting with their needs, developing design concepts oriented to solve specific problems.

3. Methodology

According to Manzini and Vezzoli (2002), the concept of Design for Sustainability (DFS) is strongly related to the capacity of promoting production systems that can respond to some social and environmental requirements in their products using as less natural resources as possible, in comparison to the current patterns. The DFS is aimed to offer efficiency to the design process, focusing on reduction of materials, choosing the right and eco-friendly source of energy, optimizing and giving more lastingness capacity for products and especially designing disassemble facilities from the very beginning of the project.

This method also considers the life cycle of matters and its impacts on human and natural systems, assuming that new behavior patterns are taking place over the market in a point that consumers demand producers with much more conformity with “environmentally sustainable, socially acceptable and culturally attractive ideas”.

On the other hand, the concept of Social Responsibility (SR) came into scene as guideline to companies to follow in order to achieve competitiveness and also attend to some social demands (e.g. quality of life, respect for the environment). According to The Ethos Institute (2000), in Brazil, the SR is a way of performing business activities together with contributing to the development of society. In this perspective, based on the preliminary studies of Mendonça (2003), a responsible company has to plan and perform some essential dimensions of responsibility, as follows: 1) transparent strategies; 2) internal market as a permanent goal; 3) respect for the environment; 4) attending consumers needs; 5) respect for community expectations; and 6) respecting law, regulation, society and government principles.

Firstly, the perspective of transparent strategies reflects the company efforts in terms of a socially responsible planning. This means discussing the goals of business, evaluating the results of management and reporting clearly the company decisions, according to society expectations. Secondly, the employees, i.e. internal market, have to be seen as an essential part of the business itself. In this perspective, the well-being as a permanent goal is placed as integral part of company values.

Thirdly, but not less important, the environmental impacts of production are increasingly dropped down and revised in order to achieve zero or as minimal as possible, requiring extra efforts from the design team. Besides, the consumer needs, of course, plays an important role within the manufacturing system, focused on innovation and offering high quality of services and products.

Other point of a socially responsible strategy is given to the relationship between company and community, evaluating the impacts of these actions on the quality of lives and cultural values overall. Finally, the respect for law and regulation as well as society principles have to be integrated to the management system itself.

In this sense, the company must plan its goals respecting the interests of profits and at the same time listening to and understanding the society needs. Within the global scenario, and particularly in Brazilian contexts, facing the social characteristic of Brazil, the market has been pushed to attend some popular demands more efficiently (e.g. housing furniture, alternative transportation, low cost products). In this perspective, the design works as a sensitive radar in order to offer adequate methods of responding the society needs. This strongly means rethinking the Design education in Brazil.

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