DESIGN FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

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Designers create products and experiences for the human dimension... Embedded in this process of design, is the objective to better our lives, and in doing so, better humanity. When we apply solutions toward social change, we incorporate this objective. The visual vocabulary of design creates a pathway to discussion, one that strengthens social relations. As Industrial designers, we use the newest technologies and resources available to open this doorway to dialogue.

When we think of social change, we think of activism and how it applies to the dynamics of communities, both locally and globally... We think of terms like involvement, education, participation, opportunity, and empowerment. We also think about how these objectives can be achieved, funded, and implemented. This course of thinking has sparked a new consciousness, especially within corporations, to think about how their products and services can apply to more green materials, recycling, repurposing and sustainability. And it's this paradigm of thought that has sparked corporations to reciprocate with sponsorships for educational programs and funding for explorative ideation and development. This is validation of a new activism.

Equally important, are the designers, who develop the 'mechanics of solution' behind these movements... They use their skills to identify the need, determine barriers and behaviors then develop solutions thru explorative ideation, product prototyping, and real-time study. Within the discussion of social change, designers apply these disciplines to social problems, such as the need for clean water, sanitation, or lighting. An excellent example of how designers work in step with corporate funding, is the ['Easy Latrine' project]. Industrial designer Jeff Chapin of IDEO, under development from *International Development Enterprise (IDE)*, and sponsorship from *USAID* and the *World Bank Water and Sanitation Program (WSP)*, developed a low cost sanitation system for rural Cambodians where 84% of the populous have no toilets or sanitation. With each latrine unit being locally sourced and installed by villagers, it is a perfect example of social change, through community involvement and empowerment. Another example of

'social design' is the ['Liter of Light' initiative]. This program was developed by design students from *Massachusetts Institute of technology (MIT)* to find a way to offer free light to people living in the poorest areas of Manila. By using (PET) recycled plastic bottles and other repurposed materials, a single fixture refracts light into a room with the equivalent of a 55watt bulb, and emits an environment friendly zero carbon units. Under the consultancy of the *MYShelter Foundation*, this program created an entrepreneur business model to employ local residents, while providing an ecologically and economically sustainable source of light without electricity. There are currently more than 26 countries now involved with this program. Yet one more example of 'design for social change', is the [Hippo Roller]. This water transport device, developed by Emily Pilloton founder of Project H Design, can hold 90 liters (24 gallons) of water, and gives access to rural Africans that do not have clean local water. Not only does it empower local companies such as *Imvubo Projects* to manufacture and distribute the product, but the program also educates the communities about hygiene, irrigation, and water purification. These initiatives are at the core of social change and serve as a catalyst for community improvement.

Design, in the context of social change, evolves to accommodate changing needs and new technologies... Even though a society in generational flux dictates exploration, it is technology, which drives product evolution. A valid example of this viewpoint is the success of the Apple iPod. As senior VP of Industrial design for Apple, Jonathan Ive was the lead designer for the iPod, along with the iMac, iPhone and the iPad. He reinvented the direction of human communication, by interfacing these products seamlessly across a multimedia platform. Intuitively, Apple realized that the rapid rise in social interest of cell phones with media players was a primary reason for development of the iPhone. But this type of developmental thinking couldn't have been possible without the advancements of media technology. Whether it was the worlds first portable transistor radio developed by Texas Instruments in 1954, or the first portable cassette player 'Sony Walkman' developed by Sony in 1978 (or its immediate predecessor the CD playing 'Sony Discman' in 1982), or even Samsung's 2001 launch of the worlds first cellphone to have MP3 digital audio capabilities, industrial designers have always been limited to, and linked with, the applied sciences of the time. This symbiosis drives design evolution. and is so relevant to limitations associated with social change.

At the core of social change, is the ability to implement and fund initiatives, and bring awareness to a global stage… Corporate involvement and sponsorship is always necessary to drive support, and increase public participation. Programs such as Nike's '*Reuse-A-Shoe' for example,* has teamed up with eco-groups dedicated to bringing environmental awareness to their local communities. By holding this shoe recycling drive, Nike has collected over 28 million shoes globally. When ground up and recycled, the rubber is used for running tracks, playground surfaces, and gym flooring. Likewise, Coca-Cola has collaborated with musicians to create a brand initiative with the launch of '*Ekocycle'*, a

program dedicated to encouraging recycling behavior among consumers, and inspire sustainability through recycled lifestyle products. These types of initiatives are aimed towards consumer participation, and are effective in enlisting a new generation of 'design activists'. With positive response, this type of corporate involvement has lead to laws that require enforced recycling of content in certain manufacturing processes.

Opportunities for social change can be found in communicative environments such as exhibits, museums, expo pavilions, and architecture… The Modern Museum of Art (MoMA) recently presented the exhibition 'Small Scale, Big Change' which featured architectural projects in underserved communities from five continents. The exhibit educated participants of the social responsibilities of architecture and ecological stewardship. It also featured an internet-based network where community leaders, architects, and organizations could share information and experiences in joined forum. This exhibition is about education. The most recent World Expo in Shanghai China is another example. With 250 countries and international organizations participating, it advocated future focus on environmental sustainability, efficiency, and diversity. The Expo was themed *"Better City- Better Life",* and introduced urban best practices, as a lasting legacy for better urban life in China and around the world. The five central theme pavilions *[Urban Footprints, Urban Planet, Urbanian, City Being, and Urban Future],* explored aspects of urban development. Over 73 million people visited the Expo during the 184-day event, with corporate participation of Coca-Cola and Cisco Systems. This was a true educational experience, and wisely used environmental design to promote a global topic.

The ultimate goal of Social Change is to better the world through human development... Investors and entrepreneurs are now seeing the importance of participating and funding social initiatives. The strategic value of design proves priceless in bringing about that change. Involvement of organizations such as IDSA, encourage educational opportunities for students with outreach programs, and lead the way forward in starting a new paradigm of discussion through design. Empower, educate, visualize and ideate, activate, encourage, involve and participate, create awareness… create change.

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