Design Values Out of the Mainstream: New Geographies of Influence

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Abstract
This essay introduces the topics addressed by Track 4 and explores decoloniality's impact on design studies in developing countries. It addresses Eurocentric dominance in design, the post-WWII shift of design practices to developing nations, and the emergence of the "Design for Development" movement. Case studies highlight design's role in transforming crafts, integrating cultures, and utilizing local materials for sustainability. The essay underscores design thinking's potential for national knowledge economies. It advocates breaking free from Western design hegemony, embracing diverse perspectives, and promoting design as culture.

Keywords
Endemic design
Global South
Crafts
Hybridization
Transition

Introduction

'Decoloniality' has increasingly been of attention and in-depth studies across broader fields of knowledge and practices. Traditionally, design studies are dominated "by a focus on Anglocentric/Eurocentric ways of seeing, knowing, and acting in the world, with little attention being paid to alternative and marginalised discourses from the non-Anglo-European sphere, or the nature and consequences of design-as-politics today." (Abdulla et al. 2019, p. 130). Innovation and creativity are crucial as socio-cultural and economic practices demonstrated their historical transformation from the Eurocentric world into the 'others,' addressing the developing nations since the end of WWII. This transformation is political, it reflected commitments from the Eurocentric powers to fulfilling the basic human needs in the 'underdeveloped' world, as identified at that time. Considering needs as to "providing people with a basic set of commodities... once the basic needs were met, people could thrive. Unfortunately, this was not the case." (Leitão, 2022, p. 5) Also, needs in this historical context continue dominating through many aid programmes presented by national and international organisations that target vulnerable social groups, these are suffering from hunger, diseases, etc., across the developing world. Reviewing the transformation of the modern design context from the Eurocentric into the developing world is the aim of this part of this essay, it will discuss specific socio-political contexts in this transformation to enhance our understanding of the scope and dimensions and to support our discussion concerning presented papers in this track.

European colonising nations and the USA offered assistance to the 'underdeveloped' world shortly after WWII ended. This aid focused on transforming modern production technology from the West to the East to enhance efforts to improve the socio-economic and their reflection on the living conditions in these countries. The United States led this movement through an assistance aid program President Harry S Truman presented in his inaugural speech on the 20th of January 1949: '... we must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas' (Escobar, 1995, p. 36). The rhetoric of modernisation and development has been extensively promoted by the newly independent Asian, African, and Latin American nations leaded by socialist political discourse utilised development principles to achieve modernisation, which was defined by Mignolo (2011) as "a want to have a comfortable, middle-class existence with all the amenities and attributes that go along with it—clean water, indoor plumbing, electricity, telecommunications, infrastructure, personal safety, rule of law, stable politics and a good education system." (Mignolo, 2011, p. 52) In this political context, design discourses were promoted in association with their social context, "beginning with the arts and crafts movement in Britain in the 19th century... social engagement was a main driver of design theory from the time of the emergence of the profession of designer in the context of industrialization" (Dorrestijn, 2013, p. 47), and utilised as essential creative practices serving industrial manufacturing production. Furthermore, this

aligned with previous local and international attempts seen in design theory, design education, and professional design practices during the 1960s–70s that stimulated design discourses' core function in social and economic growth through industrialisation (Kulick, 2017) (Papanek, 2018).

Debates concerning the modern role of design practices have continued in the political rhetoric in developing countries since the 1970s, responding to the expanding demands for materialisation and its signifying characteristics in the empowerment of social groups. According to Bonsiepe (2006) "the excluded, the discriminated, and economically less favoured groups as they are called in economist jargon... [amount] to the majority of the population of this planet." (Bonsiepe 2006, p. 30) This is applicable to the scale and types of technological knowledge transforming developing countries, supporting the need for design practices to engage and effectively utilise these new technologies. However, new technologies are divided into hardware and software; that is, "technology implies hardware and software—and software implies the notion of design as a facet of technology that cannot be dispensed with" (Bonsiepe, 2006, p. 32). This definition supports the role of design in industrialisation, as well as its role in socio-political capacities to create a path toward the democratisation of society and to "provide for a broad sector of the population to have access to the world of products and services in the different areas of everyday life: health, housing, education, sports, transport, work, to mention only a few" (Bonsiepe, 2006, p. 32).

Responding to late 1970s political debate, the 'Design for Development' movement was introduced politically when the 'Ahmadabad Declaration' was issued in India in 1979. The declaration resulted from joint efforts between the United Nation Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID), and the Indian National Institute of Design (NID). The document explicitly proposed the design engagement with development as the right way to approach design in developing countries. Additionally, the document marked the "first time that industrial design had been suggested as worthy of inclusion in national development plans" (Coward, 2005, p. 545). The declaration's major principles presented (1) Design is "a powerful force capable of improving the quality of life of developing countries' populations. (2) Designers should understand and recognise the values of their societies and reflect them in their designs. (3) Designers should utilise both local, traditional resources and modern science and technology. (4) Designers should collaborate with one another to ensure that collective identities are preserved and the priorities of these collective identities are met" (Ahmedabad Declaration, 1979).

India was characterised as one of the 'non-aligned' movement's founders and leadership countries, as was Indonesia and Egypt at that time, which influenced ideologically and politically the establishment of the 'Ahmedabad Declaration.' As Margolin (2006) argued, "It was in the spirit of an aggressive call by the developing countries to restructure the world economy that the Ahmedabad conference was held and the declaration was produced" (Margolin, 2006). However,

the 'Ahmedabad Declaration' continues to maintain its position as the only official document at the international level that articulates the strategic role of design discourse and practices in supporting the development of developing countries. Additionally, the document articulates the spirit of modernity in the political context by shifting design from its local and traditional context toward enhancements in the modern context. Ahmedabad Declaration principles have been implemented through design education and professional design practices in many developing countries since its establishment, specifically in the discipline of industrial design. In fact, it was the force factor to support industrialisation as a socio-economic sector, which got further attention during the 1980s in many of these countries. As Parsons (2016) writes:

> "What the Modernists sought, therefore, was not to turn design into 'fine art' or tradition-based craft, but to blend the best elements of traditional craftsmanship, modern mass production and fine art into a new way of producing material goods that made sense in the social context of contemporary life" (Parsons, 2016, p. 46).

While the nature of interdisciplinary knowledge and practice that culminated in the design process in terms of innovation, visualisation, production, promotion, and marketing was enforced. These practices identified design as a micro-element within industrialisation and production processes, "design is a prefigurative practice of applied imagination that goes ahead of bringing 'a something' into being." (Fry, 2020, p. 42) Also, the nature of design practices overwhelmingly shows that design plays a macro role in efforts to achieve human development goals, especially in developing countries. Such arguments support the value many governments placed on addressing and elevating design as a strategic factor in their development planning. New waves of policies—the 'design policy' or 'design and innovation policy'—utilised design discourse as a core for strategies toward implementing and promoting the country. Additionally, the power of design has been identified in relation to national economic growth. Accordingly, further new waves of design policies have been issued in countries such as Estonia, India, New Zealand, South Africa, and many more.

Case studies over the mainstream

With this background of a decade-long gaining consideration of design as a strategic factor in their development, design discourses in developing countries reached out to different applications and analyses of valuable improvement of utility in most fields of life. The papers of this track are trying to put light on some of the case studies that try to emerge the role of design in this long-term change of craftsmanship and popular culture up to game-changing performances for entire governments, while cultural affordance towards embedded local values matches the single identities.

Hoda Aman works out the difficulties of transformation and related risks of deviating the aim of craft into "its transformation into an ornamental commodity that failed to fulfil its functional requirements" by then continuing that "the craft is produced from a touristic perspective, to serve the elite, not the public, separating it from the local community and losing its cultural specificity", asking herself of what kind of final destiny the craft will eventually have. By describing different case studies of design in creative industries in Egypt, she concludes that the results all differ, "But all of them agreed that the political conditions, the general orientation, the competitive economic climate and the infrastructure provided by the state, greatly affect the growth of the experiment or stop it". This political dimension of design as a tool for economic growth, however, often can be used as an excuse for low initiative by local craft clusters, pushing away the unsuccess of their actions, arguing that the government is not providing support, because of low tourism, no organised sales channels like markets and so on. Another problem pointed out is industrialisation and mass production, which makes craft products a niche product with low-quality control, which furthermore results in more expensive as long it takes longer time to realise the items. None the less, as a political tool remains, the importance of "employing a lot of workers in villages and small cities, as well as there are many initiatives interested in activating the role of women in society because there are many crafts that these women from the local community work in".

Exactly this point becomes an important element in "Culture-based Innovation: A Localized Approach for Designing". Crafts in many developing countries are a widespread micro-economy that is not only interesting for tourism in search of eye-catching ethnical gadgets. For Alaa Elanssary and Ahmed Wahby, "handicrafts (...) offer a quick and short monetary cycle, and most of all it is a reflection of the local culture and identity." For this reason, "globally, cultural inspired designs can easily be trendy and fashionable." With this approach, the task falls back to the designer primarily, as long as supposing a craftsman will not have the ability to deal with global trends. "Designers need to expand their experiences not only with cross-cultural factors but equally important is the knowledge of local elements", facing the dilemma of "inexperience of most designers with cultural integration, and the difficulty of designing for many cultures at once."
        By giving the craftsmen the title of heroes, "as they are the designers and marketers at the same time", they arrive to conclude of the need for Design Marketing as a tool to promote in the market, as the sole craftsman is not able to run all on his own. An essential finding in their analysis is that besides the deep cultural knowledge by the designer to innovate sensitively in the given context, "the innovated products encompass not only the form, but also the function whether traditional, added, or introduced. Furthermore, the production material and techniques should be given prominent care."

With this last finding in mind, the maxim "form follows function" in the context of developing countries and the use of crafts-knowledge could transform into "form follows material". But looking deeper, we can look at the proposal "Design Resistance. Material Solutions for local remoteness", understanding the importance of local materials as a core element in the definition of artefacts, with its functional-environmental relation to local climatic conditions as well as its availability for authentic sustainability. Martina Taranto, Barbara Pollini and Valentina Rognoli address in their paper "Decentralised areas by analysing the project called Viral Nature, a material research and design of a composite material able to host vegetal life and attract biodiversity, (...) formulated as a potential design intervention against soil degradation and desertification." The approach is going further into the study of available resources of developing areas as an opportunity for innovation of a different kind: acting as unexplored local resources, design can bring innovation beyond cultural approaches, yet "practice of material design might need to rely on indigenous narratives and tangible solutions of Lo-Tek design that mould the design exercise into endemic design responses." Accordingly, the local narratives are the trigger of the use of new materials, because "isolation, social and physical remoteness, the decentralisation of creative forces have steered the direction of the design discourses and its urgencies, which now proceed towards ecologically and eco-systemically driven narratives". So to say, citing Carl Magnusson,[1] "good design is not about form following function. It functions with cultural content. By adding "cultural content" to the concept of "form follows function," objects cease to be finite or predictable." Meaning that cultural content at the very end is a narration.

Being able to use local resources to generate raw materials which are useful for production becomes more and more an important challenge to fight marginalisation of isolated places. Due to geopolitical reasons and crisis of any kind, the lack of raw materials leads immediately to deeper disasters: "Nowadays, the leading causes of rural marginalisation have not only to be ascribed to geography but to the "lack of access to resources [...] resulting from a lack of socioeconomic and political connections ('connectivity') and, hence, of relational 'remoteness'". Annalinda De Rosa and Davide Fassi in their contribution "Culture and creativity as assets for inclusive growth in small and remote places: a design-led process" go further in this path of thoughts, introducing the action-research project called *SMOTIES - Creative works with small and remote places*; it

> "aims at identifying and activating possible trajectories for a local evolutionary pathway, leveraging existing minority excellence niches. (...) The cultural and creative sectors not only offer social benefits (such as improved well-being and community cohesion) and economic benefits (through local taxation, job creation, innovation, and supply chains), but they also contribute to place-making by making cities and regions more desirable places to live and work, thereby promoting inward investment, inward labour flows, higher productivity, and increased tourism."

In this way, the design process passes from intervening with local craft culture to an overlooking system of opportunity creation for entire communities. Not necessarily related to poor countries, the approach opens up to "another kind of global south", the one which relates generally to under-developed areas. The project "will significantly improve the capacities of remote places to become part of a transnational network thanks to newly created synergies while being firmly embedded in the local context and establishing an innovative view of the local creative industry and endemic design strategies."

Yağmur Gizem Avcı, Ece Cinar and Çiğdem Kaya explore practically this approach in south-eastern Turkey. The paper "aims to use traditional knowledge as a source for sustainable development and a sustainable way of living by examining, empowering, and promoting local and traditional values through social innovation approach and design expertise. The main motivation of the study is to construct an intended link between traditional knowledge and a sustainable future for societies." Based on the principles of participatory design, an in-depth analysis of the current situation of local craft production, they can define that "there is an unknown and uncontrollable relationship between women producers and suppliers of additional resources. This situation creates an unknown background for products. To prevent this, to evaluate and associate local resources and labor in a more controlled way, the second proposal framed as a 'new ecosystem for symbiotic production process' to empower and transform the local sources into a networked community." It ends up creating new communities and, eventually, cooperatives that are able to optimise knowledge with resource networking in local contexts.

Halim Choueiry proposes this kind of design intervention on the level of the entire government, introducing the methodological approach of Design Thinking in Bahrain, a small but oil-rich Kingdom in the Golf Region. Design Thinking "was at first described as a collaborative process, and later, as a human-centred approach to innovation," and the author explores the "possibilities of using Design Thinking as the main tool to establish an infrastructure towards a national knowledge economy." As a forecast of the new economy, sustainability and understanding that welfare based only on petrol has a predictable end, the government declares to shift "to a productive, globally competitive economy, driven by a pioneering private sector, embracing the principles of sustainability, competitiveness, and fairness." This example could demonstrate that for geographies out of the Anglo-European sphere, as introduced at the beginning of this contribution, the main goals of the Ahmedabad Declaration of 1979 are also applicable in an extended context not related to economic inferiority but to a static situation where society as a whole did not develop further than a status quo through decades. Design proves to be a driver for mainly social, cultural and sustainable innovation.

With its capacity for self-reflection and multidisciplinary approach with no preliminary borders, "design is among the contemporary disciplines that are most deeply identified with the twentieth century. While recognising the need to constantly redefine its field of action and boundaries, its mandate, and its cultural, social, and political

responsibility, design seems to be the engine of the current world in which we are living, reflecting itself in the changes and deep upheavals have taken place over the century." Fabiana Marotta, in her "Burning approaches to tensing the present: a new political dimension of design", emphasises the all-disciplines-embracing character of design as a tool of the XXI century. Still, the question remains: "Is it still possible for design to glimpse collective narratives that take on a critical value and stand as an extraordinary opportunity for the re-signification of the world and the small things with which man is related?" Especially referring to the Global South, design needs to overcome the mindset of a colonised geography, that is still marked in its stigmas of "racial and sexual system of social classification, a binary epistemology that opposes high and low, spirit and body, head and feet, rationalisation and emotion, theory and practice".

Another approach of looking at marginalized design policies could be the interpretation of the contribution of "Cultural Factories: Conversion of Industrial Areas into Cultural Hub" by Bruno et altri. Starting with the idea that "abandoned industrial centers, for which redevelopment, restructuring and functional adaptation are urgently needed, can offer the development of engaging services focused on the territory's characteristics", the design task is needed to focus on territorial specifities and local community needs, and cannot "just" go over very delicate eco-systems with a global design receipt. Thus, "cultural services are the fil rouge linking the whole research through different geographical locations, material cultures and manufacturing production" and analysis of international case studies however underline the capacity of design to respond on specific local characteristics that will make success to abandoned and decentralized industrial areas.

What is happening in an Industrial Design context in a technology follower company – which is necessarily the case in most of the geographical areas out of the economic and R&D strong regions – explores the contribution of Tuncer Manzakoğlu: technology research is unfortunately limited to choosing the core components from global suppliers to set up the best configuration. Nevertheless, following renown models of design methodology and adapting them to the specific context, it leads in best case to gain competitiveness through design leadership achieving a strategic level of design management.

To conclude the proposals of papers that tackle the complex topic of the political role of design to contribute strongly to the development of strategies for geographical areas out of the Anglocentric/Eurocentric focus, the proposal of Paula Visonà, Mágda Rodrigues da Cunha and César Kieling arrive to state that the Global South eventually "came to be seen and recognized as a space for the generation of independent/authorial products, contributing to the recognition of cities outside the creative Eurocentric axis." It should be understood by itself that design practice will contribute on the one side and be influenced on the other side by its own role of mediator between global trends and visions and local answers to specific community needs, sometimes speculative-radical, sometimes traditional-functional.

Conclusions

Once more, turning back to Oscar Magnussen's statement, "By adding cultural content to the concept of form follows function, objects cease to be finite or predictable", a concluding definition of "Cultural Affordance" could try to set the final point. Affordance emerges from interaction with the product and the system: related to culture, it can show the difference between tradition and contemporaneity but points out the essence of rules in design to generate a renewed (cultural) meaning. The given context (environment, community) to the existing local value system of directly and indirectly perceived layers of knowledge and habits leads us to the horizon of interpretations of Global Civilization which needs to be detected, understood and analysed, resonated and repeated in a way that we could go beyond. To go beyond universality or global, dilemmas we face as individuals and communities, while we agree on the universality of human aims, dreams and intellectual destination, we also agree on context-dependency and different conceptualisations of those intentions. And that is how diversity and cultural richness of the design experience comes into mind, starting from the Global South.

The current context of design knowledge and practice is facing major epistemological and cultural challenges. The dichotomies of the Western hegemonic paradigm have so far limited and distorted the perspectives of endogenous design cultures and local knowledge from the "peripheries." However, there is a growing awareness of the need to embrace a plurality of knowledge and a multipolar view of the geopolitics of knowledge.

   In this context, design practice is trying to reconnect with endogenous and endemic practices and open spaces for new interactions and contributions from different cultures and epistemological perspectives. It is crucial to overcome the hegemony of global design practices in the Global North and to foster the participation of researchers from non-Western educational systems in the design debate and narrative. The 8th International Forum Design as a Process represents an excellent example of community-led knowledge targeting the Latin Network and Global South countries. As presented earlier, in a geopolitical analysis of the global knowledge ecosystem affected by ethnocentrism, we propose cultural local knowledge and endogenous design as potential solutions to subvert the current Western hegemony. Since 2008, the Latin Network has aimed at disseminating and developing design as culture in our society, addressing tangible and intangible environments covering the Latin American area and the global south in general; this model of networked perspective offers a new frame of knowledge accessibility.

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