Article

"DESIGN FOR DEVELOPMENT:" RETHINKING CULTURALLY

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INTRODUCTION

The process of development in the developing world needs to be seen in the context of how it originated – its propagation by Western colonial powers in the form of intensive political strategies and projects that served two main objectives:

1   Ensuring the stability and preservation of the colonial project, and continuing the materialisation of society and of the economy in colonised countries.

The main beneficiaries of development and modernisation in this context have been the Western colonial powers. They are the makers and sellers of material objects and the major consumers of natural resources, raw materials and energy. They are also the major purchasers of exports from developing countries.

However, development and modernisation continue in the postcolonial period, largely the product of concentrated efforts from newly independent national governments to create economic growth, fuelled by industrialism and relying heavily on state investment.

This historical context has influenced the social structure of these often conservative societies, which spent centuries in isolation from the practices and norms and of the West. One manifestation of this is the selective rejection of certain practices associated with modernisation on the basis of their "Western" status. Another contrasting manifestation is that people are being forced to question traditional thinking regarding the certainty of a "pre-given or natural order of things."[1]

The traditional belief systems present in these societies can be viewed as "an interpretative scheme, a framework for understanding the world," and a set of "assumptions, forms of belief and patterns of action handed down from the past [that] can serve as a normative guide for actions and beliefs in the present."[2] These beliefs relate both to material objects and to immaterial norms.[3]

National state ideology has tended to reject traditional ways of thinking, reflecting the perception that they are mere obstacles on the road to development. Science and technology have continued to be presented by the power structures in the developing world as the only means for achieving modernisation, from the colonial period through to the present day.

Science and technology have profoundly influenced every facet of design in the twentieth century, from communications to housing and transportation, and the way in which people interact with the rapidly changing world of objects in the developing world continues to shape and reshape social relationships, attitudes and norms.

The relation between design – which in this context means the methods and processes of shaping material objects

– and development is a subject that has been taken up by a number of designers and design theorists. It has often been based on the concept of utilising the scope of Western design models and using them as a means of achieving the goal of development in the developing world. The ideological approach of this movement has favoured economic growth as a key measurement of development.

The few studies that have looked into the historical context of "design for development" have begun to address the lack of existing analysis of the movement,[4] and an important conflict has been identified. The discourse of development has centred on the promise of reform and progress towards a goal defined largely in terms of economic growth. However, the failure of development strategies in many countries in the globalisation era has had a hugely negative effect on economic growth in these countries. This, is turn, has impacted on wider society in the form of increased poverty and inefficiency, with massive deficiencies in important social systems.

By redirecting and creating new roles for design within these social systems, it is possible to extend the discipline beyond its classical role as a means for stimulating economic growth and towards broader social, cultural and environmental applications. Utilising design in these wider contexts has been an important factor in attempts by NGOs and a few national government agencies around the world to create better ways of delivering humanitarian aid, promote environmentally sustainable business practises and support more effective communication between communities and states.[5]

MAPPING HISTORICAL APPROACHES

The short history of the "design for development" movement is reflective of the wide divisions between the discourses of "design" and "development" in terms of theory, professional practice, objectives and values. These discourses have very different backgrounds and often play seemingly opposing roles in daily life. However, it is possible to bridge these divisions and build new partnerships between those involved in design projects and those involved in development projects. It is largely a matter of investing in learning, professional relationships and institutional ties between the two groups.[6]

It was top-down political efforts that led the first initiatives aimed at fulfilling basic human needs across the newly-drawn, post-Second World War geopolitical map, specifically in the "underdeveloping nations."

THE USA POINT FOUR PLAN SINCE 1945

At the end of the Second World War, the USA assumed a world leadership position that was reflected in its new foreign policy. President Truman's inaugural address on 20 January 1949 argued that "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."[7]

According to some development studies, this signalled the era of "development" as we know it today – the process of transferring new resources and "science and technology" to "underdeveloping countries" and providing them with expertise in business, industry and agriculture. It aimed to increase industrial activity in these newly independent nations and to enhance their development by establishing democratic political systems. It was hoped that these changes would lead to greater production, prosperity and peace.

Debates over technical assistance and economic development for underdeveloping countries continued, particularly with regard to resolutions issued by the UN in 1948 that aimed to enhance development. This particular model of development favoured free-market capitalism, and transferred aid and assistance in what some have called a propagandistic context. However, positive results of this assistance included the establishment of design and industrial design programmes at the university level in Middle Eastern countries such as Turkey and Lebanon, and

the provision of technical training programmes to support handicraft industries in Jordan.[8]

ALTERNATIVE TECHNOLOGY (AT)

In an article in *The Observer* in 1965, the British economist EF Schumacher discussed how technology could be best used to reduce poverty in developing nations. "Schumacher adapted Gandhi's ideas of industry and technology to modern needs in the post-war period through the concept of intermediate technology."[9] In his view, "alternative technology" (later replaced by the term "appropriate technology" [AT]) would be much more effective in increasing productivity than traditional technology, and was cheaper, simpler, and more environmentally friendly than the high technology of the West. AT was identified as the best solution for poor communities seeking to enhance their material prosperity.

However, the overwhelming emphasis on technology and technical skills as the main requirements for development and an enhanced quality of life by AT was a clear weakness of the theory. AT offered only one solution to the complex situations – "unstructured problems"– faced by developing societies, while paying little attention to improving the social, educational and health needs of these communities. In fact, this was a solution to an imagined problem, rather than an effort to identify and address the actual needs of real communities. The uniform solution to development issues offered by AT proponents has parallels with the way that the International Style dominated design discourse after the Second World War, seeking (and failing) to create the "utopian city."

VICTOR PAPANEK

Victor Papanek is the most well-known of the early authors who initiated the discourse of design in a development context. His first book, *Design for the Real World*, was published in 1972 and republished in 1984. His vision for the role of industrial design in developing countries can be summarised as follows:

- He did not take a strong interest in industrialisation and economic development at the national level in developing countries.

- His practical approach to design and design education had a strong focus on the shaping of material objects.

- He insisted that industrial designers have a social responsibility to design low-technology products which meet the basic needs of poor communities in developing countries.

- He targeted Western corporations, encouraging them to incorporate his approach to manufacturing products for developing countries.

Through the 4-Working Group formed by the International Council of Societies of Industrial Designers-ICSID, of which he was a member, Papanek sought to enhance the profile of the "design for development" discourse. He later said that the discussions held by this group appeared to be genuinely sensitive to the conditions and cultural needs of developing countries, an emphasis reflected in the group's suggestion that an "international design school for the South" be established to address their realistic needs. However, in the end the group's discussions proved fruitless: no realistic answers were ever given to the questions that had been raised.[10]

DESIGN FOR NEED: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

"Design for need" was another important concept that inspired a growing recognition of design's social context. It was the title of a conference that focused on the "systematic study and development of design applied to projects of social value." Endorsed by ICSID and held in 1976 at the Royal College of Art in the United Kingdom,

the papers presented at the conference addressed a wide range of topics covering the social context of design, from the developmental needs of developing countries to the special needs of the aged and the disabled, poor communities in all parts of the world, and issues relating to the environment, natural resources, aid and poverty. The debate and discussion generated by the conference was an attempt to clarify the needs that have to be met for successful development to occur. Two important concepts emerged from the conference – the need for a new ethical approach to technology and design in development contexts, and the importance of shaping technology to fit with real, existing social forces and needs.[11]

GUI BONSIEPE

German industrial designer Gui Bonsiepe took these ideas in new directions when he highlighted the relationship between design and economic development. He stressed the power of design as a strategic factor in development, not only in fulfilling the basic needs of human life, but in the alignment of industrial design practices with the industrial activities occurring in developing countries.

Throughout the 1970s he used the model of "periphery" (developing countries) and "centre" (developed countries) to describe a relationship dominated by the influence of the centre on the periphery. Bonsiepe argues strongly that there is a close relation between design and politics that determines where, and how, design can benefit developing countries: "Design should be done in the periphery and not for the periphery … Design problems will only be resolved in the local context."[12] Bonsiepe's argument for design education in developing countries stressed the extreme importance of both design educators and students "practising design" by sharing with industry, avoiding the current situation where teaching programmes are grounded in academic requirements. "I wonder how you can teach design if you don't practice design," he once queried.[13]

THE AHMADABAD DECLARATION – TOWARDS INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The Ahmadabad Declaration resulted from a meeting of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) with experts from the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID) at the National Institute of Design (NID) in India in January 1979. It stressed the "urgent need" for "industrial design activities" in devising national development plans for developing countries. The document was signed by 20 nations. This was the first time that the movement of "design for development" had received this level of international recognition. The declaration argued:

- Design is an important force for improving people's quality of life.

- Designers should understand and apply design principles within their own social contexts.

- Design needs to acknowledge local needs, while utilising the power of science and technology.

- Design needs to be sustainable.[14]

The participation of UNIDO signalled the fact that the UN understood and supported "design for development" and its vital role in national development strategies for developing countries. The Ahmadabad Declaration represented the first time that design's role in development had been discussed and recognised at an international level, and shifted the discourse from the localised contexts of aid, alternative technology and "design for need" to activity at the state and international level.

According to some proponents of "design for development," some progress has now been made, especially in Asian

countries. The Ahmadabad Declaration remains the only document of its kind and, given the length of time that has passed since its conception, there is a need to acknowledge the evidence (if any) of its role in contemporary design and development practice (see Figure 1).
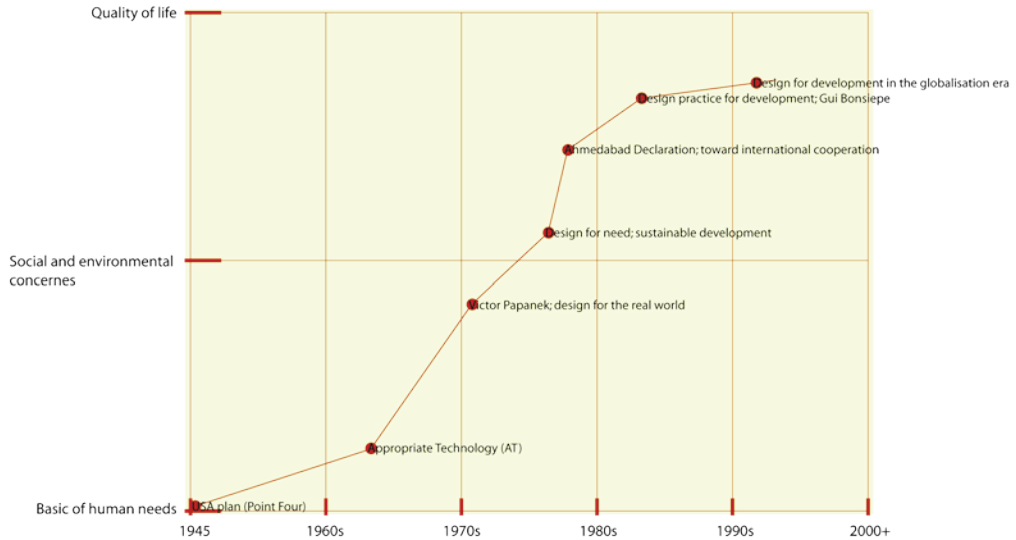

Figure 1: Mapping the history of design for development.

CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGN

Culture in any society is a superstructure of practices and beliefs, organised by the process of social activity and transferred between individuals and collectives. These interactions are increasingly being impacted on by technology, in particular by the massive speed of communications technology. This is dramatically changing the development of culture across the world.

Edward Said has defined culture as signifying two separate aspects of community life: "first of all it means all those practices, like the arts of description, communication, and representation, that have relative autonomy from the economic, social, and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principle aims is pleasure. … Second, and most imperceptibly, culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought."[15] The wider context of culture, according to Said's definition, reflects its intensive role in shaping many aspects of any given society, which in turn require further attention as strategic factors in development and strategic planning. As Amartya Sen has put it, "culture can be a very positive and constructive part in our understanding of human behaviour and of social and economic development."[16] To understand why this is so, it is important to stress the mercurial role of culture in society:

- Culture is influential. It influences and inspires what we do and how we do it, helping to form our cultural identities.

- Culture is heterogenous. It reflects a wide range of diverse beliefs and practices, ranging from our style of living to the way we eat, how we interact with material culture, and so on.

- Culture is dynamic, changeable, interactive and requires continual development.

- Different cultures readily interact with one another. Many radical changes can occur in this context.

Many design and ethnographic studies have examined the ways in which we interact with material culture and the social meanings that we attach to it. It has been said that "Goods… are the visible part of culture,"[17] and that "object-people relationships go beyond the physical and are locally and culturally constructed"[18] in society. The material objects which proliferate in a given society can be seen as a manifestation of that culture's beliefs and practices, and the ways in which we interact with material culture can be seen as an important extension of how we interact with each other. "Whatever we design expresses our culture and our designs are imbedded in our culture."[19]

Design serves the goals of cultural and economic growth by shaping the principles and methods we use to utilise technology, in its multiplicity of forms. Technology, in turn, continues to enhance the quality of human habitats. At the same time, it becomes increasingly integrated into our everyday lives, changing our methods of conceptualising, making, refining and doing. Design culture has extended our expectations of what is possible, and is helping us create manageable systems to meet the changing expectations of a changing world.

DESIGN FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE IRAQI CONTEXT

Economic activity in Iraq has traditionally been based on agriculture and trading, both of which developed throughout the long history of the land. During the time of the Mesopotamian kingdoms, governments subsidised the development of irrigation systems which increased the productivity of the land, as well as increasing the potential for profitable trade. The region's situation between the two great sea basins of the civilised world, the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, made it an important juncture on the main trade routes from China and India to the Middle East and Europe, and afforded it major trading opportunities and strategic geopolitical importance.

After the Mongol invasion of Baghdad in 1258, the decline of the irrigation system and the movement of trade routes to the Red Sea initiated a massive economic decline from which the region would never fully recover. When the Ottoman Empire took control of Baghdad in 1514, what little efforts were made towards improving the quality of life for the people of the country focused largely on the large cities, and did not reach the smaller cities or rural areas, which were ruled through a semi-feudal agricultural system controlled by local *shaiks* (tribal leaders).

The formation of the Iraqi state in 1921 represent a novel context for British colonialism, marked by the indirect control of the colonised territory according to the mandate system. At the same time, for Iraq it was the dawn of the era of modernisation and development in a colonial context, with the ubiquitous introduction of the capitalist mode of production, drawn boundaries, a constitution, a monarchy, a bicameral legislature, an administration staffed with British advisers, a security apparatus and some improvements in social services such as education and healthcare. "What it was not given, however, was a strong social base."[20]

Later, after the military coup of 1958 and the establishment of the republican state, the main factor in progress towards modernisation was the nationalisation of the Iraqi oil industry. With booming oil prices, industrial manufacturing firms were considered to be key elements in national development strategies, and new state corporations and industrial activities were established in order to ensure self-sufficiency in many areas.

Over the following decades, wider social programmes targeting the goals of universal education and healthcare, along with large-scale infrastructure projects, shifted Iraq many places higher in the statistical charts used by the UN

and other development agencies to measure relative levels of development and prosperity.

This review (see Figure 2) leads us to identify some key strategies that have been applied in the past to the project of modernisation and development in Iraq. These strategies form the basis for further discussion toward creating a conceptual model that would enable us to visualise the role of design in improving the structure of social systems.

	Islamic Caliphates 750-1258	Mongol invasion 1285-1514	Ottoman Empire 1514-1917	British Colonialism & The Iraqi Kingdome 1917-1958	The National State 1958-2003	Re-Colonialism` 2003-present
Political	Arabic Islamic order created an Islamic Empire	Mongol tribal leader initiated era of unstable and war oriented zone	Ottoman order divided the land into three main governorates, addressed as frontal line against Iran.	Forming of national state under British mandate 1921-1932. Create of democratic political order leaded by Arabic King; religiously and nationalism oriented, supervised by British	National political leader reflected dictatorship and state-lead system.	Foreign power created kind of democratic order, leads to national government reflecting sectarianism
Socio-cultural	•Conservative and religiously oriented society •High culture reflected through, Islamic Architecture style, Arabic literature, science and technology, extensive material culture objects, and effective social systems	•Retardation and instability •Deterioration of social systems •Basic utilitarian material culture objects	•Retardation and instability •Deterioration of social systems •Basic utilitarian material culture objects •Some basic efforts to present few services regarding land registration and taxing system.	•Initiated the era of modernisation and building of state structure •Capitalism economy supported by oil revenues •Agricultural-led economy •Materialisation of society •Efforts toward building modern social systems	•Post-colonial era of modernisation •Socialism economy, supported by massive oil revenues resulted from nationalisation of oil industry •Industrialisation-led economy •Continue efforts to build modern social systems	•Massive damage to the social systems reflecting the wider disorders •Deterioration of social systems

Figure 2: Modernisation and Development project in Iraq.

CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO MODERNISATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The political context underlying the creation of the Ahmadabad Declaration motivated many developing countries to sign the document, Iraq being one of them. The 1970s was an important period for developing countries, especially with regard to debates about dependency, modernisation, and development, powered by the political contexts of "Third World" and "Non-Allied" movements.

The new availability of vast financial resources, in the form of oil revenues, pushed Iraqi development projects forward. However, these government-sponsored programmes were accompanied by state propaganda that espoused "revolutionary changes" that Iraqi society would have to undergo in order to achieve prosperity and modernisation, and this propaganda exposed a gulf between the "revolutionary" principles promoted by the government and the actual principles, values, traditions and social norms of Iraqi society. Issues such as human rights, the work environment, dictatorship and relationships within families and tribes were subject to new, imposed norms. When society rejected these new norms, they were met with state violence.

Despite the tense political situation, people did enjoy increased access to education, healthcare, affordable goods, power and housing. This was not to last, however, with unbalanced progress leading to an ultimate failure to maintain prosperity or consistently meet development goals. Part of the problem was the planned economy and the state centralisation of markets. Another part of the problem was the failure to create social systems capable of integrating the abrupt shift towards industrialisation, materialism and detraditionalisation (the abandonment of traditional norms and values).

The tragic end to Iraq's period of postcolonial prosperity began with the war between Iraq and Iran in the 1980s, deteriorated further with the first US Gulf war and subsequent UN sanctions, and culminated in the present era of re-colonisation, beginning in 2003. This crisis in Iraq must be seen as a turning point, illustrating the need for a new era in the relationship between developed and developing nations.

The long period of wars in Iraq has resulted in large-scale damage to both the country's social systems and its infrastructure. Images in media reports show the difficult, miserable and unsafe conditions of the daily lives of Iraqis. The problems faced by Iraq are comprehensive and complex, to the extent that they have been described as "unstructured problems…they cannot be explicitly stated without oversimplifying them."[21] The nature and correlations of these "unstructured problems" are much wider than the context of economic development.

My argument, which asserts the role of design in sustainable development, calls for design principles to be incorporated into policies that target the social systems in Iraq. In my view, this must be the starting point for any efforts aimed at improving the quality of life for Iraqis, who have lived through decades of war. This vision is based on two main principles:

1   Design is clearly related to all aspects of contemporary life: "There is no area of contemporary life where design – the plan, project, or working hypothesis which constitutes the 'intention' in intentional operations – is not a significant factor in shaping human experience."[22]

2   Design offers new and creative solutions that can complement and support many existing efforts and plans for restructuring Iraq.

The following conceptual model (Figure 3) provides a wider vision of a process that will deal with such unstructured problems. It takes into account the classification of complex issues and "metaproblems" that are generated from multiple variables and interrelated issues. The core of this model is the social system, where the design process reflects the fact that we cannot treat any of these problems individually or independently, as the aim is not about finding the truth, but rather improving the quality of life for the stakeholders, "those who serve the system, who are served by it, and who are affected by it."[23] The process is divided into four main phases:

- Explore: A thorough investigation of the problems of the existing social system, to uncover priorities and systems that will encourage initiation of the restructuring process.

- Create: Analysis, identification, and direction of strategies to be based on sociocultural practices and traditions, as well as the diversity of the society. This phase complements futuristic visions for better alternative systems.

- Interact: International co-operation to help Iraq's "land and society" better adjust to the rest of the world. This covers a range of activities relating to the economy, the environment, technology and so forth.

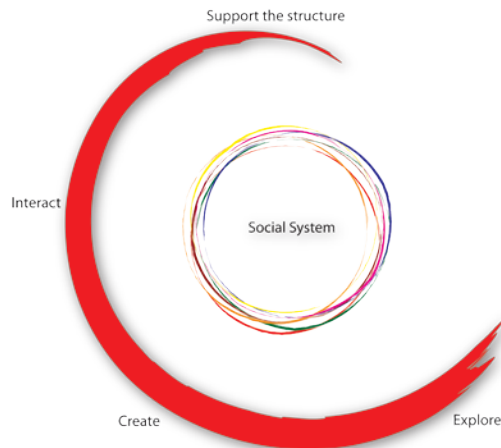- Support the structure: Encouraging people to adapt and to play their role in supporting the new systems.

Figure 3: Conceptual model for design to deal with unstructured problems.

As part of this conceptual model, design will play an active role in defining the purpose of the new system, and creating the media to present it. This role is based on the nature of design as an appropriate intellectual and cultural practice which will lead the transitional process through:

1   Separating components, changing correlations, and producing new structures; and

2   visualising and communicating new structures.

Within this context, design will use its proven analytical strengths to rearrange the structure of functions in the existing system and create new structures. Designers will initiate this process based on their ability to synthesise and imagine new relationships between the components of social systems.

CONCLUSION

Contemporary design theories and practices are moving away from the traditional role of the discipline as merely "giving form," and engaging dynamically with other discourses relating to society, culture and the ways in which humans interact with one another. Integrating design into social processes empowers designers to interact with society and to enrich it, either by creating new cultural meaning or by protecting and enhancing existing values.

Design policies should promote culturally sensitive practice "that doesn't aim to preserve a pastiche historic identity of a place, but allows a region or city to be invigorated with new meanings and innovative culturally-relevant direction."[24]

The foregoing analysis of the kind of problems facing Iraqi society makes it clear that it is no longer possible to utilise design through a merely technical, "problem solving" approach. Furthermore, this is not the direction favoured by most existing design policies as a strategic approach aimed at competitiveness in marketing, manufacturing, and innovation. However, in the Iraqi situation, there is an "urgent and deep" need to develop novel design methods and principles to facilitate structuring of the existing fragmented social system there. And the solution will depend on:

• An in-depth understanding of the sociocultural factors determining the direction of future development;

• stability and democracy, with a functioning social infrastructure; and

• an collaborative environment embracing designers and specialists in other disciplines, such as sociologists, anthropologists, development officials and politicians, at both national and international levels.[25]

It might be too optimistic at the moment to think that we can solve these "unstructured problems" that bedevil the country but, if we can keep alternative options open, we may find the means in the future to offer better lives and sustainable development to the Iraqi people.

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