Editorial: Not Just From the Centre

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There is a popular West African proverb that states that 'until the lion has his or her own storyteller, the hunter will always have the best part of the story'. Much literature on design practice and education focuses on the experience of designers in Western Europe and in North America, which we can name The Centre. The focus on the centre would make it appear that there is little to no noteworthy design practice and thinking outside of these regions. Even when literature about design draws attention to design practice from outside of The Centre, these stories are often still written from the perspective of the West, and not from the perspective of the people who are being written about. For this track, therefore, we made a specific call to designers and educators outside of the 'centre' of Western culture, designers from Eastern Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa and Asia. We intended to create a platform for these designers to tell their own stories, share their work and to spark debate on how design practice and education are impacted by cultural and geographical context. We felt that a design conference called 'Catalyst' should not take place without a specific call to encourage discussions about design in 'emerging countries' and that these discussions should be led by research from designers from these places.

"Culture comprises a society's philosophy about the nature of reality, the values that flow from this philosophy, and the social customs that embody these values" (Little Bear, 2000, p. 77). Design practice can be understood as the medium between values and ideals of a culture and the tangible reality (Buchanan, 2001; Tunstall, 2013). Since many discussions on design take place in the centre of Western culture, western designers often disregard the role that culture plays in the design process, and the cultural aspect of design is taken for granted. It is important to debate how design thinking and practice changes under different cultural values and ideals. Analysing and understanding design from outside The Centre creates a platform to shed light on some aspects of design activity that have not yet received much attention in design literature.

Political and economic terms such as 'advanced, 'emerging' and 'developing' divide 'us' into the ones who are better and the ones who are not 'good enough'; the ones who are always right and are the experts, and the ones who have to learn from the West and 'have to catch up' (Hall, 1992; Santos, 2016). This also applies to design practice, research and education. Design students from all over the world learn about European and North American design practice, while design practice from other places is often ignored. As a result, they are conditioned to believe that what is from The Centre is good, and what is from outside of The Centre is not good enough. Regions outside The Centre are seen as limited in resources, and in The Centre it is often assumed that affluence is conducive to well-being and innovation. In partnerships with international designers, local innovation, creativity and solutions are often stifled by the influence of external experts and this impacts the long-term practice and creative confidence of local designers.

In emancipatory research, there is the epistemological assumption that knowledge is defined from multiple cultural lenses while there is also the acknowledgment of issues related to power (Mertens, 2015). One of the aims of emancipatory research is to include excluded perspectives. This track is emancipatory in nature, and we sought to highlight diverse global perspectives on design education, research and practice. We wanted to understand the perspectives of these designers, how they use existing resources (or lack of resources) to trigger creativity and innovative solutions. We wanted to know how local values and traditions were used as a catalyst for their designs. Finally, we also sought to understand how happiness and emotional intelligence could play a role in the development of a new and more inclusive form of well-being that is not dependent on perceived material affluence.

Designers and educators from many countries across Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, The Middle East, Eastern Europe, Asia and Oceania responded to our call for papers. The papers covering a wide range of topics and the selected papers can be divided in two parts. The first section focused on design education and methods, and the second part focused on culturally situated design practice.

The first two papers look at design education in different contexts. In the first paper, Barbadian design educator Mayers looked beyond tertiary level design education and examined some of the challenges that Barbadian design students have in continuing to develop their projects after they leave university. While Noel and O'Neill looked at a role for design education in times of crisis as they described the experience of developing a curriculum that was used in a design class that started two weeks after Hurricane Maria destroyed Puerto Rico in 2017. The design class provided an opportunity for future scenario building, hope and optimism in the midst of chaos. Yemtim et al., moved the discussion from education to research methods in their paper where the authors examined how 'design methods' could be transferred across cultures by describing their experience in Burkina Faso.

The final four papers on culturally situated practice follow the papers on design education and research. Wahyurini proposed a framework to understand factors that restrain the engagement of users with collectivist culture background to computer technology. Hu and Dong examined the role of consumers as readers who play active roles in the dynamic structure of communication and discuss how cultural factors affect consumers in reading design. Estwick sought to establish principles for good Caribbean design and establish a case for design in local cultural policy in West Indian islands. In the final paper, Veilande addressed various research issues regarding the (non-existent) fashion industry and aspects of sustainability in meeting citizens' everyday needs in the Soviet Union.

We hoped with this track to contribute to increasing recognition of the value of design practice outside The Centre. On one hand design literature needs to recognize the work of designers in peripheral regions not only as a curiosity or exoticism but as important contributions to contemporary material reality. On the other hand, comparisons between design practice in different cultures might allow for a better understanding of the cultural aspect of design activity.

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