

Introduction

Decolonizing design, the social sciences, and social innovation for the pluriverse

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On behalf of the Taylor Center co-hosts, I am pleased to help introduce these proceedings from PIVOT 2020. Organizing and hosting this was a memorable event, held as it was for a global audience in the online Zoom-based world that the coronavirus pandemic has created for us in 2020. I appreciate everyone's thoughtful contributions and good will during extraordinary circumstances.

I write representing the research & scholarship team at the Phyllis M. Taylor Center for Social Innovation and Design Thinking at Tulane University ("Taylor Center"). Founded in 2014 with a gift from Phyllis Taylor, a Louisiana native, the Taylor Center houses several programs. One is a university-wide undergraduate program in social innovation and social entrepreneurship dating to 2011. Design thinking was a core skillset for any student seeking to learn these changemaking skills, whether from the liberal arts, business, engineering, architecture, public health, medicine, or natural sciences. In 2018, we started the research and scholarship program. We aim to engage interdisciplinary doctoral students, post-docs and faculty members and non-traditional scholars (administrators, educators, community partners) with their academic and praxis-oriented questions around design, social enterprise, and social innovation as changemaking. (The Taylor Center programs and funds are aligned with the AshokaU.org Changemaker Campus network and the Ashoka.org approach to "everyone a changemaker".)

By 2019, with Lesley joining the team at the Taylor Center, bringing emancipatory and critical design lenses, we were excited to learn about the Pluriversal SIG. The team were delighted to be invited to join with Lesley and Renata's concept for PIVOT, an unconference to decolonize design--and social innovation. Note that the Taylor research and scholarship team come from a background in the formal quantitative social sciences, which for the most part are analytical, objective, and "evidence-based"--yet we are fortunately not firmly stuck there in those worldviews. We have been following the post-colonial and post-structural shifts in our fields of international development studies, social change, and social innovation. Our eagerness to collaborate with Pivot arose in part from our scholarly interests in design



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and where and how it fits in social innovation. Also, our experiences as educators in the design and social innovation curriculum since 2013 had led to feedback; I heard that getting a taste of design was inspiring and even life changing. It seems a yearning exists for the prospective, imagination-firing qualities of design. While it is sets of skills, mindsets, and practices for “solving persistent problems” in field of social innovation, it is also much more than that. Decolonizing our minds is part of making sense of how design relates to social innovation.

The R&S team that helped bring this event to life featured Maille Faughnan (PhD, global development). Other important people were several dedicated part-time graduate students, including doctoral students in public health, engineering, and anthropology. The team spanned several nationalities and multiple languages; a few had some exposure to design thinking. Several are from the Global South. They shared how inspiring it was to hear the voices, see the faces, and read the words working to decolonize design; to see examples of the pluriverse.

Browsing these proceedings, I am reminded of the enthusiastic volume of submissions from around the world that came in the spring. They represent several design disciplines, different walks of life, and entry points to our pluriverse. After our double-blind peer-review process, we finally managed to screen out some of the voices, so that others make speak.

We were still not sure how to organize the range of papers and stimulating short presentations for a day of online conferencing. The task of sorting disparate voices and methods into meaningful streams started with index cards and a sharpie pen. I deployed the KJ technique to look for patterns. Here, I could bring my “outside-design profession” perspective to review submissions in the analog cards. I saw themes that parallel post-structural, discourse-based critiques of western institutions from other (non-design) fields and literatures. My rough index-card outline soon translated onto the organizing team’s online Mural canvas. Emergent session themes took shape quickly. It was clear that these papers represent the Pluriverse out there, and emerging. It is already here, and there. It needs much care and tending.

It was also an interesting challenge to shift from the original concept of an intimate retreat for Pluriversal, decolonizing scholars to write and publish (further inspired by field trips out of New Orleans to outstanding regional cultural institutions, sites of decolonizing efforts). We had to rethink it all for the required COVID-determined online format in a way that would still suit the spirit of the event. I think we succeeded beyond our dreams, reaching more people than we could have otherwise.

In terms of serving an audience around the world, I am still amazed that the schedule and timing of papers and sessions needed little re-adjustment to accommodate to both the speakers and the audiences from Australia to British Columbia, from Brazil to Berlin, from Japan to New Orleans. And everyone showed up on time and ready to go, making for a marvelous flow.

Reflecting on the content, I see overlaps in efforts to decolonize the social sciences (broadly) with efforts to decolonize design. Both have roots in modern institutions; let us continue to collaborate to bring in new voices, knowledges, and practices. We heard cross-disciplinary conversations and new collaborations starting, extend “design” beyond the modern design professions, out of the western centers of education and institutions, and into everyday empowerment practices. The sessions shared indigenous practices in Australian and British Columbia, Canada, and interrogations of discourses, texts, types, languages, and maps; new ways to integrate design into cities and habitats; new ways to think of the role of design. I appreciate our authors’ journeys to reveal, and re-imagine design education, research, and practices.

It has been exciting to be part of this global network to decolonize design. It coincides with efforts to decolonize other knowledge systems and practices in the social sciences broadly and in social innovation

more specifically. Though we may start from different places given academic background and positions, we can find common ground in these efforts to decolonize our minds, hearts, and academic practices.

I am grateful to Lesley and Renata for envisioning this event and inviting us along the journey. I appreciate the entire organizing team for being open to the unexpected and designing a compelling experience. I am eager to continue the conversations with fellow travelers in and through the Pluriversal worlds, starting with the papers here.

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