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## **Social innovation and the designer-the future?**

Hilary Collins

Euromed Management, Rue Antoine Bourdel, BP921, Marseille Cedex 9, France

Tel ++33 91 82 73 93 ; Fax: ++33 91

Email: [Hilary.Collins@euromed-management.com](mailto:Hilary.Collins@euromed-management.com)

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper illustrates the importance of social innovation to design and the designer. Technology and Internet platforms play an important role in innovation not as the final goal but a medium that connects people to these services or systems. The paper discuss the role of the sustainable designer generating and providing value to collaborative organizations proposing specific capabilities the designer can bring to social and sustainable innovation. We propose, not to give the whole responsibility to designers nor to propose that only designers are capable of generating social innovation, but to understand which differentiating qualities can be used and have a positive impact on service. The paper calls for designers to have vision and to use design thinking to examine the causes of the biggest societal issues and create systems that could tackle the causes rather than the consequences.

## **Introduction**

Design can go beyond innovation, from development of high tech products to creation and ideation of systems that respond to human needs tackling social issues within the community. The focus is on innovation in the form of sustainable and collaborative services, understanding a problem, discovering its causes, and ideating solutions understanding our needs and motivation, considering social, environmental, and economic aspects. Environmental and social problems such as global warming and urban sprawl have been prominent during the last decade. For the first time in history, the majority of people live in urban areas and there is an expectancy that by the year 2030, sixty percent of the world's population will live in cities (UN Habitat, 2008). Cities consume energy and goods, generating CO<sub>2</sub>, producing waste, and affecting the environment and consequently society as a whole. People are becoming more stressed, are developing bad eating habits, levels of happiness and wellbeing have been decreasing, there is a large elderly population, people have habits of hyper consumption and we live in a throwaway culture.

Design plays a very important role in this, because designers have been mostly focused on the massive production of goods that predominantly respond to unnecessary needs and consequently pollute the environment. More than 80% of the environmental impact of a product is determined at the design stage. Nevertheless, as Thackara (2005) said, "things may seem out of control but they are not out of our hands" and there has been a rise in the number and quality of social innovations emerging. It is possible that innovations are shifting from being only based on technology and product development towards meaningful services putting people before objects. Individuals are becoming more and more aware of these pressing issues in society and are creatively inventing new sustainable ways of living. These innovations and creative communities are tackling interconnected issues and generating change through collaboration, dialogue, participation, and relationships.

Creative communities and collaborative services are emerging as important social innovations, especially in developed countries. Formed by groups of people that are collaborating between each other and managing new solutions to everyday problems for innovative/sustainable ways of living, collaborative services are growing as diffused social enterprises in which people are doing things by themselves and for themselves. These services are created to solve everyday problems such as sharing cars and doing the laundry for the neighbourhood, but at the same time they generate important secondary effects in terms of sustainable consumption and behavioural change as they are based on networks and relationships. The social aspect of these services and communities is very interesting as new values and behaviours are appearing between peers, such as trust and sharing and the forms or organisations present a different model, which works in an organic distributed manner.

Designers have usually been perceived as creators of products and/or as enhancers of image and aesthetics. However, during the last few years, the design field has been broadened as it has opened its capabilities of inventing products or making them look good to be a thinking tool for achieving innovation in private and public sector. A new generation of designers willing to generate sustainable and social change is emerging, and their role in designing systems and services that aim to address social and environmental issues is being recognized. Although collaborative services are emerging as purely 'people' initiatives (not designer) they are emerging with similar goals of solving collective issues.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to analyse a case of creative communities and collaborative organisations and their relationship with social and sustainable innovation. Secondly, to analyze what role the designer could play integrating these organisations and what benefit could the designer provide to these initiatives.

## **Research Question**

What is the role of the designer in social sustainable innovation?

### **The objectives of this research are the following:**

- Identify how and why can designers generate value to collaborative organisations and which role can they play within them.
- Analyze the changing role of the designer for social and sustainable change.

## **Definitions**

**Creative communities:** "People who cooperatively invent, enhance and manage innovative solutions for new ways of living (Manzini, 2006)".

**Collaborative organisations:** "Production and services based on peer-to-peer, collaborative relationships and consequently on a high degree of mutual trust. Production and services where the values produced emerge out of relational qualities, i.e. out of real, dynamic personal relationships (Cipolla,2004)"

**Mass-creativity and innovation :** "*...ideas are emerging from a mass of creative interaction between a wide range of people who combine different but potentially complementary insights.*" (Leadbeater, *We Think Research Reports*, 2009)

**Collaborative consumption:** "Describes the rapid explosion in traditional sharing, bartering, lending, trading, renting, gifting, and swapping reinvented through network technologies on a scale and in ways never possible before" (Botsman and Rogers, 2010)

**Sustainability:** Defined as a concept that "embraces the idea of a global ecology, and its meaning must be expanded to include all parts of nature (not only humanity) and allow all of nature to meet its own needs, now and in the future" (Macdonough Architects, 1992).

## **Literature**

### **Social Innovation**

Collaborative services are themselves social innovations that promote new ways of addressing and improving issues in society and are born from particular members of a community (Manzini, 2006). The term *social innovation* has become popular and important during the past decade. Hubert (2010) in the Report for Social Innovation of the European Union defines social values "as a value that is less concerned with profit and more with issues such as quality of life, solidarity and well-being."

According to Phills *et al.* (2008) innovation in academic existing research has been defined mostly considering two different streams; one that "explores the organizational and

social *processes* that produce innovation, such as individual creativity, organizational structure, environmental context, and social and economic factors". Another which refers to it "as an *outcome* that manifests itself in new products, product features, and production methods, examining the sources and economic consequences of innovation". These authors stated that innovation happens when it meets two important criteria, the first one of novelty, when a product or a service are new to "the context, the product, or the application" and when it presents an improvement of effectiveness or efficiency to previous alternatives. Put simply, the Young Foundation (2006) provides a definition for innovation as: 'new ideas that work'; highlighting the novelty and usefulness of them and putting aside creative ideas that are not applicable. Social innovation acts as a problem solving solution and that it addresses societies' issues in a general view. Nesta's (2010) highlights the fact that social innovation can occur in different sectors, the private sector, politics and government, independent movements, in contrast to the common belief that it is only for non-for profits alternatives and social enterprises (Mulgan, 2007). In this case the definition indicates that it has to address "major social" challenges, whereas the other definitions do not mention any scale required. The OECD's LEED definition and the Young Foundation highlights relationships and collaboration between individuals and this paper follows this initiative as it underlines social capacity to act; meaning inviting all actors participate in an active role in the direction that collaborative services and creative communities take.

### **Importance of Social Innovation**

Ideas and examples of social innovation are everywhere in civilization. Some easily recognisable examples are: Wikipedia, Telethon fundraising, community gardens, neighbourhood nurseries, carpooling, microfinance, and the fair-trade movement. These types of initiatives on the increase during the last decade. Murray (2010) explained that social innovation is helping society to solve current issues that the existing institutions and policies have not been able to reach.

As explained by the author, the government policies and the existing markets lack the incentives, models, and, resources to deal with complex problems across sectors and administrative boundaries. The rise of costs that issues such as global warming and chronic diseases may represent in the future threatens enormously these bodies in present, health for example, already represents *9% of the GDP for OECD countries and care of the elderly is expected to correspond to 5% within a few years* (Hubert, 2010). These budget constraints represent a significant opportunity for social innovation to provide better solutions with less use of available resources. Another problem stated by Murray (2010) is that institutions and systems such as public bodies tend to be very old and closed (Hubert, 2010) not stimulating new ideas. "There is more innovation around self-management of diseases and public health than around hospitals; more innovation around recycling and energy efficiency than around large-scale energy production; more innovation around public participation than in parliaments and assemblies; and more innovation around active ageing than around pension provision" Murray (2010).

Mulgan (2007) concurs, explaining that problems are getting bigger and institutions do not have the means or resources to provide solutions for them while widening the gap between what people need and what is being offered by government. Hubert, (2010) stated that globalisation and rapid technological change have impacted society with new problems, and that innovation

should not start with technology but with human and social capital for economic growth.

Society's awareness of issues such as global warming, ageing population, and others has provoked a strong reaction to traditional systems and policy. Although social innovation is likely to happen in a large variety of scenarios and fields, according to Mulgan (2007) there are some areas that show great opportunities for its development in sectors that are challenging society nowadays, such as *rising life expectancy*. This requires innovators to think about new ways of urban development, changing behaviours, isolation, pensions, and others. *Growing diversity in countries and cities* leaves opportunities for language training and housing organization. *Stark inequalities*, have provoked consequences such as mental illness. Solutions and medical support for chronic diseases and health issues like obesity and bad eating habits, addictions to drugs and alcohol are required. Another major issue is: *happiness*- improvement of the well being, relationships and unsatisfactory consumerism. These are among the key societal challenges that present the possibility for innovation to enact.

### **Process and Stages of Social Innovation**

"Social change depends, in other words, on alliances between what could be called the 'bees' and the 'trees'. The bees are the small organisations, individuals and groups who have the new ideas, and are mobile, quick and able to cross-pollinate. The trees are the big organisations – governments, companies or big NGOs – which are poor at creativity but generally good at implementation, and which have the resilience, roots and scale to make things happen. Both need each other, and most social change comes from alliances between the two, just as most change within organisations depends on alliances between leaders and groups well down the formal hierarchy." (Mulan, 2007).

### **Social Innovation and Creative Communities**

"People are experimenting ways of being and doing that express a capacity to formulate new questions and find new answers, and this is exactly what we have just defined as social innovation: changes in the way individuals and communities act to solve problems or to exploit new opportunities (Landry, 2006; EMUDE, 2006)".

Social innovation is emerging from creative and passionate individuals looking for new potential solutions to everyday problems and finding new answers through experimentation, networks, relationships, and task distribution. At present, with the rise of environmental and social problems, media information coverage, and emerging technologies and the amplification of people's awareness about societies' pressing issues, social innovation is reaching an important peak in which more initiatives are emerging and more governments, private organisations and individuals are getting involved and interested.

A new era of collaboration seems to be emerging in which individuals are thinking about the collective good rather than in an egocentric selfish individualistic satisfaction. "We are re learning how to create value out of shared and open spaces in ways that balance self interest with the good of a larger community" (Bostman and Rogers, 2010). Seth Godin (TED, 2009) calls it tribes, which are individuals that instead of following a top down mass marketing product or services, are being able to connect people and ideas.

According to Meroni (2007) and Godin (2009) these individuals are not usually professional creatives or designers but "everyday heroes", true leaders, that have been able to imagine

beyond the system and structure possible alternative solutions; whether it is because of simple personal motivation such as spend less money or buy less *stuff* up to environmental concerns of resource depletion and massive consumption. Although they may be qualified as ordinary they have a usually a certain set of skills such as capacity of sharing a vision with other people, courage, positive attitudes and an interest in solving problems looking at them from different points of view, that break up with *mainstream models and generate local discontinuities* (Manzini,2006) to pursuit social and ecological wellbeing. Therefore, creative communities are: "people who cooperatively invent, enhance and manage innovative solutions for new ways of living (Meroni, 2007)". The motivation and the success of these innovations usually come from the community as a support, recognition of value for change, and a sense of strength in togetherness. It is clear that in general, the innovation itself may not be new; but the process and diffusion in the creation of groups and communities willing to work creatively and invent new ways of living, displacing materialism and looking to sustainability is by itself a social innovation (Dawson, 2006). Godin (2009) assures us that these tribes or communities are the ones capable of changing the economy, politics, and the world.

Manzini (2006) indicated that these creative communities contemplate important sustainable factors such as localisation because they are usually rooted to a specific city, village or community in which they promote a proper use of resources, usually doing things with less and recombining what already exists, and they in general encourage social exchange. Through the identification of characteristics of these types of creative communities is possible to see that collaboration and networks is one of the key components that make them alive, successful and sustainable. Bostman and Rogers (2010) showed that anthropological studies have identified that mutualism and collaboration are human basic instincts and if the contrary are just behaviours that have been shaped by culture.

During the evolution of these creative ideas, they can be transformed into business ideas (when the idea works providing specific results and solving a problem) which after take the form of "diffused social enterprises". This type of social enterprise is defined by EMUDE(2006) :*The term diffuse enterprise indicates people who, in their everyday life, organise themselves to obtain the results they are directly interested in; and the expression to auto-produce social quality refers to the process whereby, through actively seeking to resolve their problems, people enhance a project that has the side effect of (more or less deliberately) reinforcing the social fabric.*

Creative communities and social enterprises point out the possibility of a promising new pathway for society, emphasizing and developing the idea of a new welfare; "active welfare" in which people get involved the problem solving process and achieve the results they want contributing in a significant manner to society as a whole (EMUDE, 2006). Cipolla (2004) has named these communities or diffused social enterprises as "collaborative organizations" due to the common and high level of collaboration, participation, relationships and values such as mutual trust they all contain.

### **Sustainability and Collaborative Organisations**

*"Sustainable communities foster commitment to place, promote vitality, build resilience to stress, act as stewards, and forge connections beyond the community"* ( Northwest Policy Institute, n.d.).

Society and the planet face an important challenge regarding the use of energy resources, peak

oil, and a massive environmental degradation that are already impacting the life of many people around the world (Villa and Mitchell, 2010). Collaborative organisations are indeed models of social innovation, emerging creatively in interesting ways in the world, and presenting a possible manifestation of a sustainable production model and a new social era. In order to discover a coherent relation between collaborative organizations as models of social innovation and sustainability, a short overview to definitions of sustainable development and sustainable innovation is shown as follows:

Sustainable development is defined by the United Nations (1987) as the development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". This definition encompasses a broad but complete perspective to the term quoting Adams (UICN, 2006) the definition considered "the problem of the environmental degradation that so commonly accompanies economic growth, and yet the need for such growth to alleviate poverty". According to the United Nations (2005) sustainability involves three fundamental pillars, which are the following: economic, social, and environmental protection, as is claimed that these three pillars should maintain a balance and should be integrated between each other. Joshi (2010) postulates that in order to be sustainable and inclusive an innovation should add value to the life of people, be of uncompromising quality, be affordable and be scaleable. Thorpe (2007) defines sustainable development as "development that cultivates environmental and social conditions that will support human wellbeing indefinitely". Chick and Micklethwaite (2011) propose that to be meaningful the concept should consider a global ecology and nature as a whole not as something separate from the human beings.

Sustainability has historically been linked to biological sciences, environmentalists institutions, conservation organisations, and similar bodies, but according to Paehlke (2005), sustainability has a fundamental role in economics, public policy and ethics. The author proposes that sustainability should be linked to environmental ethics and improving the well being of people; and to social sciences in terms of creating and structuring institutions, services, policies and instruments, that are able to respond to their needs appropriately. Sustainability has always been an ethical concept and a desired state of economic and social outcomes, but it has not yet framed boundaries and clear goals that may identify a project as sustainable or not, or a concept of "sustainable" in which we may all agree (Paelke, 2005). What is clear about sustainability is that it involves the idea of a long process that would take lots of time to be established and that would require an important and difficult social learning process in order to change behaviours in all human beings. Manzini (2006) indicated that *"in the near future, we will have to learn to live (and hopefully to live better, in the case of most of the inhabitants of this planet) consuming fewer environmental resources and improving the quality of our living contexts"*

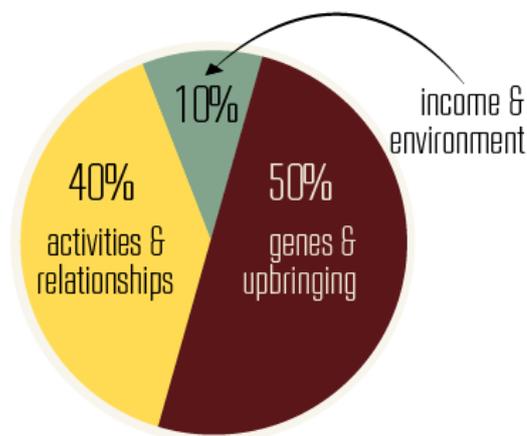
The following section relates collaborative organisations to the three main aspects of sustainability: social, economic, and environmental.

### **Social- Wellbeing and "From a less stuff world to sharing relationships"**

Over the past thirty years, economies, industrial production, and consumerist styles of life have been growing without paying attention to, human factors such as happiness and well-being. Hyper consumerism can eventually affect negatively individual's psychological and physical wellbeing (Hothi, 2008; Thorpe, 2010). Lord Richard Layard states that there are seven different factors that affect wellbeing.



Previously human well-being has been measured by financial criteria (Bostman and Rogers, 2010; Thackara, 2005). Researchers have proven that wellbeing is not related to the amount of material goods one person can afford and that “*money doesn’t equal happiness*”(Hughes,



2008).

“Although our genes influence about 50% of the variation in our personal happiness, our circumstances (like income and environment) affect only about 10%.As much as 40% is accounted for by our daily activities and the conscious choices we make”. Action for Happiness

A new concept or view of wellbeing emerges within creative communities and collaborative services. In this scenario people moving away from financial and material satisfaction and instead, are moving towards a "spiritual" wellbeing in which they value : *self-actualisation and development, relationships with family and friends, social cohesion and safety, personal security, work-life balance, education and culture* (Un *et al.*, 2006). Thackara (2005) claimed that in innovation we should look at a concept of wellbeing in which people are not valued for what they have, or what they may be able to buy, but about the quality of their relationships and experiences.

Wellbeing has a strong relationship with sustainability. According to the UICN, sustainability should be measured in terms of wellbeing improvement, looking closely at the impacts and changes it may cause in people in order live a happier and more fulfilling life.

The idea of improving wellbeing while consuming less goods and fewer natural resources comes as a contradictory statement to the industrial era, in which the access to goods and services reigned over the idea of wellbeing, "more wellbeing is equivalent to more consumption and less social quality" (EMUDE, 2006) . At present, the transition towards a sustainable

society promotes that sustainable and collaborative consumption; relationships with other people around us, and *diversity of life* are fundamental aspects to human wellbeing.

There is now a transition from consumerism, generating a shift in values. We are realizing that never-ending growth and excessive consumption of resources are not the path to follow towards a better life. Consequently, people are becoming more aware that consumerism and materialistic desire is impoverishing their relationships with their family, friends, neighbours and the planet linking self-interest and collective good (Bostman and Rogers, 2010).

Organizations, communities and individuals are looking for ideas that could bring people together with the purpose of changing the way they live, knowing that they can find solutions to problems by themselves, involving a high degree of participation, collaboration, and sharing of resources between each other. This has an impact in terms of happiness and quality of life in society (Cipolla, 2006). These types of activities are able to fulfil two basic human needs: individual freedom and collective security (Bostman and Rogers, 2010). Social psychology studies done in the area have proven that the sense of community, belonging networks, social cohesion and engagement, produces feelings of membership, shared emotional safety, belonging and identification, as well as integration and fulfilment of needs that have a positive impact in health (physical and mental) and well-being of populations and groups and that facilitates behavioural change (Pretty, 2007; Nesta, 2009). In conclusion, it is possible to create a rather obvious link between sustainable innovation, collaborative organizations, and improvement of social wellbeing.

### **Economic- Sustainable consumption and sharing resources**

Murray (2010) states that with the development of social innovations such as collaborative services, it is possible to identify the emergence of "a social economy" which include:

- The intensive use of distributed networks to sustain and manage relationships, helped by broadband, mobile, and other means of communication.
- Blurred boundaries between production and consumption.
- An emphasis on collaboration and on repeated interactions, care and maintenance rather than one-off consumption.
- A strong role for values and missions.

Technology, such as mobile applications and internet have an important role in the creation of social networks, global communities, and information hubs. Murray 2010; Villa and Mitchell, 2010; propose that the internet and new technologies such as smart phones are making it possible to connect people to a global sharing of knowledge, and connecting human interaction and mobility. Concurrently, the relevance and revival of values, of putting individuals in the centre or the process is playing an important role in reinforcing interaction, cooperation and collaboration. This system tends to be distributed between all actors and not centralized, users' and producers' boundaries are blurred and all participants have an active role accepting mass participation and mass use (Manzini, 2006; Burns et al. 2006; Murray, 2010). Distributed systems usually emerge from bottom up organizations, services that are accessible to all, but do require the participation and motivation of all to survive, making them an organic decentralized network of participants. Manzini (2005) proposes that through the idea of distributed networks and systems there is also the idea of a multi local society suggesting that local communities can be linked and connected to a bigger system through technology sharing knowledge. For example, the creation of a community garden in Paris was enabled with the instructions of other community gardens around other regions of France or Europe. However, we also need to accept that every community has their own identity and local roots and that the emergence of these

organic systems cannot be forced but also it is important that local networks that are as well connected globally.

A key component that comes out from collaborative organizations is the value of “sharing” resources and a new way of consumption based in use rather than ownership (Thackara, 2005). Belk (2009) defines sharing as “the act and process of distributing what is ours to others for their use and/or the act and process of receiving or taking something from others for our use”. With the emergence of technology and open source models sharing between individuals has come about naturally. It is now easy and cheap to connect to networks in order to swap, exchange, and share things (Roberts, 2011). Internet has reinvented new forms of trust and nowadays there is a huge market for efficient *peer-to-peer, producer and consumer, lender and borrower, seller and buyer* transactions that have been made possible through technology. These connections usually lead to a face to face encounter, in which the sharing can be, for example, sharing a spare room in your house through websites such as airbnb.com, or sharing your car (Zipcar) while you are at work, sharing bicycles ( Velib in Paris), or sharing offices and working spaces. Through this peer-to-peer model the chain of distribution of a product or service is being cut and advantages for producers and consumers are visible and tangible.

Collaborative organizations have also been innovative not only in the way they organize and solve their everyday problems but also about the ways in which they consume. “Enabling people to realize the enormous benefits of access to products and services over ownership, and at the same time save money, space, and time; make new friends; and become active citizens once again” (Bostman and Rogers, 2010). This type of exchange or sharing model is allowing people to rent, or book, things, having access to them at a reasonable price without the obligation of buying, but is also producing profits for those who are renting their possessions. . In 2010, a person renting his room in New York via Airbnb was making an average of \$1600 a month. Renters on Zilok are making over \$1000 a year by renting only one item such as a camera (Bostman and Rogers, 2010). The motivation may vary but is clear that by sharing models of collaborative organizations consumption can be decreased and values and missions are directing the path to a world of “less stuff and more people” (Thackara, 2005). This may be represent the emergence of a new social and economic era that is also sustainable.

### **Environmental Localisation**

Collaborative organizations suggest a rebirth of localisation rather than globalisation. . Globalisation and technology make possible the connections between extreme parts of the world in an instant. Western industries have taken advantage of cheap labour costs in India, Malaysia, China and our supermarkets are full of products from all over the world even though they are also being produced locally. The concept of localisation means we know the producer (*individuals buying from individuals*) . ‘ Local is good again” and this means that the products consumed haven’t travelled thousands of kilometers and emitted unimaginable amounts of CO2 (Bostman and Rogers, 2010). Local, custom-made products are valuable again and movements such as fair trade are able to flourish within mass production, globalization, and hyper consumption.

The new consumer’s mindset consists of :

- Simplicity: Consumers want to return to a traditional community market with honest relationships and strong ties with the producer.
- Traceability: Consumers want to know about the product and the story behind it.

- Participation: Consumers want to participate in the process.

Thackara (2005) concurs with this stating that “Authenticity, local context, and local production are increasingly desirable attributes in the things we buy and the services we use”; even if local does not mean simple, it is very important to understand the existing complexity in local systems and the nature of creating a service or a product which is rooted to its own cultural context. Interestingly, Bostman and Rogers (2010) call this a redistribution market, one where a product is not destined for individual use only but of sharing or exchange. This reduces consumption and purchase and *challenges the ideas of buy more and buy new*.

## **The Role of Design**

"The only important thing about design is how it relates to people" Papanek (1972)

The social role of the designer was probably first voiced in 1972, when Victor Papanek, invited designers to consider social and ecological aspects, such as resource depletion and poverty in order to create and develop products that were able to respond to human “real needs” in a sustainable manner. He criticized the design profession stating that design for mass production was not helping society, but harming it; the emergence of useless products, responded only to suggestions of marketing strategies, and had the only goal of making profits. To quote: “Much recent work, has satisfied only evanescent wants and desires, while the genuine needs of man have often been neglected by the designer”. He criticized the attention given to aesthetics instead of function, and the consequences of selling shallow and materialistic objects to society. He called for a responsible type of design not oriented in a mass production system, a type of design able to understand values and social capabilities of a culture and respond to them; a type of design able to respond to the needs of the third world countries and to the needs of people with disadvantages; a design that considered responsible use of natural resources, and had as a primary goal addressing social issues instead of promoting consumerism. Papanek was speaking in 1972, and even if his messages were powerful and claimed for change, the design world did not respond appropriately to this call (Margolin and Margolin, 2002). Despite the fact that there were some designers providing alternatives for a better world (Margolin, 2002), economical and political factors and events such as the industrial era, the power of globalization made reality, and hyper consumption at his best, designers and innovators got more and more involved in the creation and invention of products and technology (Thackara, 2005), ignoring environmental concerns and social consequences. Chick and Mickethwaite (2011) claim that the design profession has been “downgraded from being engaged with an understanding of ideas, and a powerful tool for social change, to the learning of mundane technical capabilities” and that design education has trained designers mostly for business which at the end means selling “stuff”.

A call for a new design agenda that addresses social and environmental problems has begun. McDonough (2000), considering sustainability in design, formulated the Hannover Principles, claiming that for a design to respect the rights of humanity and nature and to be sustainably developed, respecting relationships between “spirit and matter” and human communities. He proposed that the design discipline should be responsible for the consequences to human wellbeing and ecosystems as well as the co-existence between each other. The principles also reflected on the creation of products, to ensure long term value and minimizing waste and using natural energy.

Braunghart and McDonough (2002) called for a “rethinking in the way we make things” from a very ecological point of view, they encouraged designers and industries to create products and/or systems while analyzing and considering their lifecycle in a *cradle-to-cradle* manner. The idea proposed was later called “eco-design” and considered the whole lifecycle of a product before manufacture providing a lower environmental impact (Chick and Micklethwaite, 2011). Designers were being increasingly recognized as important players in strategy and innovation for business, design represented in alliance with creativity and marketing a great opportunity for wealth creation (Buchanan, 2004; Kay, 1993; Warren, 2002). There was and still is an increasing awareness of the value of design in business as a competitive advantage (Sharma *et al.* 2006). This represented a big change in the role of designers, because it offered an opportunity of being incorporated in business at an operational and strategic level and for designing systems and processes rather than only products. However, as stated by Sharma *et al.* (2006), it was not only designers but a multidisciplinary team that worked on “design process” for innovation. This also responded to the natural transition that globalization caused: a move from a manufacturing to a service society. In knowledge-based services alone, OECD employment increased from 50 million in 1970 to over 150 million by 2005 (Hutton, Design Council, 2010). Unfortunately this shift embedded the role of design in producing wealth and selling more material goods. Nevertheless, a different perspective on the role of the designer did emerge. Sustainable design ideas have emerged since the era of Papanek but didn’t receive a lot of attention until ecodesign became popular. Designers are entering a new era finding new ways of approaching environmental, social and consumption issues leading the way to a more sustainable society.

### **Designing for Social and Sustainable Innovation**

“Design for sustainability... cultivate ecological, economic and cultural conditions that will support human wellbeing indefinitely” Thorpe (2007).

At present, designers are increasingly more involved in society and business, but their role has been changing and designers are urged to find a balance between “the needs and desires of customers and the collective interest of society” (Thackara, 2005). In a world based less on consumption and more on relationships and experiences there are opportunities for designers to consider social and environmental factors by considering the consequences of design within the context of natural, industrial, and, cultural systems. This includes, considering material and energy flows in all designed systems; giving priority to human agency; delivering value to people-not delivering people to systems; treating “content” as something we do, not something we are sold; treating place, time, and, cultural difference as positive values, not as obstacles and focusing services, not on things, and refrain from flooding the world with pointless devices.

These considerations are very important because they embed all the social and environmental aspects into the practice. Morelli, (2007) agreed that designers should be positioned in the design of systems but with a “people centred approach” with the goal of leading systemic solutions “based on people, rather than machines”. This statement sounded like an agreement to the *need of designing networks, systems, platforms, and services that allow people to interact in a better way* proclaimed by Thackara (2005) which aims to meet users needs and aspirations and consider environmental and social impact (Chick and Micklethwaite, 2011) .

To achieve this, designers have started to change the creative process by employing a user centred approach, considering and analyzing needs first and then designing sustainable solutions (Chick and Micklethwaite, 2011). The RED team stated in 2006 that designers were capable of “forging connections between people and organisations, unlocking solutions and

addressing change” and that design knowledge, expertise and practical tools were to be used within different disciplines to provoke innovative and creative thinking. The designer can develop solutions based in local communities and cultures empowering individual and other social actors (service providers, institutions,..) to generate social quality. Designers should create platforms that enable solutions, their capabilities and skills allowing them to play an important role by using a user centred focus (Morelli, 2007) . The global company IDEO created an open source toolkit called Human Centred Design (HCD), HCD is defined as a process “that will help you hear the needs of constituents in new ways, create innovative solutions to meet these needs, and deliver solutions with financial sustainability in mind” (IDEO,2009). The toolkit aimed to inspire innovative solutions to social and environmental challenges all over the world with a particular scope: “design thinking”. This process aims to generate solutions through three lenses: desirability, feasibility, and viability. “Desirability”: discover the needs, desires, and motivations of the users. . The HCD process and tools usually respond to three phases “hear, create, and, deliver”, *hear* is the phase of finding and immersing with the users. It is intended to achieve a high level of understanding and empathy with the users or the community in order to really identify their needs. The phase of creation is focused on the idea of integrating the users into the process of idea generation, identifying opportunities and prototyping. The final phase of delivery is intended to assess solutions through “rapid revenue and cost modelling, capability assessment, and, implementation planning” to assure a successful implementation. Human centred design tools are intended to be used in multidisciplinary teams, not only in groups of designers, aim to co-design with people, act in a local context, and provide sustainable solutions. The design thinking methods are being largely utilized and embraced by designers in social and sustainable innovation.

### **A Changing Role for the Designer**

Social innovations such as collaborative organisations are emerging from the community and not a design result of a system or service. It is accepted that we are all designers and that design is in our human nature (Papanek 1972; Thackara 2005; Manzini, 2007) The innovations these communities are proposing offer different opportunities for design to maximize potential by providing a strategic perspective that can enhance efficiency, an appropriate communication message, and a system/service design that could transfer them from a social niche into a larger sustainable replicable solutions (EMUDE,2006). Manzini (2007) affirmed that designers getting involved in collaborative organisations show a change from the traditional design role with designers working in the community to become “solution providers”, with a visions and creative ideas of what could be possible using their ability to “materialize” them through design of processes and systems that also appeal to other social actors (local communities, companies, institutions, government, and others.)

The integration of contemporary society innovations such as collaborative services required designers with new skills to become integrated in these organisations, by generating collaboration between social actors, creating scenarios of shared visions, and co-designing services, products, and information. In these situations the designer instead of rather creating, had also the ability of supporting groups of people with potential ideas and solutions, guiding them towards expression of opinions and idea generation, facilitating interaction between all actors, and providing the facility and creative tools for visualizing in an imaginative manner. Tan (2009) studied the event Designs of the Times (Dott) 2007, which was an initiative in northeast of England that aimed to “drive sustainable development using design”. The event focused in five key priorities: health, education, mobility, energy and food. The idea was that designers work with communities in order to create innovative solutions. Tan (2009) explored

the different possible roles of designers participating on this event, and through her findings it was possible to identify that the designer took on many roles to drive sustainable innovation, including :

- A co-creator: incorporating people into the whole design process, rather than just designing for them.
- A provocateur: facilitating tools and devices to encourage actions and make innovation possible.
- A social entrepreneur: generating and detecting powerful ideas to improve peoples' lives and spreading them into bigger scenarios.
- A researcher: using design research (with mix of different other disciplines such as anthropology and marketing) to create people centred perspectives in order to innovate in products and services.
- A facilitator: Bringing out the best capabilities of people participating and supporting the finest ideas of everyone participating in order to “search for inclusive solutions and enable sustainable agreements” (Kaner *et al.*, 2007)
- A capability builder: “empowering others to utilize the ingenuity of design thinking, methodologies and approaches in effort to address some of society’s most complex issues” Tan (2009).
- A strategist: Planning actions and finding unaddressed issues to creatively devise opportunities for social sustainable innovation and development.

Tan’s research (2009) underpins the proposition that designers have been playing very different and important role, unlocking social and sustainable innovation adding widening the design discipline responding to contemporary social, economical, environmental, and political factors. Manzini (2006) stated that these new role for designers was a new model that takes “the social innovation as a kick off point and use one’s specific skills and abilities to indicate new directions for product and service innovation (in practice this involves moving in the opposite direction from that more frequently taken by designers i.e. where, starting by observing a technical innovation the designer proposes products and services that are socially appreciated)” and that the second very important stage is based on the designer and the community, and the importance of understanding and collaborating with the members in a peer to peer manner. Also, the typical company client, in this case may change to be a non-governmental organization (NGO) or a community of users ( Manzini 2006; Chick and Micklethwaite, 2011) . Finally, the designer involved in collaborative organizations is invited to work in a more complex manner, engaging users and other actors, because they have the ability able to influence positively in reveal social innovations such as collaborative organizations, guiding them into sustainable lifestyles.

One of the most important contributions of using design in the area of social and sustainable innovation is to be able to provide ideas and systems that are able to make sustainable actions accessible and fit into “existing patterns of behaviour” (Chick and Micklethwaite, 2011). . Designing a more sustainable user behaviour can be based on alternatives of “use rather than own” (Chick and Micketwaite, 2011; Bostman and Rogers, 2010) that can generate peer to peer sharing and lending systems.

## **Findings**

**The designer as a social entrepreneur, an empathic human being, and a researcher.**

Designers are now aiming to unlock social innovation and to use their capabilities in order to generate value for people, finding solutions that can have positive impacts on a wider scale. The increasing interest of designers to work and deliver more valuable solutions shows great new opportunity for applying their capability and creativity in order to tackle societies' real problems (Cottam *et al.*, 2005)

### **As a designer of systems and collective behaviours and as a communicator.**

Designers can play an important role in developing systems, within service design. Service design is an emergent discipline, which merges the design approach of interaction, environment, product, and experience design (Kimbell, 2009). It is a holistic new way of looking at services and its relation to the various stakeholders; and has emerged recently especially because of the recognition of value that design practices and design practitioners can give to organizations for boosting creativity and achieving innovation (Kimbell, 2009). Service design is necessarily directed to social good but the area presents a great opportunity for designers to develop sustainable systems. Chick and Micklethwaite (2011) proposed that design for sustainable and social innovation understand the user's needs without putting aside the needs of the environment. Bostman and Rogers (2010) recommended a design approach for collaborative consumption that includes:

- Fluidity of use: meaning that the service is more efficient, faster and easy to use. .
- Diversified access: people can reach it in different ways through "touchpoints"..
- Enhanced communications: the idea of providing a clear message that can represent the service as it is and that can facilitate an easy understanding between the users and the company through an empathetic message.

### **As a Creator of Connections and as an Actor Capable of Empowering People**

The designer needs to have the ability to develop solutions based in local communities that are able to forge connections and empower people. Relationships are key for service and the creation of communities.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This paper illustrates the importance of social innovation to the designer. It is innovation that is going beyond the development of high tech products to the creation and ideation of systems responding to human needs and tackling social issues. Technology and Internet platforms play an important role as a medium that connects people to these services or systems.

This research has focused on innovations in sustainable and collaborative services, where people are able to understand a problem, discover its causes, and ideate solutions understanding people's needs and motivations and considering social, environmental, and economic aspects. Collaborative organisations usually take the form of sustainable services, that aim to improve wellbeing by contact and interaction and the idea of communities; with new economical forms of trade such as sharing and exchanging ; and with high environmental consciousness such as locality and a leverage of consumption.

It was also important to understand design from a sustainable point of view, and how designers can push the sustainability agenda further. Design is changing; although it has been and still is

playing the role of creation of goods, designers are now recognized as important actors in business using design as a process aimed at conceptualization and visualization of communications, products, and business strategy, and services (service design).

Design has been mostly focused on finding sustainable green solutions, using materials that are environmentally friendly and implementing “cradle to cradle” ideas. At present, with the expansion of the design role and the interest in design processes and creative thinking there are new roles for designers in social policy and social entrepreneurship.

The aim of this paper was to understand how designers can generate and provide value to collaborative organizations and which specific capabilities can the designer bring to social and sustainable innovation. The findings conclude that a designer in sustainable innovation can have a vision of business feasibility, not just focusing on the goal of financial viability but to include the value that the service generates for the community by managing teams of people and facilitating process and tools that can exploit their creativity and their vision, designing efficient, appealing, and productive services which are as simple and natural as possible. However, one of the most important aspect of designers involved in social and sustainable innovation is to be able to have a holistic vision examining the causes of the societal issues and create systems that could tackle the causes rather than the consequences.

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