

Position Paper for User Interface Design and International Development

Global Innovative Design for Social Change

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Executive Summary

“Massive investments in biomedical research in the rich countries, more than \$70 billion, largely overlook the challenges of tropical diseases such as malaria.”¹

And this \$70 billion is only for biomedical research, just a mere fraction of research dollars spent in these countries. In the past several decades, innovation and research are in the hands of the developed countries. We all wait to see what is next after the iPod. Most of our creative designers spend their energy on coming up with the Next Big Thing, a perfect gadget, for the people who use it either for entertainment or making their work life easier. However, innovative design should reach beyond borders to find innovative solutions for the people overall, especially for the ones that the innovation never reaches, not just for the ones that could afford iPods and alike.

Until recently, finding solutions to the problems, either health or wealth-related, of four billion people who live under \$2 a day were only in the agendas of United Nations, World Bank, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), foundations, donor nations, aid agencies, national governments, and other non-profit organizations. Recently there is a monumental change in thinking who these people are and what they are capable of. Instead of thinking about them as the poor people who need help, the shift is now towards seeing them as active consumers who would participate in identifying opportunities and creating innovative solutions to answer their needs, creating unique products that can sell well in the global markets, improving their lifestyles which will help them leap forward in the economic pyramid. The core emphasis is shifting towards innovation. Innovation is about reinventing business processes, life practices, new ways of solving problems, and building entirely new markets that meet untapped customer needs. It involves researching, observing, identifying, selecting, executing the right ideas, prototyping, deploying, retesting, and measuring the impact on social life, specifically related to health, agriculture, energy, and infrastructure.

As the leading university in creativity and out-of-the-box thinking and having a great history in innovative design and social research, The New School is engaged in various national and international projects that target this very important challenge we all face today. The emphasis is on bringing together the expertise from different academic disciplines to conduct global studies in

¹ Sachs, Jeffrey D.: The End of Poverty: How We Can Make It Happen in Our Lifetime, page 63

innovative design. We see these activities mostly at Parsons The New School for Design, India-China Institute, and The New School International Affairs program. At the workshop, I will present a sample set of these studies, conducted by students and faculty from different disciplines, in close collaboration with the local people. These studies emphasize developing socially conscious design solutions that take into account the needs of diverse communities. In addition to these student and faculty projects, there are seminars and exhibits conducted by The New School throughout the academic year. Last year, The New School hosted two major events: “Design for Change” and “Games for Change”, which brought in top research and design leaders in these fields to discuss the challenges we face today.

Topics of Interest for Discussion at the Workshop

I am very interested in participation in the discussions regarding:

- Applying principles of Development Economics to make individual diagnosis to understand the selected region’s needs
- How do we engage local people to participate in design?
- How do we address the two issues in relation to design?:
 - Needs: health, education, food and shelter
 - Sustainable economy: agriculture, technology
- Can “Innovation injection” start a sustainable economy and/or solve a “needs” problem?
- How do we measure our “design successes”?
- How do multidisciplinary teams work together?
- How do we promote and implement “innovative design for social change”?
 - Two concentration areas:
 - Improving socio-economic structure: education, health, food and shelter (e.g. Unilever (Hindustan Lever Limited) started Project Shakti. Created income generating capabilities for rural women in India by providing micro-enterprise opportunity, and improved living standards through health and hygiene awareness.
 - Creating commercially viable business activities (e.g. AMUL: India’s milk brand started with a seed capital from the Swiss Government, now a worldwide brand – created income for millions of farmers.)

I am looking forward to be a participant in this workshop and share The New School’s experiences in this field and learn from other participants. There is so much to understand and learn in this field and I would like to be part of the community that brings this important topic in the agendas of designers worldwide.

P.S. I can bring also my independent research on this topic that covers a wide range of case studies, designs, and background literature, multidisciplinary in nature.