

The Need for Socially Responsible Design

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has overturned the normal world order of life. The pandemic, for some groups in the society, has presented changes in the ways how they are living their life, but for others it presents an additional real life suffering. The communities that suffer more are the vulnerable groups, who are marginalized, underserved, underrepresented, and are struggling in fulfilling their basic needs. This has become a serious problem for a civilized society. Design as a method for finding solutions and innovations in overcoming problems in meeting the needs of human life is required to act immediately that is to be fully involved to provide real solutions. This socially responsible design was raised to be the focus of the discussion for us in order to be aware of, pay more attention to, and be proactive in both research and practice to provide solutions and design innovation for such communities. This is done by conducting this literature study aimed to describe the development of socially responsible design, both in concept and procedure, the areas it handles, and the works it produces. In the final section, recommendations are presented for all of us, so that we all can participate in the great work of socially responsible design.

Key words: Pandemic, design, socially responsible design.

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic is an extraordinary disaster that futurists and writers of futuristic fiction works have never imagined before. The number of victims is still increasing and there is no sign that the pandemic will end soon. The current situation becomes a necessity for an immediate solution. This unusual situation prompted a change in the focus of this keynote speech piece. This piece was supposed to be talking about Arts, Craft, and Design and their relationships to the digital world and technology, especially artificial intelligence (AI), which is the topic of the ARCADESA #4 seminar in 2020. However, the topic of this paper has shifted even though this paper does not intend to deny the importance of information and communication technology (ICT) and AI in people's lives at present and in the future. There have been many papers written by experts who believe that IT and AI are the factors that will determine the shape of life for individuals and the society in the future.

Design that was the outcome of the industrial revolution 1.0, of course, cannot be separated from technology and the industrial world. At every appearance of a design idea, it is always questioned whether scientifically and technically this idea can be realized. Therefore, technology is already attached to a product when it is created. Furthermore, when the product is mass-produced, the product becomes a part of the industry. Therefore, without technology, the design industry does not even exist. In the industrial revolution 4.0, there have been many fundamental changes; life and business will move into digital platforms; types of works will greatly change; some may cease to exist, and new ones will emerge; education forms will change. Subsequently, data and information become important

resources for competition; all parties, whether they are individuals, institutions, or organizations, are required to be able to be versatile, proactive, and quickly adapt to new challenges in response to changes brought about by advances in information technology (Kasali, R., 2018). In a situation in which many things move quickly with highly dynamic changes, it is certain that design has an increasingly important role in supporting human life.

Another reason why I do not talk about design related to the digital world and technology along with the AI that is in it is simple. It is because this field is not my expertise; therefore, there is not much knowledge or thoughts that I can share or convey about the subject. For this, I hope you all can understand.

Returning to the current pandemic problem faced by human beings across the world, public health experts say that the pandemic will not end soon; these experts have also predict that the consequences of this pandemic will still linger for some years to come. At the end of September, the Covid-19 pandemic had a tremendous effect on the health condition of a very large number of people around the world and the caused the decline in the people's economy. This did not only occur in some countries but in almost all countries in the world. In Indonesia, the pandemic has also become an enormous health and economic disaster; people who are exposed to the virus had reached over 287 thousand people while the death toll had reached 10,740 people (data obtained on 30/09/2020). The pandemic that has lasted for more than 8 months has devastated the country's economy as it has caused a negative economic growth, and Indonesia is expected to enter a period of economic recession very soon.

In this pandemic situation, the question is how design can contribute to alleviate this. In many literatures, it is said that design is a means of solving problems in human life by providing accurate ways to fulfill people's needs. Will design be the mighty one to help mankind to mitigate the Covid-19 pandemic and to continue their life after the pandemic is gone? Especially, will design be able to help the marginalized, underserved, underrepresented community groups, and those who are struggling in fulfilling their basic needs?

The pandemic has clearly changed human life in the present, and it will surely in the future. It seems that these changes are very significant. In his book *Masa Depan Dunia Setelah Covid-19* (the Indonesian version of a book entitled *The Future after COVID: Futurist Expectations for Changes, Challenges, and Opportunities After the COVID-19 Pandemic*), Schenker, a futurist from America, states that this pandemic will change how society works and lives, and it will change the forms of various industries in the future (Schenker, 2020).

By citing reliable sources, such as the Norwegian Research Council, news from the BBC, and an international research institute, Bill and Melanie Gates Foundation, on 22 September 2020 Kompas (an Indonesian national newspaper) wrote that the pandemic had knocked out the minorities, marginalized, children, and women who had been the community groups that had suffered the most from the pandemic. The pandemic had also worsened the inequality between races, and the condition of those in areas of conflicts or wars. It was also added in the article that the pandemic had hampered the pace of achieving the sustainable development goals (SDG's), and it had also contributed to the addition of

millions of people who had fallen into poverty and other millions who had become even miserably poorer. Several days earlier, which were 3 days in a row from 14 to 16 September 2020, this newspaper published news about the difficulties faced by children with special needs during this pandemic.

To solve all of these, will the society be able to put their hope in the discipline of design to participate in solving these problems and provide real solutions by creating innovations in produced goods, services, and processes for the marginalized groups? This is a momentum to better understand the roles that can be played by government or non-government and private institutions or organizations, communities, small community groups, and individuals who are motivated to develop socially responsible designs.

Socially Responsible Design

Within the last two decades, design has shown a very rapid development; therefore, designers nowadays do not only work in studios or in research and development offices, but they also have crossed into the business world and are involved with many other experts to jointly create products, services, and systems to support human life. Friedman (2019) followed by Meyer and Norman (2020) discuss design education in the 21st century and asserts that designers nowadays are playing an increasingly important role, not only designing conventional products but also working outside the boundaries of their studios into the world of business, commerce, health, and even the environment. Meyer and Norman have grouped the challenges to design into 4 categories, in which every group contains 11 challenges that have been presented by Friedman. The four challenges are the performance challenges, systemic challenges, contextual challenges, and global challenges.

The discussion in this paper does not lead to this direction, but it attempts to underline that design with its ability to combine work that applies a rational-analytical and creative-synthesis mindset and has an orientation that is human-centered has been able to open a wider horizon. Therefore, it is inevitable that the design also includes areas with social dimensions. Let us take a little look at the history of socially responsible design.

Victor Papanek (1923 - 1998) was a pioneer in socially responsible design and gave a priority to design for the interests of people with limitations in terms of economic capacity and physical ability, or those who did not receive attention from the public and those who were marginalized. One of his harsh criticisms was against the practice of design that serves the interests of modern industry and consumption. These are the industry and consumption that have created the Kleenex culture, a culture that tends to utilize disposable objects. Papanek also strongly disagreed with unsafe designs when they were used, designs with excessive visual appearance, designs that could not be adapted to their users, and those that did not have real functions. For Papanek, designers should have social awareness and responsibility and provide designs that were in favor of marginalized groups of society (Papanek, 1973, 1983, 1995, Triatmodjo, S., 2014 and Devey, 2005).

Papanek himself focused on making people's daily necessities, and in the course of his career he had created many design works including *Design for the 3rd world*, *Design for Teaching and Training Devices for the Retarded, the Handicapped, and the Disabled*, *Design*

for Medicine, Surgery, Dentistry, and Hospital Equipment, Design for Experimental Research, System Design for Sustaining Human Life Under Marginal Condition, and Design for Breakthrough Concept (Lee, 2007). Many of Papanek's projects and thoughts have been written in his two books, namely *Design for The Real World* (1974) and *Design for Human Scale* (1983), and in his many other books.

Furthermore, in 1994 Papanek published a book entitled *The Green Imperative*. This book became one of the icons of the Green Design. Papanek himself said that this book was a form of designer's ecological responsibility for the much environmental destructions on earth caused by the use of equipment and development by humans, in which designers were involved. Green Design as a movement emerged in the 1990s and was influenced by two books on the environment, namely *Small is Beautiful* written by E.F. Schumacher (1973) and *Our Common Future: Report of the World Commission on Environment & Development*, a report written by GH Brundtland (1987). The world of design has answered this environmental problem in many design concepts and forms such as recycled materials, energy saving or renewable energy, reducing carbon gas emissions, appropriate technology, and many others. All of these have been aimed at reducing the malevolent impacts of the industry and excessive consumption on earth. Ultimately, these design concepts have been aimed at achieving sustainable development, which means to maintain the sustainability of human life on earth.

Mr. And Mrs. Margolin, design researchers, wrote an article in 2002 about Social Design as a design practice and research methodology that focuses primarily on designing social services. However, the application of this idea can be extended to the designs for education, health, and technology systems appropriate for all citizens. The new development offered is the design that enters the realm of social service design and not merely product design. According to Margolin, at the time the social design model was more needed than product design in general. For this reason, they appealed to designers, design researchers, professionals, and design educators to pay attention to this and find ways to realize it (Margolin, Margolin, 2002).

The model offered by Margolin received positive responses from many parties, especially from designers at the UK Design Council, Burns and his colleagues. The idea of Burns and his colleagues is known as transformation design. It started with a project he was working on to redesign a prison. The concept of transformative design is a design practice that is more aimed at creating a service pattern than at creating an object. The creation of a new service pattern is intended to bring about a societal transformation. This concept can be applied to radically change the existing public services in community organizations as well as progressive social achievement targets in private companies by applying a human culture-based design approach (Burns et al., 2006). Burns was the head of the RED unit at the UK Design Council. Together with experts from various disciplines and policy makers, he worked on many projects that applied process design as a means of working collaboratively with design users that included students, teachers, patients, nurses, prisoners, and prison wardens. This was done in order to make the right solution for the improvement of services in schools, clinics, and prisons.

What needs to be highlighted in their study is the recognition of 6 characteristics of transformative design, namely: 1) defining and redefining the brief; 2) collaborating between disciplines; 3) employing participatory design techniques; 4) building capacity and not dependency; 5) designing beyond traditional solutions; and 6) creating fundamental change; (Burns, et al., 2006).

In the early 2000s the green design and sustainable development movement encouraged the emergence of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) concept. The major causes of the destruction of our living environment are the exploitation of nature, industrialization, and excessive consumption. It is in this context that the corporation is the party that is most responsible for the damage done on earth. CSR is a concept that emphasizes that an organization or company has a social responsibility to all its stakeholders that can be comprised of consumers, employees, shareholders, communities and the environment, and they are all involved in all aspects of the company operations, economy, social and environment.

A study conducted by Davey, C.L. et al (2005) on the relationship between Socially Responsible Design (SRD) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). This research was conducted out of a suspicion that a lot of CSR were carried out solely as a company window dressing. To be able to see the relationship between the two more clearly, namely the presence of the essence of SRD when a company runs a CSR program, Davey subsequently compiled a new model for SRD. In this model, SRD is expanded that is not only to cover products, services, and environment, but also to include systems such as government, commerce, health, and others. Davey succeeded in compiling a model with 8 main issue points, namely: 1) **Government**: more responsive & representative, improved efficiency, 2) **Economic policy**: sustainable and responsible, 3) **Fair Trade**: support for workers' rights and reduced exploitation of poor economies, 4) **Ecology**: reduced pollution and environmental impact and use of green technologies, 5) **Social Inclusion**: reduced social exclusion, reduced discrimination, 6) **Health**: improved delivery of service, improved patient experience, 7) **Education**; improved quality of resources, improved delivery of resources, and 8) **Crime**: reduced incidence of crime, reduced fear of crime. The model illustrates the problem domains, namely: government, business and commerce, and non-government organizations. Furthermore, it is also illustrated that in each domain there is a locus where the issue is present. These loci are local, regional, national, and global. The model presented is interesting to discuss because according to Davey, the potential in SRD can be seen using this model and how progress can be carried out more firmly than with the concept of CSR alone.

Another study conducted by Lee, Y. (2007) explored design participation. In this research, Lee proposes new roles that designers can play, including the role as a generator, facilitator, and developer to produce human life support utility, be it objects, environment, and systems. Lee mentions that these roles are the designer's tactics in working and developing effective quick action and working closely with other parties to solve design problems in different spaces and situations. The first tactic is the designer as a developer that works together with the design community. The second tactic is the designer as a facilitator who collaborates with people in the real world. Finally, the third tactic is the designer as a generator who collaborates with professionals in an abstract space. In

essence, these roles are played in order to facilitate innovative collaborations and create platforms for socially inclusive design practices.

Lee's research on Design Participation was an attempt to increase users' participation in the design process. The findings of his research show that the most important thing is that designers can work flexibly, that is, changing the roles they play according to the situation they are facing. The main duty of the designer is to create communication channels and a creative design process (Lee, 2007).

Furthermore, Sangiori states that designers for services are increasingly being hired by many organizations and communities to drive or encourage the transformation process of these institutions. It is important to contribute to society in achieving its transformative goals and it demands a high degree of responsibility on the part of the designer. In his article *Transformative Service and Transformation Design*, Sangiori has identified 7 key principles that mark the transformative practice of design in an institution or community, namely: 1) Active Citizen, 2) Intervention at community scale, 3) Building capacities and project partnerships, 4) Redistributing power, 5) Building infrastructures and enabling platforms, 6) Enhancing imagination and hope, and 7) Evaluating success and impact. These seven principles are the characteristics and conditions for carrying out the transformation practice accurately (Sangiori, 2010).

Recent developments show that social-design work is becoming increasingly complex and networked. Doorst states that in the practice of social-design, the designers are facing complex problematic situations, for example the Redesigning Psychiatry Program case in the Netherlands. In this complex situation, because it involves many parties with many interests, designers can no longer be conventional, that is, with an instant problem solving, but they need to view the design as a *neoteny* that the design result is an ongoing process and along its journey it is able to adapt from time to time to changes in the existing situations. The key is in the ability of the design process to be resilient and adaptive (Doorst, K, 2019).

The next case is open design, which is a design movement that emerged in Europe. Open design is a movement that is interpreted as granting copyright designs to the public. In this way, the designer has given permission if the design is freely distributed and documented by the public, and the designer also allows if the design will be modified and diversified (van Abel, 2011). This activity is carried out online; therefore, it can be done by groups or people who live in different places and do not know each other. Sharing knowledge between experts and amateurs is done not for profit but for the common good. With this open design van Abel et al implement several strategies to open up all possibilities in developing the broad design, such as seeking inclusiveness, involving other people, building bridges between different positions, such as between North-South, old-young, traditional-experimental. Open design followers are often referred to as possibilarians, who represent a sharing culture, and this is what makes it the core of open design (Marleen, 2011, in van Abel 2011). Open design also allows the sharing of creative skills between developed and developing countries for the benefit of humanity, as well as against the sophistication of global product consumerism (Atkinson, 2011 in Van Abel 2011).

Open design is jointly managed by Creative Commons Netherlands Premsela, and it consists of the Waag Society, Nederland Kennisland, and The Institute for Information Law (IViR) at the University of Amsterdam. In the present day, there are several branches of this institution that work in several countries outside of the Netherlands, such as Fab Lab in Indonesia, which is based in Yogyakarta.

It is important to state that design is an activity closely related to ideology because basically the designer embeds their values, attitudes, and philosophy when carrying out design practices. This statement is conveyed by the originator of the critical design movement, Bruce Cadle and Simon Kuhn (2013). This movement focuses on the social role of design and seeks to challenge the dominant models of production and consumption by offering alternative perspectives and insisting that the current values are unsatisfactory. Affirmative design, which has been around so far, tends to make products in accordance with the cultural, social, and technical expectations of the community. Critical design criticizes affirmative design by making products that contain alternative ideologies or values. Critical theory aims to "free human beings from the state that enslaves them" and to promote emancipation and enlightenment in order for the agents to be aware of hidden forces; therefore, they can be free from the grip of these forces. Critical theory is mainly a critique of ideology as well as critical design which is centered on relationships between design and ideology.

In this section I would like to underline Cadle & Kuhn's (2013) statement that design contains an ideology of the person or society who created it. Therefore, design in favor of something that is social in nature is an ideological activity of the designer or the user group. On the other hand, the ideological activity according to Poynor (Poynor, 2003, in Cadle & Kuhn, 2013) is based on the philosophy, values, and attitudes embedded in themselves.

The several paragraphs above have outlined how socially responsible design continues to grow and develop. It widens in the scope of its design object, develops in its character and principles of design execution, and also grows in its implementation. In Sanders' design methodology, through practice mapping and design research, he shows several areas of research and design practice that can be said to have social content, such as Participatory design research, Generative Design, Scandinavian Design, Human-centered Design, and Critical Design (Sanders, 2006, Sanders and Stappers, 2008). Through the depiction on the map, it can be understood that the presence of socially responsible design (SRD) in the design discipline has been recognized in terms of epistemology, ontology and axiology.

Conclusion

From the above presentation, it can be concluded that the presence of SRD research and practice have been recognized in the design discipline and have produced many real products in society, not only in the Western world from which references are taken, but also in Indonesia and in many other countries. However, the author still feels the need to re-emphasize it in this forum that the world needs the work of SRD in research and practice as much as non-SRD works. Especially, during this Covid-19 pandemic the need for it is increasing especially for all the marginalized people or groups, who are underserved,

underrepresented, and poor. They long for the “blessings” of design solution. I am inviting all parties to be able to agree with, popularize, and practice a more socially responsible design. This invitation is not only addressed to individuals, but also to social communities (NGOs), government and private institutions, higher education institutions with its Tridharma, as well as media companies.

As a closing, I would like to return the discussion to the current topic of the seminar, namely the relationship between art, craft and design with technology and the digital world. I have a strong faith that digital technology and capabilities can be parts of design, both in the process and in the product, to produce the more socially responsible designs.

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