

# Local Impact Design: *best global practices*

How can design have a positive impact in local communities and economies?

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Master and Ph.D in Industrial Design and Multimedia Communication at Politecnico of Milano. Work as designer and researcher with a special focus on local impact design and social innovation, use the action-research method developing projects that merge research, teaching and professional activities. Worked in different countries: Italy, Germany, Netherlands, Brazil and India. Collaborate with several private and public institutions, such as Politecnico of Milano, Poli.design, Ard&nt Institute, GD Goenka University of New Delhi, teaching and developing international and national researches.

## Abstract

How can design have a positive impact in local communities and economies? Several groups, universities, and incubators are now working in local impact projects all over the world, creating local brands and sustainable productive chains with projects that are merging teaching, research and professional activities.

This paper evaluates some local impact projects in different countries and continents such as Brazil, India and Ghana delineating a methodology that can be replicated.

Local Impact Design is a branch of design practice that is now ready to emerge from the praxis to the theory in order to share tools and methods for the development of a global network.

**Keywords:** Design, local impact, India, Brazil.

## Resumen

¿Cómo puede el diseño tener un impacto positivo en las comunidades y economías locales?

Varios grupos, universidades e incubadoras ahora están trabajando en proyectos de impacto local en todo el mundo, creando marcas locales y cadenas productivas sostenibles con proyectos que están fusionando la enseñanza, la investigación y las actividades profesionales.

Este documento evalúa algunos proyectos de impacto local en diferentes países y continentes, como Brasil, India y Ghana, delineando una metodología que se puede replicar.

Local Impact Design es una rama de la práctica del diseño que ahora está lista para emerger de la práctica a la teoría para compartir herramientas y métodos para el desarrollo de una red global.

**Palabras clave:** Diseño, impacto local, India, Brasil.

## Introducción

**H**ow can design have a positive impact in local communities and economies?

To answer this question one must first define what design for local impact is. Design for local impact is a branch of design standing between Social Design and Design for Social Innovation, that in the latest ten years is emerging from practice to theory.

Several groups, universities and incubators are working in this direction all over the world, creating local brands and sustainable productive chains with projects that are merging teaching, research and professional activities.

These projects are becoming a driving force for the local development of productive communities by allowing them to progress valuing local traditions and cultures, and create economic value and new jobs.

Data from Brazil, Mexico, India and Ghana analyzed in this study are meant to be preliminary to a larger study aimed to define a replicable methodology in the design learning process and design for local impact to be used by universities, incubators, and research centers.

### Design context and theoretical references

It is important to contextualize the theoretical framework of the concept of “design for local impact” upon which is based the controversy between social design and design for social innovation and between theories of local development and territorial capital.

The structural differences between social design and design for social innovation are best outlined by Ezio Manzini who defines social design as “a design activity that deals with problems that are not dealt with by the market or by the state, and in which the people involved do not normally have a voice” and the design for social innovation as “everything that expert design can do to activate, sustain and orient processes of social change toward sustainability” (Manzini, 2015, 65).

Cameron Tonkiewise in his Paper “Is Social Design a Thing” seeks to overcome the idea of social design as a traditional design action applied to social contexts and to consider social design as a social activity, leading to socioprotection based on new networks paradigms in collaboration with governments and non-governmental organizations, to respond to expressed and unexpressed social needs by creating a social change.

At the same time, in the theoretical debate on sustainable design, there is a branch that investigates the relationship between design and territory and how design can influence local development and trigger community-based innovation processes.

At the Politecnico in Milan, authors such as Giuliano Simonelli, Marina Parente, Stefano Maffei and Beatrice Villari made important contributions to the design for territories, based on concepts of local development, social and territorial development, human capital enhancement and communities of practice, collaboration with local districts, regional innovation systems, territorial clusters.

These concepts, that involve an action research methodology in the field of local impact design, are the starting point of many of the projects analyzed in this paper and the basis for defining the concept of local impact design.

The theme of Social Impact is gaining ground in the international debate on new forms of local development involving collaboration between private investors, public administrations and third sector entities.

Social Impact is defined by the center of social impact of the Michigan University “A significant, positive change that addresses a pressing social challenge.”<sup>1</sup>

“It means the consequences to human populations of any public or private actions that alter the ways in which people live, work, play, relate to one another, organize to meet their needs and generally cope as members of society. The term also includes cultural impacts involving changes to the norms, values, and beliefs that guide and rationalize their cognition of themselves and their society.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Social Innovation Academy: Social impact definition, Accessed Jun 24 2019 <http://www.socialinnovationacademy.eu/project/social-impact-definition/>

According to the GIIN<sup>3</sup> definition, the term “impact investing” refers to the realization of investments in organizations, companies and funds that are linked to measurable and intentional social goals that can at the same time generate a return on investment for investors.

Projects of territorial enhancement, creation of territorial brands, exploitation of local businesses, creation of business networks are the actions in the design projects for the local impact that generate a social impact by potentially creating projects that can be funded by the impact investing world.

## Global research Context

This section defines the context of research that involves several countries and continents and different types of organization. The selection criteria of the cases are: geographical distribution in different continents often in emerging countries, the involvement of a university or educational institution in design, the presence of real companies involved in the process.

In this paper, case studies occurred in four different continents: Europe, South America, Asia and Africa involving processes of design, training and action research.

The qualitative analysis of such studies allows not only to compare methodologies and practices, but also to evaluate theoretical contributions on design by junior authors from different countries belonging to the specific field of not always known internationally.

In particular, the theoretical framework of this project brings together some concepts on design and design education in India with those on social and sustainable design and the experience of incubators in Italy and Brazil.

The theoretical roots of Indian design are described in the Indian report written in the 1958 by Sr. Charles and Ray

Eames outlining the features characters of a Design Institute adapted to the Indian reality.<sup>4</sup>

The Ahmedabad Declaration on Industrial Design for Development<sup>5</sup> of 1979 is also a key moment of the discussion on design in developing countries addressing the pitfalls of design for development and making recommendations for design policies, government action, international cooperation, and access to information, education, and training.

In the Balam idea of design as interface between tradition and innovation (1998), lies the definition of contemporary Indian design, that has its strong roots in the rich iconographic and craft tradition but is also projected in a global, interconnected world with cross cultural contaminations from other countries such as Italy in this case.

According to Margolin<sup>6</sup>, design for development needs to broaden its brief from an emphasis on poverty alleviation to include the strategic creation of products for export, and thus the project has to focus on the development of exporting processes aimed at creating job opportunities locally.

Bonsiepe<sup>7</sup> has consistently urged developing countries to include design in their manufacturing sector to better integrate in development theories multiple factors of trade, technology transfer, and cultural expansion that affect the condition for development. Design education may contribute in the progress of a country or a region by:

- Creating a connection between design students and productive realities making the students interacting with real projects with a real impact
- Identifying and using visual elements of visual local identity to improve the value of local products and promote the country

Design acts as mediator and orchestra director of the new value constellation, generating value for all stakeholders, not just customers.

2 Quizlet, Social Impact Assessment flash cards, Accessed Jun 24 2019 <https://quizlet.com/331593398/social-impact-assessment-flash-cards/>

3 The GIIN Investor Forum is the largest global convening of leaders in the impact investment industry.

4 Charles Eames, (1958) *The Indian Report*, New Delhi, National Institute of Design.

5 Singanapalli Balam, (2009), *Design in India: The Importance of the Ahmedabad Declaration*, Boston: The MIT Press

6 Victor and Sylvia Margolin. (2002). A 'Social Model' of Design: Issues of Practice and Research, *Design Issues*, vol. 18, No. 4.

7 Gui, Bonsiepe (2004). *Peripheral Vision*. (Rio de Janeiro: Escola Superior de Desenho Industrial) (ESDI).

In Brazil design is also an instrument for social change, developing new methodologies and educational frameworks.

Important is the experience in Brazil of the ITCP (Incubadoras tecnológicas de cooperativas populares), organizations acting in the universities to gather students from different faculties to start cooperatives involving of people with low income.

A group of students from the Faculty of Economy, Psychology, Agronomy, Design and Engineering work together to develop projects of local development in a community with low income and popular companies, starting from the creation of business model and ending with the commercialization of the products. These way students are involved in a real project and can transfer the academic knowhow to a real situation, contributing to improve the quality of life of cooperative workers.

The contribution of design in this process is to help defining a business model, the corporate identity of the company, and the products through processes of co-design, and organizing the participation in fairs and sales events.

Most of the analyzed projects are effective in emerging countries, sometimes in connection with the global market sometimes focused on the internal market. The Indian perspective of design for development is really interesting because it preserves and promotes the local identity and improves the manufacturing sector.

In the Brazilian approach on design and education, design students work in collaboration with local companies to improve the competitiveness of local territories.

## Case studies

Four case studies were selected in really different settings but sharing the idea that design educators and students can improve the social condition by interacting with territories and local communities.

The cases involve different universities and institutions such as Politecnico of Milan, An-halte Schule of Dessau, Gd Goenka University of New Delhi, the Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie of Sao Paulo and works with students at university and senior students in Brazil,

India, Africa and Germany.

The features that make these case studies similar and significant for the local impact are:

- Involvement of different actors: students, producers, and local communities that together can accomplish mobilization and innovation processes
- Working with companies that in some cases are also social enterprises and the generation of new branches and jobs
- Promotion of local cultural identity
- The launch of businesses in new markets and of commercial opportunities

Cases will be analyzed at a qualitative level to enhance their common replicability.

### Name

GD Goenka University

### Address

GD Goenka Education City, Gurgaon Sohna Road, Sohna, Haryana, India

### Website

<http://www.gdgoenkauniversity.com>

### Years of activity/Foundation

2013

### Context

GD Goenka is a private University providing recognized degrees in Bachelors, Masters, and PhD programs. The university has 10 schools including Engineering, Management, Design, Architecture, Humanities, Hospitality, Communication, Law, Medical and allied sciences, and Education.

### Number of workers

Full time faculty of the entire university: approximately 150

### Number of users/beneficiaries

Students—about 2000

### Number of volunteers

Visiting professors: > 20

### Overview of the organization

The GD Goenka Education City is set on 60 acres near the high-tech Millennium City, Gurgaon and the National



**Image 1.** Flying carpets project, Students and Teachers from GD Goenka University New Delhi

Capital Region New Delhi. The dogma of GD Goenka University is that novel ideas in the areas of teaching, learning, research and training are pivotal to forge good students.

The University goes beyond the classroom to teach how to use education to solve real-life problems.

Focusing on providing quality education, GD Goenka University has engaged the best and brightest faculty to guide students, and broaden their perspective. This is done by creating systematic opportunities for students to interact with a broad range of industries and service sectors. This provides multinational companies the opportunity to learn about GD Goenka University and recruit its students. The University has the best of facilities, equipment including laboratories, dedicated video conference facilities, virtual learning facilities and fully equipped conference rooms. The hardware is superbly backed up by able counselors who can inspire students to express themselves.

#### **Most important project**

GD Goenka university is engaged in many programs with each of its schools, including research projects, industry projects, and collaborations with industry as well as academic institutions- both from India and abroad.

The School of Fashion & Design established a live project with an Italian firm Canova-home, in which design students visited Italy and participated in creating design ideas for carpets and rugs to be sold in the Italian market.

In the Canovahome project Indian students worked with the head of the company, its de-signer, and also members of the faculty of Politecnico Di Milano and GD Goenka University. The students visited the carpet manufacturers in India to understand the manufacturing process, and learned to make the carpets as per the manufacturing specifications with the assistance of the carpet design software 'Galaincha'. The students with the help of the faculty guides visited retail centers, museums, exhibitions, and other areas of cultural interest in Milan, Florence, Venice, and Turin. The team focused then on generating new designs at the Politecnico campus under the faculty guidance. The concepts were given feedback by the company head and the chief designer of Canovahome, and helped the students to final-ize their ideas in the correct direction. Finally a carpet design workshop was held with a great success. Over 15 students presented their designs, and 5 designs were selected to be sampled by the Italian company to show to their clients. The finalized designs were sampled in Bhadohi (India), and Kathmandu (Nepal). These carpet designs were then displayed at the Canovahome showroom in Milan. The students who participated in the workshop were given certificates of attendance by Canovahome, along with a money prize. In addition the students of Communication, Interior, and Product design at GD Goenka university developed a set of solutions to communicate, exhibit, and retail the Canovahome products.

### **Relevant results**

This complex project is aimed at merging teaching and professional action by giving the students the opportunity to consult the companies.

The main results of this project are to:

- Enhance the relationship between universities, companies, students, and producers operating in a cross-cultural perspective in two different countries
- Allow students, teachers and producers to work together in a real not just academic project
- Create a local visual identity, based on Indian traditional skills used both in the rug's manufacturing and in the communication projects

### **Plan development for the next 5 years**

The next stages of the project will include in the workshop more students from India, trying to merge the Indian tradition with Italian style to create interesting and saleable designs. Italian students will be visiting India to take inspiration from the rich Indian culture and combining it with the Italian sensibility. The project can also be extended to other companies with different range of products, which may use the expertise of Indian students.

### **Business model**

The business model will involve a commercial agreement with the partnering industry that will include a salary for the students involved. The university will charge to cover the planning of the project and for the involvement of the faculty and resources. The industry will be able to commercialize the outputs of the project after giving due credit to the students and the institution for their involvement. The institution will be able to use the project case study as part of its marketing exercise.

### **Contribution to the design field**

This cross-cultural method of working has the potential to produce totally new directions of design inputs for a given market. It will also promote the spirit of understanding and cooperation between industry and academic institutions. The students will have the opportunity to see how the work is carried out in the industry and gain valuable experience from working with design experts. They will also enhance their understanding of design through the practical feedback. This new breed of designers is the future of design. Making designers more skilled will help the industry and society in the long run. What be learned from these projects will also become valuable case studies that will have an impact on future projects as well as educational methodologies.



**Image 2.** Design in Ghana, prof. Mark Kwami with craftsmans



**Name**

Mark Kwami / M. Kwami Design Consult

**Address**

Elberfelder Str. 25, 10555 Berlin, Germany

**Years of activity/Foundation**

Since 2000

**Context**

Mark Kwami is a design professional and an educator based in Germany who works with transnational projects involving Europe and Africa, linking professional with teaching activities.

**Number of workers**

One man office with project collaborations with about 20 other designers, consultants in Germany and Africa.

**Number of users/beneficiaries**

Over the years about 200 crafts producers in over 15 African Countries.

**Overview of the organization**

M.Kwami Design Services, is an independent design and social impact business consultancy that has worked in numerous projects in Africa, Latin America, The Caribbean and Asia.<sup>8</sup>

Most of the projects have been in the field of export promotion projects in the crafts and design sector. The goal was to help build the capacity of small and medium sized enterprises from developing and emerging economies to develop their products to meet international standards and then gain access to international markets. Since the craft sector is one of the largest employers in the developing world, the projects involved thousands of craft producers in the countries (many of them women).

In addition, M.Kwami Design Consult helped establishing the Brand "Made In Africa Collection", a franchise system of 6 Stores in Germany and the Netherlands, to develop and market a contemporary collection of design led furniture and home accessories made in different African countries.

Mark Kwami recently founded the company "Things For Good", a company that seeks to develop products that

have a positive social, economic or environmental impact. The first product developed is the O-Cube, a simple, low-cost tool that can be used to demonstrate the use of Female Condoms in developing countries.

Mark Kwami presently teaches design as a guest professor Design Department of the University of Anhalt in Dessau/Germany, the home of the historic Bauhaus Institution, where he introduced the subject "Social Impact Design" to the international Masters Programme.

**Most important project**

The main activity to date, is the work as design and business consultant for numerous international development organizations working in the field of Export Promotion in the crafts sector. The projects train small and medium sized enterprises in developing countries to help them build their capacity to be able to export their products to the international market.

Besides assisting the companies to design attractive products that retain their cultural identity, the other important component of the projects is to make the companies able to produce and market the products in a sustainable and profitable way and standards, so that can gain access to international markets.

**Relevant results:**

Over the years, M.Kwami Design Consult has worked with about 200 companies in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia.

Most of these companies work with hundreds of craft producers mainly in the rural regions.

In the regional Trade Fair in East Africa in 2016, the 30 exhibiting companies had the potential to give employment to over 6000 craft producers. This shows the huge impact that this sector can have on the economies of developing countries.<sup>9</sup>

Many of the companies attended the major international trade fairs and were able to create a viable network of international buyers that regularly order from them.

**Development plan for the next 5 years**

In the next 5 years, through the company Things for

8 NUMODOS. (2010) Mark Kwami Profile. Accessed Jun 24 2019. [http://www.numodus.com/team\\_mark\\_kwami.html](http://www.numodus.com/team_mark_kwami.html)

9 Mark Kwami.

Good, Mark Kwami would like to develop new projects with positive social impact in different parts of the world through the collaboration with Anhalt University Dessau and other Universities in Europe.

**Business model**

The concept behind Things for Good is that Social Impact Design can contribute to improve the quality of life, and at the same time, be profitable.

Positive design concepts therefore need to be supported by viable business models to ensure that they can be sustainable.

According to the Fair Trade practice a relevant part of the incomes coming from the craft product selling is redistributed between the local communities and used for activities with a social relevance such as training, health, infrastructures.

**Contribution in the design field**

M.Kwami Design Consult, demonstrates how design can have an impact in the area of international development projects, and contribute to meet the key needs and challenges facing the world today rather than just being used as a marketing tool to promote consumerism.

**Name**

Acre design project

**Address**

Rio Branco, Acre, Brazil

**Years of activity/Foundation**

2011

**Context**

Acre is the leader region of environmental awareness linked to the Amazon forest. Environmental awareness was started by the famous environmentalist Chico Mendes and carried forward by governments that have followed in subsequent decades. The idea launched by Mendes and that has become a cornerstone of sustainable development of the region, is based on the responsible use of forest resources to avoid the destruction by the frequent fires that were going to turn the forest into farmland. The region of Acre started the conversion process for an economic and industrial development from wood supply chain, and then introduced the concept of “certified forest” dedicating forest areas to the extraction of wood according to the principle of “manejo florestal”.



Image 3. Acre design project

The “Polo Moveleiro”, the productive center of Rio Branco in the field of furniture, was then created by the government bringing together different companies of the area in a manufacturing district characterized by the sharing of infrastructure, a prototyping work-shop, a showroom, and an area devoted to education and research.

The “Polo Moveleiro” was the main promoter of “Acre design” giving rise to the “Acre, made in Amazonia”, a brand that identifies products developed in accordance with principles of environmental and social sustainability, first applied to the wood and furniture sector and then spread also to other productive sectors linked to local materials such as rubber or bamboo.

In parallel, ZPE project, a frank export processing zone, was developed to attract Brazilian companies and international enterprises to set up there, in order to allow them to process on-site raw materials, and sell high value-added products instead of raw forest materials.

To create a new generation of technicians and creative people who can act as the engine for this type of development, the government started the establishment of a design school. The government of Acre is pursuing a visionary and ambitious project that binds the value of local raw materials to the creation of companies engaged in the production of high value-added products that can drive the region's economy and create jobs and social and cultural innovation.

**Number of workers**

international work team of about 20 people

**Number of users/beneficiaries**

10 companies, 30 students

**Overview of the organization**

Acre design is an international project conceived by the government of Acre and the Dom Moacyr Institute that involved the Italian organization Poli.design, Consortium of the Politecnico of Milan, with a staff of 20 professionals based in Italy and Brazil, 30 companies of the region, and a mixed class of 30 students of the faculties of architecture, artists, and woodworkers, aged 16 to 60 years.<sup>10</sup>

**Most important project**

Acre design is a project that aims to create a Design sys-

tem connected to the territory, its cultural identity, and its industrial development. The Acre Design project began in 2011 with the development of a first experimental line of wood furniture and has grown over the years transforming it into a more ambitious project that works on educational, political, and business innovation involving the entire Acre region, its businesses and creative talents.

In the first phase, a mixed class of students developed the basic concepts derived from the different lines of the collection “Acre, Made in Amazonia”. The students together identified the different souls of the local culture and developed a “local visual grammar” which was later an inspiration for the design of the furniture.

Two internationally renowned designers lead the design workshop, with students work on objects of contemporary design but impregnated with the local culture. A specialist in the furniture sector directed the prototyping phase through a technical training process with the business involved in the venture. An Italian designer created the brand and the visual communication, working side by side with local artists. First of all the proper name was chosen for each object. The names, that are traditional and symbolic (“Jiboia”, a serpent sacred to the Forest peoples; “Palafita”, names of traditional houses located on the rivers), refer to archetypical characters of the local population: the rubber extractor, the “Pajé” (wise Indian chief) and the river fisherman. A catalogue photos was made based on these worlds, connecting Acre with its beauty and its products, to a more industrial world, but never forgetting the values of sustainability, ecology, and respect for the forest.

The brand “Acre, made in Amazonia”, created by the government of Acre, joins together various businesses that participated in the project and aims at being the first nucleus of a productive development of Amazonia, always striving to be sustainable environmentally and socially. Between 2012 and 2014 collection was exhibited in Rio Branco, at the Placi-do Castro theater, in the creative economy festival of Sao Paulo, at the furniture fair in Milan, and at the same time a book describing the “Acre, made in Amazonia” experience was edited and distributed.

<sup>10</sup> Acre Design Catalogue, 2012, Milan: ed. Polidesign

Meanwhile, the work with artisans and students continues. On the one hand the team works on engineering and industrializing the collection and formalizing an agreement between producers related to the brand “Acre, made in Amazonia” and an Italo-Brazilian research group giving form to the political-pedagogical structure of the future technical design school of Acre. Currently, the collection is working on distribution matters and the school begins to work through the provision of professional courses in the area of design.

#### **Relevant results**

The main results of this project are represented by the work done with the companies, which led to the creation of a series of brands and a consortium of companies, and the work with local institutions to formalize the school and the training of young people and technicians. The Acre design project involving the wood and furniture sector is meant to be only one of the first steps in the sustainable economic development of the region of Acre. The marketing project derived from the project must be a stimulus to the consolidation of the consortium of the wood furniture industry manufacturers. The goal of the government is to attract business in the region to create a working production center that will also work in the field of rubber, bamboo, textiles and ceramics. The school wishes to be integrated and start operating in the Brazilian professional education system.

#### **Plan Development for the next 5 years**

In the next 5 years the school of design will be established and start working full-time.

The brand will be expanded to include other value chains such as rubber, leather and textile, and to other producers.

The products of the first collection will be commercialized in the Brazilian market through a show room in Sao Paulo.

#### **Business model**

The Acre Design project would like to transform the original business model to a local consortium of companies comprised in the regional brand Acre made in Amazonia.

#### **Contribution in the design field**

In the Acre project the design is the main driving force for the territorial development.

Design acts as an innovation driver for a sustainable local economy, and the designer can be considered a social actor, not just a professional, who interacts with raw material producers, small enterprises and artisans, shops and distributors, final consumers and institutions. The designer has the important role of network creator, company innovator, and creator of sustainable productive chains.

#### **Name**

Rede Design Possível (Possible Design Network)

#### **Address**

Rua Catequese, 120, Butanta, Sao Paulo, Brazil

Years of activity/Foundation: 13 years, founded in 2004

#### **Context**

The “Design Possível” Network originates in 2004 from the university project of extension and international cooperation called Design Possible. The project, at that time, sought to work at the development of products, in socially vulnerable communities in the city of São Paulo, Brazil, integrating the work of Brazilian and Italian students. Throughout the years, the association “Design Possível” has been founded, and, more recently, the Design Possível Network - an integration among several collectives, cooperatives, social enterprises and start ups that work on innovation, sustainability, and social participation.

#### **Number of workers**

30

#### **Number of users/beneficiaries**

about 250

#### **Overview of the organization**

Rede Design Possível is a non-profit association that integrates initiatives having the positive social and environmental transformation as a guiding line. The mission is to articulate, foster, and strengthen, in a cooperative and self-managed way, initiatives of social and environmental impact, forming a network that promotes positive transformations for the society. The main goal is to build a more fair and sustainable society, respect the environment, work cooperatively for the common good, respecting their pluralities and exercising their full autonomy.

Currently the Network is formed by collectives, groups, enterprises, people, and social enterprises, such as Idea -



**Image 4.** FDesign Possivel Group, Teamwork with students and craftsmen

Collaboration, Social Innovation and Design, Scipopulis, S2 Social Seal Association, Sustainable Giro and Camaleoa. Each of these groups works on numerous projects related to design, information technology, innovation, conscious consumption, etc.

**Most important project**

The most important Project is the Solidarity Economy project, carried out by the Design Idea, involving groups and enterprises from different market segments, such as artisans, seamstresses, food groups, mental health, and services. These projects are carried out by several partner institutions to promote technical and entrepreneurial training through solidarity economy, aiming to generate work and income for beneficiaries in situations of vulnerability.

**Relevant results**

The most relevant results in the area of solidary economy is the accomplishment of several partnerships and services with the ventures in the areas through the:

- Development of product or service;
- Opening of market spaces for enterprises, such as fairs, exhibitions, shops, etc;
- Integration with universities combining students and knowledge in favor of entrepreneurship;
- Foster the social participation of enterprises;

**Plan Development for the next 5 years**

The plan development for the next five years is in the

line of Solidarity Economy, combining also the methodology of social technologies, which are developed by and for the beneficiaries of these technologies.

**Business model**

Design possivel works both as NGO and as network of associations, based on collaboration design and cooperation.

The cooperatives involved are in the Solidary Economy system and work as social companies that distribute incomes among the members.

- Contribution to the design field
- The “Design Possivel” Network contributes to the field of design with an innovative model that blends:
- Design and interdisciplinarity;
- Creation and collective construction of businesses;
- Use of design as a tool for socioeconomic transformation;
- Promotion of the participation of the design in spaces of social participation and creation of public policies;

**Case Analysis**

The comparison between the different cases is certainly easier at a quantitative and qualitative level as we have different aspects that they share.

At the qualitative level, the relevant aspects are:

### Replicable design toolkits

Teaching + research + local action.

All the case studies are design actions that take place mainly in developing countries and see young design students and colleges collaborate with local businesses to develop goods and services in a solid and sustainable economy perspective.

In all projects there is a combination of higher and university education, research, and activities in local communities.

Very often, such as for the design group, the impetus of these projects comes from universities, which is the driving force for change directing students to provide their skills in favor of local communities.

In some cases the teacher or group involved in these projects also acts as personal consultants for companies or organizations such as Mark Kwami with the FTO.

### Action-research approach

The approach of all projects is the one of action research that sees research aimed not at deepening certain theoretical knowledge, but at analyzing a practice related to a field of experience by a social actor with the purpose of introducing changes in practice.

The various projects include substantial parts of research, such as the one on Indian craft traditions, that are always engaged with practice and used as a tool to form young designers.

### Co-design techniques

In all projects analyzed, students and professionals activate participatory processes involving both students and productive communities.

A major issue at the level of co-design is that of local identity. In both the Acre and Indian projects the thoughtfulness for local identities has been the result of collective brainstorming sessions, moodboards, elaborations, and coordinated images.

The core of the Design Possível network is the cooperation with the productive communities, each product and communicative artifact being developed by craftsmen involved with co-design techniques consolidated over the years.

Research materials, often developed by students, such as the social impact toolkit developed by Mark Kwami at the Dessau University Design Faculty, are intended as toolkits for students and designers who codify the methodologies and tools used in project making processes replicable and exportable in other contexts.

In the search for a crean identity, for example, moodboards regarding local visual identity were the basis for the inspiration to product designers and communication in collecting development.

In the Flying Carpets project, research into Indian craftsmanship and product scenarios was the basis for the development of the entire project.

Research and toolkits have sometimes been produced by teachers and researchers either autonomously or, even more relevantly, in collaboration with students who have also been able to practice the specific activity.

### “Glocal” vs local or global perspective

The connection with global markets is a key theme in the projects being analyzed.

Research on trends and formation in the field of quality and production is a constant element whenever designers have the role of connectors between companies and the market.

### Cross-cultural processes

The processes activated through collaboration between different countries, such as Italy-Brazil and Italy-India and Germany-Ghana are necessarily cross-cultural.

The concept of cross-culture comprises the identity side that links local visual identities with global contexts, and thus necessarily contaminates local elements with the use of international languages both at the graphic and product design level.

At the business level, the term cross culture can refer to a company's initiatives to increase understanding of different groups, develop effective communication or marketing efforts to reach out to customers and clients outside of its traditional market.

Culture on the one hand and market on the other are

the cornerstones of the cross-cultural action of these projects that bring craftsmen and producer groups to deal with a wider audience, open their markets while maintaining a strong identity component both in products and in communication.

### **New original business models**

The project activities involved real and market-oriented activities, in some cases before startup level, then consolidating in the enterprise as well as in the Design Possivel, while in most cases the students met with business. Sometimes the students' design work has focused on business models, as in the case of Acre, that led to the establishment of a business consortium. In all projects the economic and production aspects were evaluated in details, together with product prices and their commercial viability.

These aspects are fundamental to distinguish projects with a real impact from exclusively didactic or demonstrative projects.

### **NGO and companies mobilization**

In some of the cases analyzed, such as the design network and advisory action by Mark Kwami, the beneficiaries of the coproduction activities are NGOs or social-purpose associations. In other cases, such as Acre, we deal with private companies that value both environmental and social sustainability. Students therefore relate to realities that are pursuing real-world sustainability processes and interact with them as the engines of innovation within the processes already in place.

## **Conclusion**

All over the world there are some group of Design teachers and students acting in the field of local impact design, sharing processes and using similar methodologies.

They probably don't even know each other but they all act aiming at creating through design a positive impact in people's life, companies, and local communities.

The analysed cases involve the manufacturing area in emerging countries such as Brazil, India, Africa and see de-

signers not just as professionals but as teachers, and social mobilizers.

Designers are the promoters of training courses merging students from universities and professional schools, consultancies with local companies and ONG, research projects on local identity, and of innovative brands with new business models such as consortiums of cooperatives and local companies.

Thinking about the future of design, we can envision a new role for designers who are no more just creative professionals or educators but also, in a freirian perspective, a driving force of change, able to connect the different stakeholders of a productive chain or of a district and to create new sustainable brands able to compete both in local and global market.

Interacting with craftsmen, design students can also contribute to important social changes acting as bridge between the local producers and the global market.

Design and design students became innovation drivers for a sustainable economy and have taken new roles in "designing districts" based on creative economy and local production:

- Designer as network creator
- Designer as companies' innovator
- Designer as identity artist
- Designer as local brand strategist

These different roles of designers' can be assets for the activation and improvement of local productive chains creating different opportunities for all the stakeholders involved such as students, teachers and companies.

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