Social Design in Turkey through a Survey of Design Media: Projects, Objectives, Participation Approaches

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Abstract

The literature on social design consists of studies that report on single cases on one hand, and global reviews that are offered for theoretical purposes on the other. There is a lack of local reviews that report on social design practices that stem from peculiar political, economic, design professional and educational contexts. In response to this gap, we provide a review of 27 social design practices in Turkey from the last decade. The projects are compiled in accordance with social design criteria derived from literature. Sampled projects were analysed via textual analysis of their representations on design media. In our findings, we demonstrate the ways in which local context shapes local social design practices. We also outline a framework for the discussion of prominent issues, range of actors, objectives, and participatory approaches.

Keywords: social design; design activism; design for social innovation; participatory design; co-design.

Introduction

Design fields have historically devoted part of their creativity to engaging with social and environmental issues. Starting with the Arts and Crafts movement, later transformed by the political atmosphere of the 1960s, such sensibilities have today culminated in a range of approaches, such as 'design for social innovation' and 'design activism'. One can surely argue for the benefits of replicable methodologies; however Kaygan and Julier's (2013) survey of activist design practices around the world showed that designers and design scholars have been concerned with the implications of increased institutionalisation and global standardisation of activist practice: Have globalised approaches replaced a much-needed sensitivity to local needs and assets?

Highlighting these concerns, the current literature on social design is divided into reports on single cases on the one hand, and reviews that strive to offer global definitions and theories on the other. Apart from the limited discussion provided by the cited survey, there is a lack of local overview studies that

describe the specific ways in which social design manifests in different localities, and is shaped by social and economic structures and political agendas therein.

To start addressing this gap, in this study we provide a review of social design projects of the last decade in Turkey, where we see a rising interest in the topic as exemplified by recent meetings in 2018 such as UTAK 2018 (Töre Yargın et al. 2018), Gökçeada Design Forum (ozu-iid.com) and the Istanbul Workshops (trans-making.eu). Our primary objective is to take the first steps towards building an archive on which comparative studies of social design practices can be based (*cf.* Veiga and Almendra 2014). Secondly, we underline the specificity of local design agendas and their dependence on the contexts in which they are realised. Our conclusions show that, in addition to globally recognisable repertoires of practice, local political events and agendas and the availability of certain types of actors, provide the distinguishing features of local social design.

The paper starts with a literature review of socially oriented design practices to outline a working definition of social design. The discussion is followed by a review of such work in Turkey, sampled with a specific set of criteria derived from literature. Following the review, we present an assessment of social design initiatives in Turkey in terms of their composition and approach.

Literature Review

In the introduction we noted the ubiquity of social and environmental sensibilities in the recent history of design. In response to ecological problems, Papanek's (1985) and Fuller's (1969) early explorations were followed in the late 1980s by 'green' initiatives, which focused on environmentally friendly products and manufacturing processes. Current examples of 'design for sustainability' tend to offer solutions at the level of communities and systems, rather than products and production, and present higher levels of design intervention and increased attention to the social component of sustainability (Madge 1997; Ceschin and Gaziulusoy 2016).

As regards designers' social responsibilities, many projects have followed Papanek on his call, providing for the needs of disenfranchised groups, such as the Third World and the disabled (see Whiteley 1993; Smith 2007). This tradition of 'socially responsible design' (SRD; Davey et al. 2005; Melles, de Vere, and Misic 2011) is typically focused on technical solutions to social problems. Its critics have indicated the limitations of understanding design as expert aid, and called for system-based and locally specific solutions that are best developed via participatory approaches (Morelli 2007; Julier 2011).

Manzini and his collaborators' work under both strategic design for sustainability (Manzini, Collina, and Evans 2004) and design for social innovation (DSI; Meroni 2007) provide alternatives to SRD. DSI is important for its participatory approach (Manzini and Rizzo 2011; Mortati and Villari 2014), and its original definition of design intervention. Instead of focusing on social 'problems' such as extreme

poverty, designers of social innovations help communities produce novel 'social forms' to effect 'social change toward sustainability' (Manzini 2015, 62). In these and similar work, the designer's role is accordingly transformed from providing solutions to providing means and infrastructures (Hillgren, Seravalli, and Emilson 2011; Unteidig et al. 2017), as design moves from a 'need-based' to an 'asset-based' model of engagement (Thorpe and Gamman 2011, 220). Today, a participatory mindset and a local focus characterise much of the work that is grouped under the umbrella of social design (Armstrong et al. 2014; Koskinen and Hush 2016). These are indebted to the Scandinavian tradition of participatory design and its emphasis on developing design tools that enable skilful participation (Binder et al. 2011; Chen et al. 2015).

A third body of work is gathered under the title 'design activism' to include design projects that are more explicitly concerned with the political dimension of design. While 'activist' projects cannot be easily distinguished from 'social' projects, the former's terminology of political activism (Thorpe 2008), 'counter-narratives' (Fuad-Luke 2009, 27), 'disruptive aesthetics' (Markussen 2013, 44) and political contestation (DiSalvo 2012) is a defining feature. Many design activist interventions accordingly pursue experimental and critical avenues, aiming to raise awareness, to disillusion, to subvert.

In response to the plurality of concerns and methodologies, one ongoing debate concerns how to define and demarcate 'social design'. While their objectives vary, social design practices serve primarily non-commercial ends, and specifically, the benefit of a disadvantaged group (Armstrong et al. 2014; Markussen 2017). Initiatives are often content with results at the micro level, but with an eye to effecting larger changes (Tonkinwise 2015). Participatory approaches are critical to the extent that open collaboration amongst co-designers becomes a defining feature (Manzini 2015).

Within the definition of social design provided by this preliminary framework that highlights social objectives, micro level implementation, and participatory approaches, our aim is to highlight local specificity. Focusing on the opportunities offered by the local context, the social and political agendas designers respond to and the practical repertoires they develop, we can particularize the framework provided by the global definitions and approaches we cite.

Research Design

As part of their research agenda for social design, Margolin and Margolin (2002) note the opportunity that media provide in accessing archival data and revealing the ways social projects are presented. As such, we preferred document analysis to make an extensive overview that simultaneously reflects the dominant ways in which social design is viewed and presented by its practitioners and the media. We compiled social design projects conducted in Turkey between 2006 and 2017 through a comprehensive search on Turkish design media, including magazines, blogs and university pages as well as general news sources. We sampled the projects based on the definition of social design by Armstrong et al. (2014, 15), i.e.

whether they serve 'collective and social ends, rather than predominantly commercial objectives', and the following three criteria, all of which are derived from our review above: (1) collaboration or participation of multiple actors; (2) involvement of professionals from design disciplines such as trained architects and designers; and (3) implementation of the project with material outcomes other than conceptual plans and drawings. At the first stage, we inventoried around 50 initiatives with more than 120 projects in total. For further evaluation, we gathered project descriptions on designers' own websites, books and articles, as well as interviews and manifestos. From within this larger sample, we selected 27 projects that both fit our sampling criteria closely, and represent the range of topics, approaches and stakeholders that such projects are engaged with in Turkey (see Table 1). The data collected was analysed using a textual analysis approach (McKee 2003), and template analysis method (King 2012), based on a combination of descriptive and in-vivo coding (Saldaña 2009) of the material (see Appendix 1).

While known for the wide coverage it enables, document analysis can create bias in selection (Bowen 2009). Therefore, between August and September 2017, we conducted interviews with four experts who have managerial and/or curatorial roles in key educational and research institutions as well as experience as practising artists, designers, architects and urbanists. We cross-checked our sample with the projects they suggested for analysis. Still we present this final sample neither as exhaustive nor a collection of best practices, rather as representative of the characteristics and diversity of social design projects in Turkey.

 Using sampling criteria that are derived from social design literature, we could not include the following three categories of projects: (1) Those projects in which design acts as expertise for disenfranchised groups either as part of personal projects or working for civil society clients, were eliminated for lack of a participatory approach to design. (2) Workshops where either design students or the general public are invited to create ideas towards social or environmental issues, and (3) education projects at design departments of universities that have social themes, were both eliminated from our sampling for lack of implementation.

We introduce the projects and discuss our findings in the following sections. The review of projects is presented in three sections, categorizing the key issues that the initiatives address: urban issues, local cultures and economies, and social inequity (see Table 1). The categorisation is used to identify common tenets as well as global antecedents of local practices, yet the boundaries between categories are not clear-cut, as many projects address multiple issues.

Table 1. The sampling of social design initiatives and the issues they address

Urban issues	Local cultures and economies	Social justice
Public Space TAK Sokak Bizim Şehrine Ses Ver Oda Projesi: Kültürel Aracılar	**Local Values** TAK	**Disenfranchised groups** Oyun Engel Tanımaz Önemsiyoruz OTSIMO Robotel Düşler Engelsiz
Public Green Spaces POT+ PARK: Bir İhtimal TAK Tarihi Yedikule Bostanları Kuzguncuk Kent Bostanı	**Revitalisation of Crafts** Crafted in Istanbul Made in Şişhane Ustaişi Beyoğlu Zanaattan Tasarıma	**Justice at work** Özgür Kazova
Architectural Interventions Herkes için Mimarlık Plankton Project Mimar Meclisi Düzce Umut Atölyesi	**Sustainable Local Development** Joon Imroz Tasarım Çalıştayları Mardin ve Salihli Projeleri Designers United Initiative Reflect	

Urban Issues

Urban issues have always been at the forefront of activist and socially oriented design practices (Bell 2004; Bell and Wakeford 2008; Markussen 2013). The importance of community participation and providing 'opportunities for all people to be politically involved and share in the development process' has been emphasised since the 1960s (Sanoff 2000, 1). In Turkey, many social design initiatives are interested specifically in fostering public spaces for social and political engagement.

One of these is *Tasarım, Araştırma, Katılım* (TAK; Design Research Participation), an initiative with a large number of projects, which was established with the partnership of two municipalities and private and civil actors. *TAK* runs three specific programs on public spaces that invite volunteer designers and citizens to develop strategies for the betterment of neighbourhoods (takortak.org). Another initiative that focuses on public space is *Sokak Bizim* (The Street is Ours), an association that is run mostly by volunteering urban planners. It collaborates with city municipalities to organise participatory events and campaigns on issues such as pedestrian safety and alternative transportation (sokakbizim.org). The third one, *Şehrine Ses Ver* (Give Your City a Voice), has been collecting and displaying sociological and statistical information collectively via installations, interaction panels and infographic projects (sehrinesesver.com).

One last work in this category is *Kültürel Aracılar* (Cultural Agencies), conducted by the *Oda Projesi* (Room Project) art initiative. In Gülsuyu and Gülensu neighbourhoods, one of the urban transformation

and gentrification regions in Istanbul, the collective carried out a participatory project for documenting, exhibiting and intervening into the material culture of the neighbourhoods. (kulturel-aracilar.blogspot.com).

These initiatives aim to encourage and mobilize people not only to raise awareness but also to make them seek their rights and participate in decision making through design. Appealing for the 'right to the city' (Harvey 2012), they might use an activist discourse: 'In order to make cities habitable, as citizens, we must reclaim them and create common spaces together' (sokakbizim.org; our translation). Still, as many others in our inventory do, they work with municipalities for their temporary or permanent interventions.

Public Green Space

Another group of initiatives has brought together environmental concerns with an interest in fostering publics through interventions in public green spaces. Examples are *Komün-Aksiyon Bahçeler* (Common Action Gardens) and *Komün-Aksiyon Duvarlar* (Common Action Walls), conducted by the *POT+* design research group, and *PARK: Bir İhtimal* (PARK: A Possibility) project, curated by Can Altay (Altay, Kortun and Elveren 2017). In these projects, designers adopted a co-production approach to the public parks they worked on, in order to raise environmental awareness and public engagement simultaneously. In a similar vein, *TAK* has two programs for neighbourhoods, one of which focuses on vegetable gardens, the other on recycling.

Urban agriculture is practised throughout the world for civic engagement and ecological activism (for a review, see McClintock 2014). Two prominent community gardens in Turkey are *Tarihi Yedikule Bostanları* (The Historical Yedikule Vegetable Gardens), which is located at a UNESCO site in Istanbul, and *Kuzguncuk Kent Bostanı* (the Ilia Garden), both of which have been protected against urban transformation by volunteering locals and professionals (Connelly and Bal 2016).

Architectural Interventions

As noted above, the ideas of participation and access to commons in architecture have existed since the 1960s, with early examples such as Fathy (1973). There has been a recent surge of interest in social and activist architecture, where architects work for and with disadvantaged groups who cannot receive professional support (see examples in Lepik 2010; Aquilino 2011). In Turkey, a number of collectives, made up largely of professional architects and architecture students, collaborate with local people and municipalities for this purpose. *Herkes için Mimarlık* (HIM; Architecture for All) has been transforming idle buildings and spaces into schools in various rural and urban areas of Turkey (herkesicinmimarlik.org).

Plankton Project has been building structures such as bus stops by prioritizing the use of local materials and local people. A third initiative, *Mimar Meclisi* (Assembly of Architects), has been using a more activist language 'Architecture for people, not for profit!' (dayanismamimarligi.org; our translation) and have clashed with local authorities.

The last one in this category, *Düzce Umut Atölyesi* (Düzce Hope Homes) emerged in response to a specific problem, i.e. the housing struggle of the 1999 earthquake victims in Düzce. Since 2015, in collaboration with the victims and their housing cooperative, a group of volunteering professionals have organised a series of participatory design workshops to design houses collectively. The project is looking to provide 389 houses for earthquake victims (duzceumutatolyesi.wordpress.com).

The projects we reviewed under the umbrella term, urban issues, show us a wide range of engagements with the city across different levels, from temporary installations to complete architectural projects. Regardless of approach and scope, they typically collaborate with residents, and often public actors such as municipalities. Many of these are also strongly influenced by the political agendas around urban transformation in Turkey, and therefore have politically meaningful objectives and often activist discourses that strive to not only practically but politically engage people.

Local Cultures and Economies

As we noted in our literature review, a strong current in design practice is in favour of close engagement with localities. Scholars have underlined the significance of local materials and skills (Walker 2010), local communities and practices (Manzini 2015) and local control (Melles, de Vere, and Misic 2011) for socially and environmentally oriented design practices. In Turkey, too, Er and Kaya (2008) noted an emergent interest by designers and educators in local contexts and cultures, including crafts practices.

Keeping with the value associated with grassroots practices in social design, many social design initiatives in Turkey can be seen to attach importance to local cultural contexts. For instance, a number of *TAK* programs have documented the local values of Istanbul's Kadıköy neighbourhood, even reproduced them via participatory redesign activities into souvenirs and goods. Other projects in this category are concerned beyond preservation with issues such as strengthening local economies, supporting craftspeople or contributing to the economic sustainability of disenfranchised groups. In the following two sections we outline these.

Revitalisation of Crafts

Initiatives under this title often utilise a discourse that suggests increased visibility and collaborations with design professionals as strategies for the economic development of local crafts. Two projects have aimed

to map and showcase the craft persons of Istanbul. One is *Crafted in Istanbul*, an interactive online map of craft workshops in Istanbul (craftedinistanbul.com). The second one, *Made in Şişhane*, has concentrated on Şişhane, the lighting centre of Istanbul, which has been a target for gentrification through urban transformation (Kıyak İngin 2011). In both projects, the objective has been to make the economic potentials of crafts visible, and search for ways to maintain century-old crafts traditions by encouraging designers to collaborate with craftspeople.

Two more projects brought designers and craftspeople together in events. The *Ustaişi Beyoğlu* (Masterpiece Beyoğlu) project was a collaboration of civil, public and university partners to launch a new apprenticeship program (kulturkentivakfi.org). Under the *Zanaattan Tasarıma* (From Crafts to Design) program by the Istanbul Modern museum and Istanbul Development Agency, product designers were matched with craftspeople to design novel products (zanaattantasarima.istanbulmodern.org).

The product of crafts come to the fore in the work of the initiatives in this category, which are related more closely to industrial design than any other design discipline, as opposed to the dominance of architecture and urbanism in the previous group of initiatives. University industrial design programs played roles by providing academic collaborators, workshop space, participating students, and in the first two projects above, courses in their curricula to help initiate the projects.

Sustainable Local Development

Another group of initiatives echo some of the concerns and methods of those that take revitalisation of crafts as their objective, yet have utilised local values and crafts with the specific aim to achieving sustainable development of communities. One of these, *Joon* is a design entrepreneurship that works with craftspeople from disenfranchised groups such as refugees, 'to bring their making to the light with a micro-investment model' (joon.world). Another is *Imroz Tasarım Çalıştayları* (Imroz Design Workshops), organised in Gökçeada by Alayça Erözçelik and Alpay Er to 'facilitate the emergence of a local system of innovation based on the bicultural character of Gökçeada Island' (Erözçelik and Taşdizen 2017, S1752).

Three projects in this category specifically target women, intersecting with the 'Social Inequity' category that we separately review below. Çiğdem Kaya has conducted projects in Mardin, and together with Koray Gelmez in Salihli, in which they helped women to transform their crafts into designed products that can find a better market (Kaya 2015; Kaya and Gelmez 2013). The second is *Designers United*, an initiative with international composition and international funding. It has run two educational and collaborative projects with underprivileged women, one in Soma with the wives of the miners who lost their jobs after the disaster in 2014, and the other with refugee women (designerunited.org). A third one is *Reflect*, a fashion design entrepreneurship. *Reflect* provides financial support for girls in high school

from disadvantaged communities and helps them receive training in creative sectors by collaborating with textile workshops (reflect.ist).

The language used by the initiatives in this category of local cultures and economies is noticeably dissimilar to the activist discourse of those initiatives that are interested in urban space, instead highlighting the financial sustainability aspect at least as much as the social value created (see Markussen 2017; *cf.* Fleischmann 2013). Also, designers' one-to-one engagements with craftspeople and their work can be expected to bring a stronger sense of collaboration at the level of individual skill transfer and empowerment, than does the collective character of public engagements that target urban issues. Still, the impact of local agendas is easily observable, as projects are concerned with the dissolution of crafts via urban transformation, immigration or the Soma disaster.

Social Inequity

One of Papanek's (1985) key observations was the overrepresentation of wealthier and more powerful social groups in design at the expense of the needs of the majority. It has been argued that design should actively encourage diversity by empowering underrepresented user groups and promoting inclusion and equity (Tauke, Smith, and Davis 2015). In the previous section, we introduced a number of projects that aim to support women and immigrants both economically and socially by improving their crafts. In this section, we present those that are related to social inequity for children and the disabled.

Bursa Nilüfer Municipality collaborated with a wide range of public, civil and university partners for the *Oyun Engel Tanımaz* (Game without Barriers) project, in which disabled and able-bodied high school students designed a playground where they could play together (nilufer.bel.tr). The project is the only one in which a municipality acted as leader without the mediation of another organisation. Two more initiatives that focus on play are *Önemsiyoruz* (We Care), which designs toys for children who live with their mothers in prison (onemsiyoruz.org), and *OTSIMO*, which designs online games for children with special needs, especially autism, to help them participate in social life (otsimo.com). Even though these two projects do not include children in their processes, they collaborate with NGOs, universities, and professionals from various disciplines such as designers, pedagogues and psychologists. Additionally both projects have been supported by the *IMECE* (Collective Work) social innovation platform, one of a number of such platforms in Turkey that aid entrepreneurs in initiating social design and innovation projects.

A fourth initiative, *Robotel* (Robot Hand) provides 3D-printed prosthetic hands for children. As part of the global *e-NABLE* community, the initiative brings volunteers from different disciplines together with the children for measuring, designing and printing prostheses (robotel.org). Another social design project for the disabled is *Düşler Engelsiz* (No Disability for Dreams), the only project in this inventory that is conducted by a profit company as part of its public relations efforts. Carpet manufacturer Atlas Halı

organised a one-time workshop in which designers worked one-to-one with visually impaired participants to design carpets, which were then produced (atlashali.com.tr).

The last initiative, which is of a unique character in this inventory, is *Özgür Kazova* (Free Kazova). In 2013, workers at the Kazova Textile Factory occupied their factory in response to unpaid salaries and unfair dismissals, then formed the cooperative to produce and sell sweaters under the brand name, *Patronsuz Kazak* (Sweater without a Boss). In 2014, the workers opened a cultural centre and shop with support from NGOs and volunteering professionals, including those from design disciplines (yesilist.com). *Özgür Kazova* stands as an example of how designers can and do contribute to activist practices that experiment with alternatives to the current economic system.

Findings

In this paper, we reviewed a number of social design practices in Turkey, sampled according to a definition of social design that foregrounds non-commercial objectives, and the three criteria of participation, involvement of professional designers, and implementation. Drawing on our review, we discuss the field of social design in Turkey in terms of the types of institutional actors involved, their objectives and participatory approaches.

Types of Initiatives

As our overview shows, social design projects in Turkey are undertaken mostly under the leadership of non-profit actors. In our sampling, there are projects by a number of associations, one foundation, one museum, one worker's cooperative, as well as artist projects and design collectives. Municipalities typically contribute as supporting partners. University engagement is high in social design projects, especially in those concerning crafts. Universities provide infrastructure; design academics initiate and run projects; students are recruited from universities as participants; courses and research projects are used to support social design projects that are otherwise independent. Design programs in many universities integrate social projects into design and architecture education, but education projects remain conceptual, even when they include local actors themselves. With one exception, large-scale commercial companies are missing from this picture.

In addition to trained design professionals, the involvement of locals is seen; however the media representations of the projects indicate that these are initiated by the former rather than rising organically out of local demands. Three exceptions to this observation in our data are *Düzce Umut Atölyesi*, *Kuzguncuk Kent Bostanı* and *Özgür Kazova*. However, it is possible that the reports on which this

analysis depends may be overplaying the contributions of the institutional bodies at the expense of local, non-professional partners.

Objectives

In our review we discussed the range of issues that social design projects address (see Table 1). The initiatives also formulate their objectives and approaches variously – ranging from co-designing houses to mobilizing political resistance. Based on the analysis of the discourse the initiatives use in describing their initiatives, we distinguish five main objectives, each divided into three (see Figure 1):

Develop solutions. Design projects by definition try to solve a problem by actually *designing* or *co-designing* a product, a system, a service or a building; or more modestly, opening up a *debate* as to which solutions can be offered and how.

Make visible. Either as an alternative to or as part of developing solutions, almost all projects aim to enhance the visibility of issues, values or practices. Some projects *raise awareness* of problems such as access to education *(e.g. HIM)* or problems of pedestrians (e.g. *Sokak Bizim*), or reveal and *preserve* local values that are otherwise latent (e.g. *TAK*) or whose loss is imminent due to urban transformation (e.g *Crafted in Istanbul*, *Made in Şişhane*). Others create archives to *demonstrate* that technology can be used for the benefit of society, the significance of craftsmanship, that disability is not an obstacle to participating in everyday life, or that it is possible to build liveable cities.

Organise. Many initiatives define their objectives as *mobilizing* people to seek their rights and get involved in social, political and economic processes that shape their lives (e.g *Oda Projesi*, *Mimar Meclisi*, *Sokak Bizim*, *Park: Bir İhtimal*). Beyond propaganda, this means creating means and environments for people through which they can *build relationships* and *share* their knowledge and experiences, for instance in the face of urban transformation or cultural and economic stagnation.

Empower. Designers also claim to use their expertise to support people in various ways, not least to psychologically support and *encourage* them. *Robotel* strives to instil self-confidence in disabled children, or designers who support the labourers' resistance in *Kazova* aim to make them feel that they are not alone. Other projects help by *educating*, even *financially supporting* disenfranchised groups.

Learn. For the initiatives, objectives may also include mutual learning through *research* and acquisition of social design related *experience* and competences, as well as *developing approaches* to make their practice sustainable and replicable (e.g. *TAK*, *POT+*)
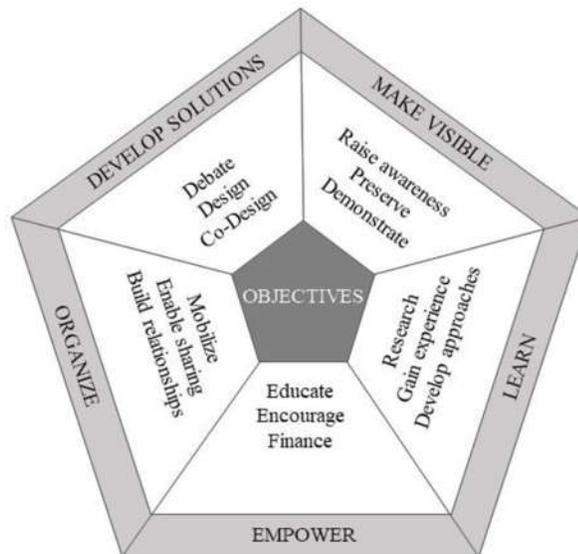
Figure 1. Objectives of Social Design in Turkey

Participatory Approaches

As one of our sampling criteria dictates, all of the projects have a collaborative component. Beyond that, most initiatives advocate interdisciplinary, plural, open, local, and/or participatory approaches. Almost every project in this inventory includes actors from disciplines other than design; e.g. lawyers, psychologists, teachers. Furthermore, in their discourse, initiatives emphasise openness and transparency in their dealings, as well as pluralism in decision making. To achieve these, many projects focus on generating heterogeneous spaces through workshops and other events that gather various actors and foster understanding to overcome differences.

In discourse, the key role of locality and involvement of local people is explicitly stated, with a belief in the positive effect of micro-scale design work. Projects focus on particular localities and seek ways to involve those people who will be affected by the design. In this, many projects are specifically interested in the participation of disadvantaged groups (e.g. *Robotel* and *Designers United*). On a negative note, university students and volunteers appear to attend more often than locals.

Whereas the rhetoric used by the initiatives underline the need to collaborate with target groups, project presentations rarely detail the participatory processes. We see that in early stages of projects, including problem definition and project initiation, participation of target groups is relatively invisible. As we note above, with a few exceptions, most projects are initiated by the designers rather than the beneficiaries. Some initiatives choose to rectify this shortcoming by engaging in in-depth user research and need elicitation at these early stages (e.g. *Önemsiyoruz*). Participation is highlighted when it takes place at the middle stages of a project – during design and implementation. This is most visible in the case

of target groups whose visibility itself is an outcome of the project such as craftspeople and disadvantaged women groups. The participation of locals, who are highlighted by the initiatives themselves as key actors in urban projects, is often seen in the later phases of projects (e.g. *Sokak Bizim*, *Şehrine Ses Ver*, *Park: Bir İhtimal*). Even when neighbourhood residents participate in earlier stages, their contributions are still more visible in design media as users of the designs. Children to whom the designers' access is difficult due to legal limitations, can hardly be represented in media except as target users.

Conclusion

In summary, the salient features of social design initiatives of last decade in Turkey, as reflected in design media, are as follows: One large group of initiatives has concentrated on issues related to urban life and public engagement. These often conduct temporary interventions in public spaces with the aim of increasing citizens' quality of life by creating awareness and increasing mobilisation. A smaller group of architecture initiatives work to produce more permanent, architectural solutions for the communities they collaborate with. One group of projects aim to strengthen the relationship between craftspeople and creative industries by making the former's practice more visible and open to collaboration. A final group considers design as an effective tool for ensuring the equal participation of disenfranchised groups in social life, with an emphasis on economic sustainability.

In addition to volunteering designers and non-profit organisations, which take lead in projects, municipalities have been important actors, providing both infrastructure and access to locals. Universities have also played major roles either as institutions, contributing their academic environment and student base, or through affiliated individuals. Social design in Turkey has a close relation with design and planning education, and to a lesser extent, research. In comparison, larger companies are reluctant to include social design practices in their corporate social responsibility portfolios.

We identified five objectives for social design, as initiatives strive to (1) design solutions, (2) make target groups and their practices visible, (3) organise communities, (4) empower and support their target groups, and lastly (4) learn and develop new practices. Making problems visible, creating opportunities for debate and collaboration, and mobilizing communities on that basis, have been the most common objectives, rather than co-designing long-term, permanent solutions to the actual problems communities encounter. This can be related to the fact that only three initiatives in our sampling can be considered grassroots, while most other initiatives have a 'collaborative' character, if not top-down (Manzini 2015, 82-83). In these, the design groups had to focus on garnering the support of the communities, then trying to address their problems.

Accordingly, initiatives have embraced pluralistic, open, interdisciplinary and participatory collaboration processes with a specific focus on local actors. In general, however, the participation of

locals is not highly visible in project descriptions and designers' claims in design media. Based on our observations on the participatory practices of initiatives, and following the arguments in the literature on the need for long-term infrastructuring (Social Impact Design Summit 2013; Armstrong et al. 2014), there is a need for more extensive, deeper and well-evidenced collaboration with grassroots groups and target users in Turkey. *Düzce Umut Atölyesi* and *Made in Şişhane*, for instance, provide examples that prioritize the building of long-term relationships and structures over short-term effects.

Another of our questions has been about the impact of local context on the shape of social design in Turkey. With the number and variety of social design projects we have identified, we can hardly detect today the 'mental barrier' against social design that Er and Kaya (2008) identified in Turkish design. Design professionals and entrepreneurs have been actively engaged with local communities and cultures in the last decade. They do not merely utilise cultural elements to devise a Turkish design identity (see Balcıoğlu and Emgin 2014), but to fully engage with and empower communities in the various ways we describe above. For instance, projects were not only interested in preserving artisan cultures or the culture of Gökçeada, but most importantly, helping people transform those into sustainable practice.

The social and political context has also been influential on social design projects. The threat of urban transformation, its impact on disenfranchised groups and the impending loss of local values, have been brought into focus by various initiatives' discourses and practices. Accordingly many groups were interested in the problem of right to city. Initiatives such as *Made in Şişhane* and *Crafted in Istanbul* have been interested in craftspeople who are affected by urban renewal decisions. Others such as *Designers United* and *Joon* were influenced by the Syrian immigrant crisis. *Özgür Kazova* is a particularly interesting case of design intervention that is interwoven with a traditional mode of working class struggle over factory ownership.

Our study has started outlining a framework for understanding the range of actors involved in social design, and of prominent issues designers have been interested in. We have also provided a classification of objectives and of participatory approaches according to project stages. We followed the guidance provided by the existing literature, yet depended on empirical data from Turkey to devise the frameworks and classifications.

More importantly, we consider this a call for local overviews to develop comparative studies: How and to what extent are social design practices worldwide impacted by local political agendas, social and cultural contexts? What are the salient models of collaboration, and how dependent are these on global inventories of practice? What are the role of universities, municipalities and for-profit actors worldwide in social design? Only by investigating such questions can we outline the impact of both the peculiarities of local contexts and global flows of activist discourse and practice on local manifestations of social design – and develop policies and strategies to benefit all.

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