

Design Ecologies: Products, Places & Communities

developing strategies for revitalizing traditional practices

Keywords: Design Ecologies; Crafts; Culture; Revitalization

1. Workshop Organiser/s

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2. Context of Workshop

Background: This workshop emerges from a current AHRC funded project entitled *Design Routes* that examines culturally significant designs, products and practices. The project as a whole is being conducted by researchers in the design departments at Lancaster, Manchester Metropolitan and Leeds Universities. The project recognizes that many culturally significant, traditional practices around the world are in decline as older artisans retire and younger people move from rural communities to the cities (examples include Turkey, Indonesia and Thailand among others). As part of this research we are looking at potential strategies for the sustainment and revitalization of traditional designs, products and practices. The Lancaster and Manchester design team have carried out a detailed examination of what might be understood as a highly successful example of sustainment/revitalization in this area. We conducted a 10 day field research endeavour in Sante Fe and its environs in New Mexico to understand why, in this particular place, traditional craft practices are flourishing and are part of a thriving arts-based economy. The initial results of this research will be presented together with the researchers' proposals for understanding traditional designs, products and practices within a broader appreciation of what we are calling *DESIGN ECOLOGIES*. Following the presentation, there will be a series of participatory activities that probe the ideas presented and invite participants to engage in group-based activities that lead to a series of distinct outcomes that will contribute to the development of a more broadly applicable strategy for the sustainment and/or revitalization of culturally significant designs, products and practices.

Design Ecologies: In this context, we understand a design ecology as comprising the interactions of a wide range of practices, organizations, resources, activities and connections that enable culturally significant designs, products and practices to flourish. In addition to these outer or externally verifiable factors, we also include in our study 'inner factors', interpreted from our reading of relevant literature and from our field observations and interviews – these include the priorities, perceptions, values and outlooks of those who are involved in the sustainment of these culturally significant traditions.

An introductory talk will outline the research to date and present to the workshop participants our initial mapping of these potential factors. This will provide a starting point for the workshop discussions and participatory activities.

This workshop resonates strongly with the three conferences themes but especially with the theme of: ***How can design research shape our lives in more responsible, meaningful, and open ways?*** Our research in *Design Ecologies* is strongly related to tradition, culture, localization, sustainability, identity and spirituality.

3. Planned Activities and Expected Outcomes

Following the introductory talk (ca. **15 minutes**) Participants will be formed into groups: ca. 4-5 groups of ca. 4-5 person per group. We invite maximum **20** participants. Through discussion and critique of *design ecologies*, as described in the preceding presentation, participants are asked to draw on their disciplinary expertise to conduct the following group-based activities (Proformas will be provided to help direct and lead the discussion):

Activity 1: Components and categories – Context Specific and Universal

15 mins discussion/group – pin up results sheet

- Identify components and categories that could be added to the presented *design ecology* (and/or components and categories considered superfluous that could be deleted). Which of these are context specific and which are more generally/universally applicable?

Activity 2: Prioritization and Chronology

15 mins discussion/group – pin up results sheet

- Building on the above components and categories, order priorities in terms of 1) essential factors that need to be taken into account; 2) recommended factors, i.e. 'nice to have'. For revitalizing a culturally significant design, product of practice, what would be the chronological order for implementing these considerations?

Activity 3: Strengths, Weaknesses, Usefulness and Planning

15 mins discussion/group – pin up results sheet

- Identify the potential strengths and/or weaknesses and the usefulness of *design ecologies* as a basis for understanding ways of sustaining or revitalizing traditional and/or culturally significant designs, products and practices. For example, can such *design ecologies* actually be planned or are they (at least in part) a result of serendipity – geography, climate, local resources, entrepreneurs etc.

Activity 4: Boundary Conditions

10 mins discussion/group – pin up results sheet

- Useful boundary conditions to contain a *design ecology* that would make it a useful tool (recognizing that such a framework could, potentially, keep expanding outwards).

Plenary discussion of findings, 15 mins

Final Conclusions and Workshop Close, 5 mins

TAKE AWAY FOR PARTICIPANTS

- understanding the values and meanings inherent to culturally significant design, products and practices,
- the losses that potentially occur when traditions disappear,
- how such traditions are intricately connected to place, community, identity, economy while also continually changing and being more broadly connected
- how traditions can be invented, adapted, developed and, potentially, revitalized

4. Intended Audience

We invite participants from various fields of expertise in design, including but not limited to craft making, product design, design strategies and sustainability.

5. Length of Workshop

The workshop will last for 1.5 hours, including the introductory talk by the organisers, four different activities and an open discussion session.

6. Space and Equipment Required

In terms of equipment, we require flip chart stands (5), flip chart paper (5 pads), marker pens (5 black and 5 red), projector with a laptop connector, post-its, sharpies, blu-tack and sellotape.

In terms of space, we require a large room with a screen stroke projector and five breakout tables with 4-5 chairs per table.

7. Potential Outputs

Insights and results will inform our on-going research, AHRC funded projects, 'Design Routes' and 'Design Ecologies'. The findings from this research will be offered as a paper contribution to a future Design Research Society conference.

About the Organisers:

Stuart Walker is Professor of Design for Sustainability and Co-Director of the ImaginationLancaster research centre at Lancaster University, UK. His research focuses on design for sustainability, especially product design related to place, natural materials, socially responsible processes and material culture.

Martyn Evans is Professor of Design in Manchester School of Art at Manchester Metropolitan University, UK. As a trained product designer his research interests explore the strategic approaches designers use to consider the future.

Jeyon Jung is a Senior Research Associate in ImaginationLancaster at Lancaster University, UK. Her research interests include the strategic use of design through identifying its core values in context with particular emphasis on place and culture.