

JOHN THACKARA LECTURE

Solidarity economics & design: life after consumerism

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SUMMARY

The word 'development' implies that we advanced people in the North have the right or even obligation to help backward people in the South to 'catch up' with our own advanced condition. No, it doesn't make sense. The concept of development is further devalued by the impoverished but destructive mindset of economics. The North's purse strings are clutched by people who define development narrowly in terms of growth, jobs and productivity - and ignore broader measures of sustainability and well-being. A renewed sensitivity to context, and to social relationships, is a key aspect of the transition from mindless development to design mindfulness. But even this new approach can be a mixed blessing. One b-school professor now talks about "harvesting lifestyles". By what right do we swan around distant cities capturing information about people's lives? If we are to exchange value - rather than just take it, or act like cultural tourists - what do we have to offer? One contribution is that fresh eyes can reveal hidden value and thus mobilise otherwise neglected or hidden local resources. Visiting designers can act like mirrors, reflecting things about a situation that local people no longer notice or value.

SLIDES KEYWORDS

1 Assumptions

2 Reality Check

3 Opportunities

1) Assumptions

Development = Growth, Productivity, Consumption

The inevitability of Tech

Automation + "self service" > displacement of people

Transport intensity as a measure of success

The hard infra needed to support that

And the subjugation of people to systems time that follows

All of the above paid for by external investment

Investment that is fuelled, increasingly, by design "visions"

Because "They" need "Us"

2) Reality Checks

Developed - or wrongly-developed?

New indicators > measure what matters

Well-being as: environmental quality, service intensity, social capital

3) Opportunities

South > North.

- Local value
- Embodiment
- Service intensity

Nomadic banquet example

- Shared use of stuff
- Informal economy | alternative business models

North > South

- Fresh eyes: design as value revealer

Collaboration

- Issues are already global
- Recombination of knowledge systems
- Microsellers
- Fluid times
- Time banking
- Resource ecologies (Gramchitra. Hot-spacing)
- Food systems
- Enabling platforms" Googlebase etc
- Service design

FURTHER READING

Solidarity Economics : Strategies for Building New Economies From the Bottom-Up and the Inside-Out by *Ethan Miller*

<http://www.geo.coop/SolidarityEconomicsEthanMiller.htm>

World Social Forum: Another World is Possible

<http://www.counterpunch.org/obrienalegre.html>

<http://www.wsfindia.org/>

New indicators

The percentage of people in Northern countries calling themselves happy peaked in the 1950s - even though consumption has more than doubled since then. Hazel Henderson has helped develop twelve quality of life indicators - new criteria against which to make decisions about what we innovate, and how. <http://www.calvert-henderson.com/update-globalboom.htm>

How 'natural' are natural disasters?

Large losses of life, and destruction of homes and infrastructure, are often the outcome of risky forms of settlement by large numbers of people whose choices are limited by history and economic circumstance. http://www.desphilosophy.com/dpp/dpp_journal/journal.html

Design and disaster

Many architects and designers were eager to help with post-tsunami rebuilding in Asia. But appropriate design knowledge is embodied in people and situated in a context. There is a place for sophisticated new design and technology - but only when and where local traditions and ways of building and living cannot be readily adapted to cope with future emergencies

Alternatives To Geldofism

A range of African NGOs and organisations has expressed frustration and concern in

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response to statements from G8 that world leaders would solve Africa's problems with limited debt relief and increased aid.

href="http://www.g8alternatives.org.uk/admin/test/g8Mambo/content/view/180/39/

Nomadic Banquet

<http://nomadicbanquet.dutchartinstitute.nl/archives/info.html>

Small is not small

Build a bus stop in an urban slum and a vibrant community sprouts and grows around it. Such is the power of small interventions into complex urban situations.

Small Change by Nabeel Hamdi contains an implied critique of old paradigm, top-down, outside-in, development thinking.

<http://shop.earthscan.co.uk/ProductDetails/mcs/productID/389/groupID/3/categoryID/19/v/>

Civilizational Knowledge

Susantha Goonatilake's: "Buddhism encompasses many conceptions of time, and powerful metaphors for thinking about systems. The concept of *samsara*, the flow of life across time is one such. In Buddhist thought, change and process are considered the essence of life".

http://www.doorseast.com/transcriptions/goonatilake_txt.html

Who owns a lifestyle?

Is there a right to privacy on the street? Yves Doz, a professor at Insead, has written blithely about "harvesting lifestyles". One of the livelier debates at Doors 8 in Delhi concerned the ethics of anthropology used in the product development.

<http://www.epic2005.com/>

<http://www.cks.in/html/index.html>

Rural connectivity

Even if individual farmers do not own a PC or handset, eighty five per cent of India's 700,000 villages now have functional access to some form of connectivity. 300 million people use the country's 950,000 Public Call Offices (PCO), and PCO revenues currently account for 25 per cent of India's total telecom revenues.

<http://www.tenet.res.in/>
http://www.doorseast.com/2000doorseast/india_in_bubble.html

Hybrid Rural Portals

A chaupal, traditionally, is where farmers meet to share news and information.

<http://www.soyachoupal.com/>

Health spending per person

Less Developed Country \$11. High Income Countries \$1,907

Sustainable tourism

The average tourist uses as much water in 24 hours as a villager in a developing country uses in 100 days. <http://www.responsible-travel.com> <http://www.planeta.com>

Shadow City

Half or more of the inhabitants of major South Asian cities like Delhi are 'illegal', but Shanty towns are also sites of intense social and business innovation.

<http://squattercity.blogspot.com/>

Informal economies

When not working in the informal economy, a floating population of more than 15 million migrant workers sleeps in dormitories so small that there is no room to accumulate consumer goods. As a result, new patterns of living, consuming, and play have emerged which challenge traditional notions of efficiency, order, and creativity in city design. Buy a copy of the book.

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/9628604082/002-5092540-8956860>

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Sharing knowledge

The Honeybee Network has documented 48,000 rural innovations - but a lot of them are hard to transfer from one situation to another; the system doesn't scale.

Solidarity and Sustainability

<http://www.pelican-consulting.com/solisust08.html>

Buddhism and Development (Prof. Sulak Sivaraksa)

<http://www.daga.org/ds/dsp00/dl3m-f.htm>

Embodiment as localisation

The main thrust of the anti-globalization movement. As organisms active in the world, we process perhaps 14 billion bits of information per second., The bandwidth of consciousness is about eighteen bits. John Gray, 2002, *Straw dogs: thoughts on humans and animals*, Granta, London.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Embodied_philosophy

Ethnoecology

Only 1,100 of 265,000 plant species have been thoroughly studied. Of these, probably 40,000 have medicine or nutritional applications for humans. Susantha Goonatilake, 1998, *Toward a global science: mining civilizational knowledge*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press

Knowledge maps

Learning from locality: Gramchitra involves the use of Global Positioning System (GPS) systems, mobile phones, and digital cameras to create communication and knowledge maps of households.

<http://www.doorseast.com/projectexamples.html>

Design criteria for enabling platforms

Anything that shapes connectivity and information architecture inevitably impacts on knowledge and value – and therefore power. The challenge is to design system architectures that permit and promote local leaderships. They should creatively engage the people they are intended for. They should help people to evaluate the new against the old. They should help local people retain control over their own resources.

<http://doors8delhi.doorsofperception.com/proceedings.html>

Light-Fingered Distribution

In a light and sustainable economy we will share resources - such as time, skill, software, or food - using networked communications. Sunil Abraham, an internet advisor to NGOs, told us in Bangalore that local systems of barter and non-monetary exchange, such as Jogjami, have existed in India for at least 500 years. A cooperative distribution system called Angadia, or "many little fingers", enables people to send goods over sometimes vast distances without paying.

<http://www.mahiti.org>

March of the micro-sellers

Could sites like eBay enable individuals start to exchange time and services online?

<http://www.nationalmarkets.com/index1.html>

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