

DESIGN E RESPONSABILIDADE SOCIAL –

ILKKA SUPPANEN

Marília Riul,
Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos

INTRODUÇÃO

¹ Do desperdício ao desejo: projetando novas cadeias de valor socialmente sustentáveis em resíduos e reciclagem/ encontro acadêmico realizado junto ao Cedir, sob responsabilidade da professora Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, Universidade de São Paulo.

A entrevista com Ilkka Suppanen foi conduzida no Centro de Descarte e Reuso de Resíduos de Informática (Cedir), na Universidade de São Paulo (USP), no dia 30 de agosto de 2012. A presença do expoente designer finlandês se deveu à sua participação nas atividades de um encontro¹ sobre sustentabilidade no qual ele concedeu um *workshop* sobre resíduos eletrônicos.

Ilkka estudou Arquitetura na Technical University of Helsinki e design de interiores e do mobiliário na University of Art and Design Helsinki. O arquiteto e designer é internacionalmente reconhecido por sua premiada criatividade em design de interiores, de produtos e de conceitos, pelos projetos de arquitetura e também por sua inventividade aplicada no desenvolvimento de materiais *high tech*. Seu trabalho é frequentemente descrito como “leve, vanguardista e ainda classicamente escandinavo”. Seu portfólio nos permite perceber essas expressões através das formas elegantes e linhas sóbrias, combinadas ao frescor dos materiais inovadores e toques bem humorados de cores vivas.

Embora os trabalhos de Ilkka Suppanen certamente fossem nos render páginas e páginas sobre projetos de Design e Arquitetura, escolhemos nos aprofundar um pouco em uma faceta de sua carreira que ainda não foi muito abordada. Recentemente, o designer, que também é professor na University of Art and Design Helsinki desde 1996, envolveu-se em um projeto social desenvolvido em comunidades na Índia, juntamente a artesãos moradores de áreas rurais desprovidas de qualquer infraestrutura para a sua qualidade de vida.

No contexto contemporâneo de profundas inequidades sociais e de problemas de complexidade crescente, nesta entrevista Ilkka Suppanen nos dá *insights* enriquecedores acerca da responsabilidade dos designers. A experiência de Ilkka transcende barreiras espaciais e culturais para dar formato e consistência a interações mais éticas entre seres humanos. Se não é suficiente, esse projeto não apenas ajuda a melhorar a condição de várias vidas através de serviços básicos em um grupo social excluído historicamente, mas também representa um impulso de inspiração para acordar talentos resignados e esperanças abandonadas. Tanto para designers, quanto para grupos que sofrem com a exclusão social.

DESIGN AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY —

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INTRODUCTION

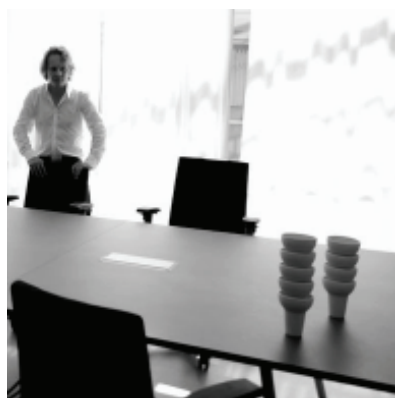
This interview was conducted in Centro de Descarte e Reuso de Resíduos de Informática (Cedir), in Universidade de São Paulo (USP), August 30th, 2012. The presence of the notable Finnish designer Ilkka Suppanen in São Paulo was due to his activities in a sustainability meeting² in which he guided a workshop about electronic waste.

Ilkka studied architecture at the Technical University of Helsinki and Interior and Furniture Design at the University of Art and Design Helsinki. He is internationally known for his awarded creativity in interior, product and concept design, architecture and also for his inventiveness in developing new high tech materials. His work is described as “light, forward-looking and yet classically Scandinavian” and his portfolio lets us perceive these expressions through very elegant shapes and sober lines, with the freshness of innovative materials and touches of colorful sense of humor.

Although pages and pages can be written about Ilkka Suppanen design works, we chose to deep a little in a side of his career that wasn't very much addressed yet. Recently, the designer, who also is a Professor at University of Art and Design Helsinki since 1996, got involved in a social project with artisans inhabitants of a very poor community in India.

In the contemporary context of profound social inequality and crescent complexity problems, in this interview Ilkka gives enriching insights about designers' responsibility, transcending space and cultural barriers to take part of a more ethical interaction among humans. If not enough, this project not only helps to improve quality of life through basic human needs in an excluded social group, it represents a trigger to wake up resigned talents and forgotten hope. Both to designers and excluded social groups.

² Do desperdício ao desejo: projetando novas cadeias de valor socialmente sustentáveis em resíduos e reciclagem/ academic meeting under responsibility of professor Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, Universidade de São Paulo.



<http://www.suppanen.com>



Foto: Marcos Santos/
http://www.imagens.usp.br?attachment_id=16272



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

³ Tikau Share (<http://tikaushare.org/>): "TIKAU combines Scandinavian design and Indian handicraft traditions with the vision of employing and empowering the artisans of rural India. The word Tikau comes from Hindi and means sustainable and durable" (TIKAU, 2012).

Marília: Please, can you describe in general lines in what consisted your work with artisans in Índia?

Ilkka: So, the project started when I met this woman in Finland who created a NGO, a organization³, which has two sides. In one part of this business, she imports from India beautiful craftsmanship from the rural area, areas which are not industrialized, and sells it in Europe and now USA. And the second part of this business is: the money she earns, she tries to help this people. So it is business and making good combined in one model.

And when I started to work with her, she has seven villages she worked with, making textiles, carpets, small boxes, many different kinds of craftsmanship, all around in different parts of India. And then she explained that there was this one village, which was the most poor of the villages and that they were casteless people who don't even had houses. "But what they can do? They can do baskets", and she said yet: "Can you design a basket for them? Design has a value". And then we realized that it is very difficult to make expensive baskets. It always stays under 10 Euros, 10 dollars. You cannot sell 20, because nobody buys. And we realized it was very difficult to earn money with it. And then I had an idea to make a lamp with this, because lamps can be quite expensive, especially when you make a big one. Every lamp is different and so then we can ask bigger price. It was just an idea and then we started to work.

We sent some drawing but it didn't really come good, they didn't do anything. So we went there, and we made a workshop with them. We said: "but we teach you how to do our lamp". First day we appeared, two people come and we try to do something. Wednesday there was already 20, and in the end of the week everybody was there. They didn't really understand what we were doing in the beginning, so they didn't want to come and then they come, because they see what was happening. And nowadays they do by themselves, so we don't have to go there anymore.

And now we sell the lamps, and we bring the money back. So, the money we earn from the lamp, we take it back to the village, but not as money, as services and goods. We bring them doctors, we bring them somebody to teach them, specially to women, about the sanitation, and somebody to talk about also, that they can one day send their children to school and learn. Because probably they



<http://www.tikau.com/products.php>

can start to target, specially the women...they will bring their children to school one day. And then we bring football and all clothes, you know? These are also very practical things but we never bring money.

Marília: Why don't you bring money?

Ilkka: I don't make the decision of what we bring, but the specialists who are working in India, they explain, they make analysis and they say if you bring money, they buy food, they buy clothes and then the next time you go they need money again. They don't improve, they just don't work anymore. With the healthcare, they have a better health, with the education you learn, and then of course clothes are important, because they don't have enough.

Marília: Where and when did it happen?

Ilkka: It's been 3 or 4 year we are doing this work. It took 2 years to get the first lamp. Because we also tried something different, we tried some other things, and we made mistakes and then we had to start the lamps that they can do.

Marília: The project is still in progress?

Ilkka: Yes, but now they make the lamp by themselves. We have to continue, because now they expect. It's different because when I make a sofa and if it doesn't sell, and I don't earn any money and the company doesn't earn any money, it's ok. But if we cannot sell the lamp, it's a problem because this people are waiting for the money to live, not the money but the services. There might be a woman who needs the doctor, and if she doesn't have she dies. You have a responsibility now, in a very different level.

Marília: How you became interested in doing this project?

Ilkka: When I decided that, I was working with big well known design companies. You realize you're working quite a lot. Most of the time the company earns a good money, and I make a rich person even more rich. This is the typical situation. You become a little bit tired. Because you think: "Why am I doing this?" Because you realize that there are people who actually could appreciate my help. Because the companies become richer and then you don't have any more good



relationship with it and you say “Why am I doing this?” So, I realized that I had to have part of my work as something that I want to do. I can’t completely do that, because I have to earn the money to be able to do work for free.

Marília: How did you choose this community or how did you get there?

Ilkka: It’s not my choice, those communities. It’s a choice of this Finnish organization. Somebody come and says: “Look, there’s this one village nobody can help”, “So, please, can you help?” So this is how it come⁴.

Marília: Did you know their work before your contact with them?

Ilkka: Yes, I was a time with the women at the company and she said: “Ilkka there’s this village”, and she showed me pictures of what they are doing.

Marília: How was the reception by the artisans in yours first contact?

Ilkka: They were very suspicious of us in the beginning, because they didn’t really know what we would do. I don’t think they had an idea about what is making a new design, because they always make the same things.

Marília: Can you give more details about your creative process in this work?

What are the main differences between this kind of creative process and the regular creative process?

Ilkka: Yes, it’s different because normally, if you think about the creative process of designing an object, you have an idea of a cabinet, probably an idea of using something very inspirational you want to do, and you find a technique and then you start to develop your design, probably quite conceptual in the beginning, and then design gets more concrete. And finally you get the final product in your head. So it’s a process, you know, which can be linear, which can be also circular, or in many ways.

But in this case, it’s different, because first you imagine the end result. You have to understand that the first idea we had was: “I want to have an expensive light made by this people so the rich people in New York buy it”. So you start with the end vision and then you start to think how you can do. So then you start to

⁴ The work of Ilkka was developed with artisans of a rural village in Orissa, India. They are Dalits – formerly known as Untouchables – are one of the most discriminated social groups in India, over 160 million people regarded as the “lower caste”. Despite discrimination laws, many Dalits still suffer from social stigma, political oppression and violence. They are forced to work in the lowest societal occupations as scavengers, lavatory cleaners and farm workers (http://tikau.com/pdf/tikau_catalog_2012_autumn.pdf).

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<http://tikaushare.org/villages/>



<http://www.tikau.com/products.php?lang=en>

think: “Can they make big?”, “Can they make smaller?”, “Can they make it”? It is almost the reverse linear process. But we make also a lot of mistakes, so we try something and if it is not possible we change. You cannot design really, you make a very careful design line and it becomes completely different. So, it takes 3 months to transport, so you say “Ok, if you make another design”, in 3 months we have a model, and after 6 months we can have the new product. And you say, “No, it’s not a choice”. Because it’s half a year, and in half a year no money comes. So you have to be very flexible and also accept that they don’t follow your idea, and probably it’s so nice like this.

Marília: Can you explain the artisans’ role in this project? Did they create some design?

Ilkka: They are partly creators because, first they were not motivated and then when we motivate them, they realize that they do a little bit. We have a drawing but they change it a little bit. And every artisan makes a different weaving, so when we look at the lamp, we know who is the women who make the weave because it is so personal. They like to do everything the same, because they have seen the industrial product and they want to imitate this. But they cannot and it’s good and we try to say that it doesn’t matter, that it’s ok that the lamps are different.

Marília: Which were the main difficulties you and, in your opinion, the artisans had?

Ilkka: Motivation. They were not motivated to do, because they didn’t know why they do this. It’s not technical. They were very excited to make the new technique and design, they were quite enthusiastic, but after they get motivated.

Marília: And to you?

Ilkka: Of course it was in the beginning because we worked a lot, we made a lot of proposes, we asked them to do something and it didn’t come nice. So, then after one year, you are doing a lot of work and nothing comes, nothing interesting and what they send is really bad and then you become almost hopeless, because you think you have a nice idea, but it doesn’t work.



<http://www.tikau.com/products.php?lang=en>

Marília: Do you think that, after this project, any kind of innovation appeared or can appear in their traditional artifacts?

Ilkka: Yes. I think it doesn't have to be technological innovation, it can be also the typology code innovation, like, you know, the fisherman that do their nets, they already have beautiful technique but they can do something more about this. Of course when we think about innovation we always, not always, but quite frequently we think about technology, and many time this people have a good technology.

Marília: How do you think the artisans benefit this action?

Ilkka: It is quite simple: the medical care, the education, and probably they also will do their own design. They understand that they can. The problem is that this are casteless people and they never had human rights, for example, the neighbor just come and steal the baskets and they don't do anything, they accept that it is ok to steal from them, so they also accept they never can be a creator, they never can make something. It is also a difficult culture, difficult to change the caste system.

Marília: How was the acceptance of the design artifacts in the market?

Ilkka: Good, you know. Some places we sell and some places we don't. In Finland they always say "But this is so expensive". Than we sell in New York everything immediately, and they don't think the price is high. So, it depends a little bit on the place, and we realized that in big metropolitans like New York or London, people buy very easily, and in Finland they buy a little more cautiously.

Marília: And the people that buy the lamps know about the project?

Ilkka: Yes, we try to communicate, and of course, because they look like they are not the same. These kind of "interior design ethnical craft", we try to avoid it. We try also to present it in a modern environment that we don't make it look like a style. And it doesn't become a trendy object, because if it becomes a trendy object, after two year people will stop buying, it will disappear. We try to keep it more kind of a classical and keep the same lamp always and people come to buy and it stays.



Marília: In your opinion, what are the relationships between design education and social/environmental questions?

Ilkka: I think education should provide both: the understanding of the social and sustainable aspects of the world. But also some basic skills and capabilities to deal with the social and environmental issues.

Marília: As a Professor, how do you think current design education is interacting with social/environmental problems? And how do you imagine it should be?

Ilkka: I think this is very different in different countries and situations. I have seen schools and universities with great deal of education and interaction with social and environmental issues.

For me the social and environmental issues should not be different and special part of education. It should be integrated to all levels of education and should be integrated to all the structures.

Marília: Do you think that experiences like the project you developed with artisans in India, that became a trade of knowledge between two different origins (yours and from Indians of the rural villages) may contribute to design education, oriented to social/environmental issues? How?

Ilkka: It became some “trade” of knowledge, it is absolutely correct. I can put this project into my education. But the challenge is that many of the experiences, findings and learnings are not documented so far. It will take some time. Sometimes we have people from university or academy researches with us to study the situation. But we are just building the pool of documented information now... Work is in progress.

Marília Riul

Possui graduação tecnológica em Design de Interiores no Centro Federal de Educação Tecnológica da Paraíba, mestrado em desenvolvimento e meio ambiente no Prodema/ Universidade Federal da Paraíba (UFPB) e atualmente é aluna de doutorado em ciência ambiental no Procam/Universidade de São Paulo, como bolsista da Fapesp.
Av. Professor Luciano Gualberto, 1289 - Campus Butantã
05508-010 – São Paulo, SP, Brasil
(11) 3091-2500
mriul@usp.br

Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos

Possui graduação, mestrado e doutorado em Filosofia pela Universidade de São Paulo. É membro do corpo docente permanente da Universidade de São Paulo, na Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo, onde defendeu tese de livre-docência e foi aprovada em concurso público como professora titular de Design. É orientadora plena credenciada em dois programas de pós-graduação da USP, na FAUUSP e no Procam-USP.
Departamento de Projeto FAUUSP
Rua do Lago, 876 – Campus Butantã
05508-080 - São Paulo SP, Brasil
(11) 3091-4555
closchia@usp.br