Section excerpted from:

INSIGHTS

4th-Year Students' Reflections on
Design for Social Innovation

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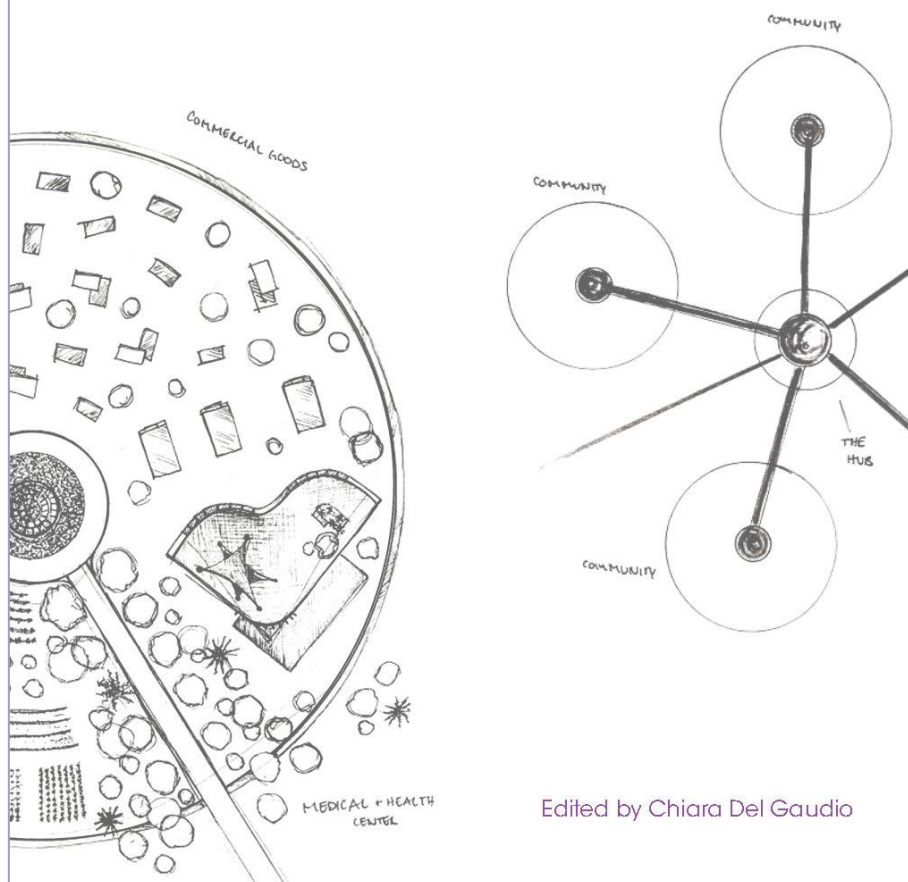
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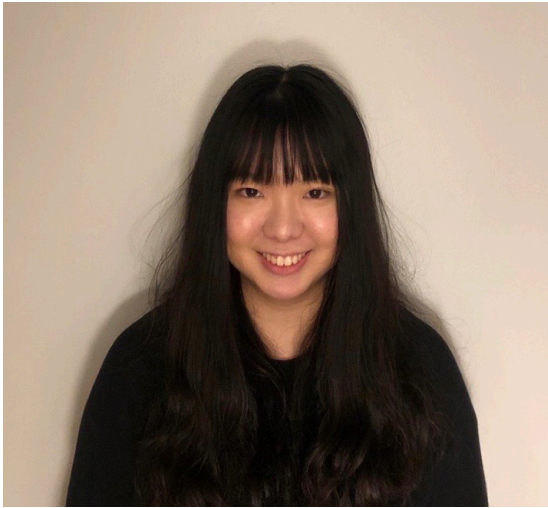
Designing Social Innovation in Sustainable Tourism

DESIGN - SOCIAL INNOVATION - SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The concept of social innovation has, in recent years, gained and retained a lot of interest as a way to achieve both sustainable economic growth and social changes (Balamatsias, 2018). According to the *Global Sustainable Investment Review 2018*, sustainable and responsible investing have been growing every year. Thus, there is every reason to believe that the pace of social innovation will, if anything, accelerate in the coming years. Despite its rapid growth, social innovation has received limited attention in academic tourism literature (Mosedale & Voll, 2017). The aim of this paper on social innovation in tourism is, first, to provide a conceptual overview of social innovation in the context of improving sustainable tourism; and second, to explore ways designers can help achieve social innovation in tourism.

Design for Social Innovation

There is a wide gap between the scale of the problems we face and the scale of the solutions on offer (Mulgan, 2006). In the past, governments, non-profits and for-profit organizations have been working to address some of these issues by helping create jobs and addressing social issues, however, the traditional "tools of government policy on the one hand, and market solutions on the other, have proved to be inadequate" (Murray & Mulgan, 2010, p.3). The above dependence was generally not good enough for fostering sustainable growth, securing jobs, and simultaneously meeting social needs. Therefore, when people came to realize that the old ways of doing things no longer work (Urama & Acheampong, 2013), an interest in the concept of social innovation started. Innovating generally means introducing new products, process or business solutions which are not only new but also extremely distinctive or game changers (Kogabayev

& Maziliauskas, 2017). Most of the time, innovation is associated with technological developments. Social innovation, on the other hand, is commonly viewed as a process of collaborative innovation, where the innovation process benefits from the newly created social relationships, which change social interactions and practices for the good of society (Mosedale & Voll, 2017). Social innovation is not a one-size-fits-all proposition and the values produced are not easily translated into quantifiable benefits. Social innovation brings more social justice and more empowerment which will make for a more dynamic and productive society (Hubert, 2011). Social innovation can emerge from both top-down and bottom-up processes, or a combination of the two. Top-down innovations are facilitated by external actors (experts, governments), while bottom-up innovations are driven by local people or communities (Manzini, 2014). The bottom-up perspective is more successful for social innovations at community level as it emerges to cope with day-to-day problems (Butkeviciene, 2009). "Traditionally, designers focused their attention on improving the look and functionality of products, [but] […] in recent years designers have broadened their approach, creating entire systems to deliver products and services" (Brown & Wyatt, 2010, para. 7). In design for social innovation, designers focus on society's most important challenges and complex social issues, such as reducing poverty and pollution, preventing illness, providing better sanitation and resolving much more critical social issues. Furthermore, social innovation designers are changing the way the world works: they tackle problems by creating new models, products, services and solutions that are characterized by a socially-oriented objective instead of predominantly commercial
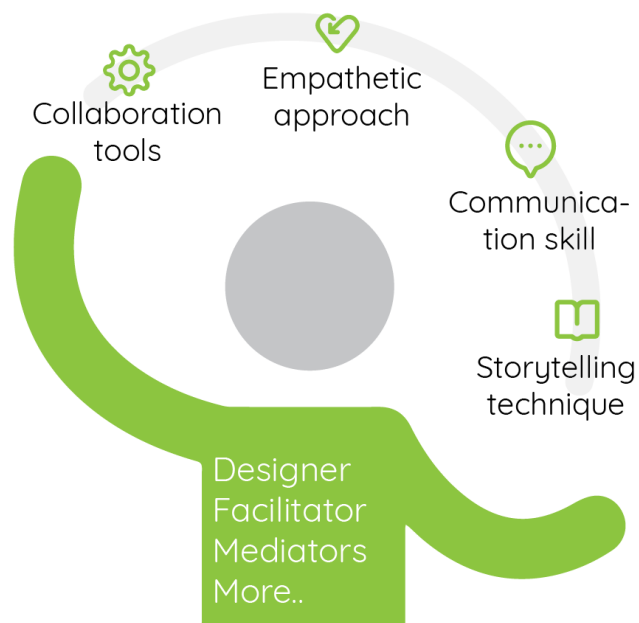
or consumer-oriented ends (Deserti et al., 2019). Proven design methods can be used to implement innovative solutions to address these complex social issues. In this regard, the *Open Book of Social Innovation* (Murray & Mulgan, 2010) identifies the following six stages that take ideas from inception to impact: 1. Prompts, inspirations and diagnoses, 2. Proposals and ideas, 3. Prototyping and pilots, 4. Sustaining, 5. Scaling and diffusion, 6. Systemic change. The book explores each of these stages in depth and describes some of the main methods used for each one. This framework will guide the designer through the familiar process of prototyping, piloting, tweaking and visualizing.

Sustainable Tourism

The tourism industry has for a long time been an important source of income for many regions and even for entire countries. This industry has experienced steady growth almost every year and international tourist arrivals were forecasted to exceed 1.8 billion by 2030 (Statista, 2018). Unfortunately, increasingly communities and local governments have attempted to heighten economic benefits with little regard for the social or environmental costs associated with tourism expansion (Allen et al., 2008). As a result, tourism is not without negatives consequences. These consequences include noise, polluting natural resources, erosion, displacement of population, social problems, endangerment of local species, and resentment by local residents. Learning about the impacts of tourism has led to sustainable tourism. The United Nation World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines sustainable tourism as: "Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities" (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2005, para. 1). However, sustainable tourism is understood differently by different people in the industry, resulting in poorly executed tourism development. This is why sustainable tourism, like most other industries, is increasingly becoming "growth-oriented and profit-driven with a relatively short-sighted approach to planning and development" (Mullis, 2017, para. 19). Sustainable tourism is not in its ideal state and therefore it needs to change. It needs to find new models. And finding new models means one thing: it needs to innovate.

Designing for Social Innovation in Sustainable Tourism

The concepts of social innovation and sustainable tourism are closely related, as innovation is an important aspect of sustainable tourism. Social innovations in tourism are needed to develop creative and imaginative communities while minimizing their associated negatives impacts (Mullis, 2017). In order to improve social and environmental performance across the entire tourism sector, both innovation and "empowering local communities to make informed and appropriate decisions about their tourism development" are critical (Mosedale & Voll, 2017, p. 629). In this regard, people need to be competent interpreters of their own lives and competent solvers of their own problems; people are the backbone of the social innovation process (Mulgan, 2006). In this framework, designers can play a crucial role by helping society reshape in the direction of a more participative arena where people are empowered, and learning is central, which make policies more effective (Hubert, 2011). "The role of the designer should initially be to support the development of new concepts and later to make them attainable so they can result in the development" (Chick, 2012, p. 58) of sustainable tourism as social enterprises. "Designers should be challenged to go beyond consumer culture and economic markets and become engaged in socially innovative design" (Chick, 2012, p. 55). They need to facilitate effective coordination and collaboration between themselves, policymakers, organizations and the community in general, resulting in a lasting social fabric that supports sustainable prosperity and self-reliance.

Collaboration tools

Empathetic approach

Communication skill

Storytelling technique

Designer Facilitator Mediators More..

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