

Changing the change

Design Visions, Proposals and Tools

An international conference on the role and potential of design research in the transition towards sustainability

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DEEDS, A NEW TEACHING & LEARNING RESOURCE

Developing tools and educational models to help mainstream sustainability into everyday design teaching and professional practice

Abstract

The first post-modern design manifestoes referencing ecological imperatives emerged in the 1960s (Jencks and Kropf 1997). Green and ecological design in the late 1980s evolved into eco-design and Design for the Environment (DfE), with an emphasis on eco-efficient ways of designing. By the late 1990s, the canon moved on as Design for Sustainability (DfS) gained credence. However, DfS, 'sustainable design', or 'sustainability design', still lingers on the outer boundaries of design education and practice. Observing this lack of progress led the International Centre for Innovation and Sustainability (ICIS) in Denmark, to successfully apply to and receive funding from the European Commission Leonardo da Vinci community Vocational Training Programme to set up the DEEDS (Design Education & Sustainability) project. DEEDS comprises five partners: ICIS, SERI, BEDA, University of Brighton and the Academy of Fine Arts, Poznan from five EU countries. DEEDS primary aim is to 'Integrate Sustainability into Mainstream Design Education and Design Practice in the EU Countries' by improving the skills and competences of people, and the quality of, and access to, continuing vocational training. The aspiration is that DfS can be inspired, inspiring and innovative in helping deal with sustainability issues that figure prominently in the public and political domains, and help the EU meet its strategic sustainability objectives expressed in the Lisbon Treaty.

Early research sought to understand (by literature survey, questionnaires and workshops) the barriers and needs for the two key audiences, design teachers in Higher Education and designers in professional practice. This process guided the early development of a web site (DEEDS 2007) generating a platform for presenting new T&L models. Concurrently, DEEDS set about determining the underlying principles that might guide the creation of a Teaching and Learning resource for these audiences. DEEDS believes that sustainability is complex requiring people to understand, imagine, design and resolve

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together (see for example Fuad-Luke; Manzini; Walker; and Wood in Chapman & Gant 2007; Manzini & Jegou 2003;). DEEDS derived a generic systematique of themes, 'SCALES', that need to be addressed when considering how design can positively impact on sustainability (Spangenberg et al, 2007). SCALES is a complimentary set of 24 principles based on key Skills (S – 9 principles), Creating change agents (C - 3), Awareness – systemic and context (A – 3), Learning together (L – 3), Ethical responsibilities (E – 3) and Synergy & co-creating (S – 3). SCALES was compared with other systematiques for ecological and sustainable design, and opened to critique in workshops. SCALES offers a most comprehensive set of criteria that embraces the scope of previous criteria yet adds new ones found to be essential when understanding DfS as a broader challenge than DfE.

SCALES is now informing the continuing development of the DEEDS Teaching and Learning (T&L) resource. In particular, there are some central tenets of SCALES that are shaping the communication, navigation, form and content of this resource. One set of tenets focuses on practical tools to help teachers and designers to develop further by adopting new behaviours, apply qualitative or quantitative DfS methods, and learn about relevant case studies that demonstrate application of DfS and SCALES. Another set of tenets embraces a range of principles that encourage inter-disciplinary thinking and practice; mutual learning; participation; development of teams, communities and networks; development of synergistic clusters of competence; and encouraging stakeholder participation, collaboration, sharing and partnering.

Within the guiding ethos of SCALES, the DEEDS partners are developing a concept for the web-based T&L resource involving 'pods' that are located within a 'pod landscape' or 'podscape' through which people can navigate, either slowly, quickly, randomly or co-operatively, depending on their needs. Pods can be created by DEEDS or by web visitors using a guide that encourages the creators to consider the new thinking, behaviour, practical outputs and experimental forms including concepts, prototypes and one-offs. Each pod is 'tagged' with information that enables other pods and other parts of the landscape to be connected, revealed and/or explored at a macro or micro scale.

This paper shows the development and testing of the DEEDS Teaching & Learning resource and discusses its potentiality to lever mainstream adoption of sustainability thinking into everyday teaching and design practice.

References

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