Chapter 11
Educating a Socially Responsible Designer:
First to Know User

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ABSTRACT

Between user and environment, the main responsibility of a designer is to conceive user as part of design understanding. Design education is one of the important stages to provide required bottom-up change in prevalent design perspectives by equipping student with necessary skills and tools towards a socially responsible designer. Addressing this issue, the chapter aims to provide a framework to contribute education of socially responsible designer. Focusing on Donald Schön's notion of "on-the-spot inquiry," a framework for the organization of user learning in design studio is discussed to provide design students a way to understand real user with its complex dimensions and lead them to define their design problem with this user-informed perspective. The critical tools of this approach are underlined as real user-student interaction, on-the-spot user inquiry, and user case in design studio. This framework is exemplified with a user case involving a design studio experience.

INTRODUCTION

User oriented design approaches, especially during the last few decades, have come a long way by seeking more active ways to reconcile between user and environment at different scales both in theory and practice. Social design is one of them, whose focus is particularly on the social impact of design. Equity and social justice are the main issues of these approaches. These user-oriented perspectives basically indicate two complementary dimensions for designing better environments; awareness and knowledge about user phenomena and a design process, which embraces this human factor effectively.

Yet, despite all these efforts, expected change in prevalent user and design perspectives both in practice and education is very slow. User is still defined based on designer's own experiences or on some

second hand quantitative data set and user is placed as a substantial part of given design problem, in most cases. Also, "user" and "user-oriented perspectives" are still additional themes for curriculums of most design schools.

Considering the development of more inclusive relationship between user and environment, design education is one of the important stages to provide required bottom-up change in prevalent design perspectives by equipping design student with necessary skills and tools towards a socially responsible designer.

Basically, design can be defined as a problem solving process, which aims to transform existing situations into preferred ones. But, before solving the problem, a designer has to define the design problem carefully, so this definition provides designer its mind sets, tools and its solution set. So, it can be said that when defining a design problem, designer's perspective and knowledge base are critical to determine what the solution is.

With this background, present chapter aims to provide a framework to contribute the education of socially responsible designer. Based on Donald Schön's (1988) notion of "on-the-spot inquiry," it will discuss the significance of real user participation and search in the design studio education for understanding user with his/her context and for defining design problem with this understanding.

The scope of this chapter can be defined considering the issues; design discipline, design studio education, design process, and real user interaction. Design studio education constitutes the primary focus of the study, since it is still the very place of learning by doing in design education, but exemplary case is limited with the architectural design studio education. Because learning of user related issues as early as possible in design is important to provide a user integrated design learning, novice level of design studio education is defined as another scope for the study, especially for provided case example. The problem definition, early design concept generation phase in design process is defined another boundary, due to its guiding character and strong effects on the design solution space for the study. The issue of user participation to design studio is limited both with organization of students' user research efforts and with the involvement of user experience to the problem definition phase in chapter's discussion. Mutual learning and co-design approaches between user and student and also participation of user to the other phases of design, like design development, or assessment are excluded, since they remain beyond the goal of the study.

The first part of the chapter aims to provide a base for why a design profession needs a socially responsible designer, and the next part sets the existing conditions of this formation in design studio education. Then the last part, remarking required dimensions in design studio for the cultivation of socially responsible designer, searches the potentials of on-the-spot user inquiry in studio and "getting a feel for behavior of user phenomena" and "user case" as its main constituents.

BETWEEN USER AND ENVIRONMENT: RESPONSIBILITY OF A DESIGNER

In recent decades, with technological improvements and the changes in society; increasing awareness of users, aging population, developing new patterns of life, and increase in demands for sustainable environments lead problems in relation to designed environments, products, and services, which are unable to meet these changes. This transformation and the problems indicate a serious need for change in prevalent understanding of user in design and reveal a necessity that design embrace diversity of users and improve its communication skills with society.

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