

Chapter 7

The Design Approach to Social Innovation

ABSTRACT

This chapter identifies the way in which design thinking is evidenced as trends and patterns in the social innovation literature. The newly emergent concept of design thinking has become more prominent in social innovation literature since 2010. The inclusive and multidisciplinary state of social innovation research has supported the integration of design thinking elements within its literature thereby resulting in the two literatures co-evolving. The conceptual developments of social design, service design, and socially responsible design are viewed as micro-level perspectives. Whilst the design for sustainability is viewed at the meso level and design for social innovation is viewed at the macro level. It is accepted that design thinking may take the form of an attitude or a participatory design or co-design process. The case studied in this chapter is the One World Project's approach to making, selling, and distributing durable footballs exemplifies the evolution of service design to design for social innovation.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-4588-1.ch007

INTRODUCTION

The inevitable shift of the locus of economic activity in the developed world from industrial manufacturing to knowledge-centric service delivery, has made innovation crucial to long-term survival. Thus, mere confinements to the introduction of new physical products is now hardly viable, calling for new processes, services, interactions, entertainment forms, and ways of communicating and collaborating (Brown and Katz 2011). This has led design professionals to push design beyond an isolated engagement with consumer culture and to exploration of new forms of practice (Chick 2012). Furthermore, as a development, design is now used to tackle social issues to create innovative solutions (Cairns 2017; Light 2019; Manzini and Rizzo 2011). With the publication of the book entitled “design thinking” by Rowe (1987) and the influence of an article by Buchanan (1992), diverse business communities have now adopted design thinking methods. These adaptations come with expectation that they will contribute to developing competitive advantages. In addition, various types of businesses embrace design thinking, believing that such processes will yield greater innovation, higher differentiation of their brand, and a faster turnaround of their products and services in the markets. Not only the for-profits oriented firms but also the not-for-profit organizations are now using design thinking approaches to develop interventions to address social challenges with improved and appropriate solutions. As a result, design thinking goes beyond the traditional borders between public, private, and third sector organizations (Brown and Wyatt 2010; Kim 2018).

With this background, policy makers, organizations, researchers and other stakeholders are now paying increased attention to design thinking in social innovation development. The historical social movements have shown that social innovation generates prolific outcomes to meet the unmet social needs in communities. Social innovation, in a way, has become a movement of its own (Bennett and McWhorter 2019). However, as a field of research, it is still in its infancy (Light 2019). The design perspective of social innovation research is attracting popularity amongst academics, practitioners and policy-makers, particularly after 2010. The word ‘design’ has gained prominence in the fields of business and management, yet it remains contested term with multi-faceted interpretations and meanings (Cairns 2017). With the higher involvement of design professionals to address growing social, cultural and

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