

CROSS CULTURAL CO-DESIGNING FOR INNOVATIVE SUSTAINABLE (TEXTILE) DESIGN SOLUTIONS – QUESTIONING SDG 4 & 17

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ABSTRACT

The main goal of the paper is to discuss cultural appropriation in order to ultimately work together to create a more sustainable future and to encourage the application of seven (7) different instruments in educational settings. This paper showcases design methods for co-designing and cross-cultural design processes, to educate students and industry partners about respecting design codes and ownership. A case study on textile design – pertaining to design, production and living conditions – is presented in Europe as well as North Africa, to illustrate the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17 ‘Partnerships for the Goals’ as well as SDG 4 ‘Education and Quality’. SDG 12 ‘Responsible Consumption and Production’ is supported by our research into cultural appropriation in the design business. ‘Cultural appropriation’ is not only a debate taking place in fashion design, regarding designers profiting while using patterns that are ethnologically significant to indigenous people without asking permission. Engaging in cultural appropriation with a positive intent can serve as a means of remembrance and ‘revaluation’ of hand-crafted techniques, which run the risk of being lost. This knowledge is evidence of our cultural remembrance and our knowledge archive for the future: it informs us on how we might restore, teach and convey this valuable knowledge within the curricula – providing a collaborative sustainable design education.

Keywords: Cross-cultural co-designing for SDG 17, design ownership, knowledge archives for SDG 4, cultural appropriation, 7 instruments for fair co-designing

1 INTRODUCTION

Our main intention is to design a sustainable future together in Europe and around the globe, while respecting design ownership [1]. We aim to do this by educating students through co-designing with people from so-called foreign cultures. While this paper is an inquiry into cultural appropriation in design, within this framework. It will showcase design methods for co-designing and cross-cultural design processes used to educate students and partners throughout the industry. We are using the elements of edu-care [2] related to our knowledge archives for a sustainable academic future.

Regarding the designing, working, production, and living conditions, the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [3] give us an orientation for the future. This paper focuses on the following SDGs: SDG 17 ‘Partnerships for the Goals’ – beyond Europe – with the intention to illustrate how cross-cultural co-designing can promote a healthier world; SDG 4 ‘Education and Quality’ and SDG 12 ‘Responsible Consumption and Production’ are addressed by our question about cultural appropriation in the design business – which examines the cultural education of all partners – and, additionally, reference is drawn to the politically relevant focus selected by the UN for the year 2023. ‘Cultural appropriation’ [4] originally relates to art robbery and will be explained further in chapter two. Fashion designer Isabel Marant was criticised for profiting from her design, while using indigenous ethnological patterns without asking for permission. However, cultural appropriation conducted in a positive manner can help in the preservation and remembrance of techniques, hand crafted techniques. These techniques run the risk of being lost, which would significantly impair SDG 4 as well on the long with consequences for a sustainable economy. This knowledge represents our ‘cultural mind’ [5] and our knowledge archive in design engineering, which can be used in the future (see chapter 2.2). Our use of this valuable knowledge archive [6] is showcased using co-design and cross-disciplinary learning in chapter three.

Here, a balance between culture, aesthetics, and ethics – demonstrated by a design study – is achieved. By combining new knowledge connected to rituals, cultural behaviour and old techniques with the technological aid of digital tools of our 4th industrial revolution, we can enter a post digitalisation ‘industry 4.0’ era. Chapter four finally highlights seven instruments used to formulate the cooperation framework applied in design cultures and design studies. The case studies in chapter three will enable you to identify and reflect on the solutions found. This will help you envision and understand how the SDG 17 ‘Partnerships for the Goals’ – beyond Europe – could lead to a healthier world for us, by reshaping the behaviour linked to design attitudes.

2 CULTURAL RITUALS, MIND AND APPROPRIATION – SDG 4

2.1 Cultural appropriation and cultural behaviour – creating a cultural mind

SDG 4 ‘Education and Quality’ and SDG 12 ‘responsible consumption and production’ focus on cultural appropriation in the design business, as directed by the United Nations (UN) for the year 2023. Cultural appropriation is a debate taking place in fashion design. Awareness has been heightened since the misuse of ethnological patterns of indigenous people, in a design by Isabel Marant [7], in the year 2019, as she had not asked for permission.

Cultural appropriation originates from art history, which exposes the phenomena of ‘art theft’ [8]: Over the course of history, emperors took trophies as art objects from foreign countries, indigenous people, and appropriated colonies. The art historian Bénédicte Savoy is highly respected for her expertise on this subject. She published her dissertation about art theft committed by the French in Germany around 1800. In her writings, Savoy explores the sociological, historical and cultural significance of cultural appropriation caused by art robbery. She was invited to work alongside interdisciplinary teams to build the new Humboldt Forum in Berlin. Together with David Blankenstein, she curated a highly regarded ‘Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt’ exhibition at the Deutsches Historisches Museum in 2019. The textile example of the balloon, which represents a flight between ‘old and new’ European fields, sparked a vivid discussion about cultural ownership [9]. Savoy and other scientists campaigned for stolen objects to be returned to their original owners. Since this debate, museums in France and in Germany have acted according to their wishes. For example, the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum in Cologne are giving back the Benin sculptures, which is part of building the identity of the Edo culture and a significant part of the cultural mind of the folk of Nigeria [10].

Previously, this was meant and understood as the cultural spirit and rituals that shape tomorrow's cultural behaviour, and the rituals that will guarantee sustainable life on earth if craft skills are lost, due to the loss of knowledge regarding physical skills and resourcefulness [11]. ‘Nous sommes en train, d’oublier, peut-être, le métier de physique dans le métier de design’ [12]: We may currently be in the process of losing the physical skills in the design profession, and the part of the knowledge archives connected to objects – such as art sculptures and design objects.

2.2 Co-designing and usage of intercultural knowledge archives

The cultural mind of a nation showcases their long-lasting rituals and passes them along to future generations. It is our cultural code, identity, and knowledge archive [13] that inform our design and handling instructions and are always reflected in the future in terms of the lifecycle of our resources and nature [14]. The textile cultural mind and heritage refers to the phenomenon of cultural appropriation with regard to the question of design ownership. To take the next step toward 21st century design, we need to take cultural appropriation seriously. The case study noted below showcases an example of co-designing in a sustainable and culturally appropriate way. This illustrates how a beneficial cooperation and integration of all partners from different countries, with different cultural habits and understanding, could serve as an example of positive cultural appropriation for the future. We can learn from other cultural codes. We can learn to design form, patterns and design structures, as well as convey the appropriation of old handcraft techniques. Manufacturing knowledge and design is our foundation and, around the globe, we have to learn to value these parts of our societal mind, while conveying the different perspectives.

3 FACING CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN INTERCULTURAL CO-DESIGNING WITHIN SDG 17

3.1 The unfolding of co-designing is breaking cultural boundaries

Social co-designing is becoming an increasingly important area in the design education system [15]. Cultural exchange has the potential to enhance the unique quality of identity, especially when it comes to intercultural co-designing based on a high level of tolerance of ambiguity [16]. At the same time, it enables us to re-evaluate our mindsets, ideas and judgements, thus building knowledge archives [17]. A broader perspective on different cultures of memory leads to a more open and panoramic view of how value attitudes develop [18]. Furthermore, intercultural co-designing can not only drive innovation, but also promote social lifestyle changes towards more sustainability and the transformation of the new economy [19]. A sophisticated design research methodology within intercultural co-working can enable the creation of designs that revive cultural codes and create awareness of the respective culture. They can also meet the aesthetic demands of the target customer [20]. The case study of the intercultural project 'Indigenous Modernity' will illustrate this thesis.

3.2 Prerequisites for intercultural co-designing of the individual

In order to co-operate successfully with stakeholders from different cultures and avoid cultural appropriation within the discipline of cultural creativity, several preconditions are required. Regarding design creation, a designer should not only be creative, but also respect and possess knowledge of the cultural past and historical political power relations. Thus, it can be ensured that ethnic groups or indigenous peoples are not marginalised or oppressed [21]. To avoid cultural appropriation and to build social-cultural awareness, we must teach history, cultural diversity, and cultural sustainability within the SDG 4, as early as infancy. According to the 2022 Report 'Re|Shaping policies for creativity' by UNESCO, SDG 4 'Education and Quality' aims at the acquisition of the necessary skills, like technical and vocational skills for employment, decent work and entrepreneurship in the cultural and creative sectors, by youth and adults [22]. The key findings of the case study with regard to the prerequisites for successful cross-cultural cooperation are summarised in Figure 1a.

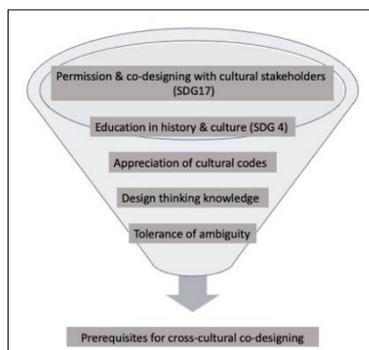


Figure 1a - 2022 Prerequisites for woman in intercultural co-designing-by Charlotte Weber



Figure 1b - Exchange with indigenous Berber Matmata, 2022, photo rights: Ramona Möllers

3.3 A case study of cross-cultural co-designing

The 2022 Summer School project with the co-working collection 'Indigenous Modernity' serves as an example of intercultural exchange between multicultural partners. The sustainable denim collection was created by two German design students who co-designed with the Tunisian denim supplier Sartex Group. They collaborated with indigenous Berber people (see fig.1b), the Hochschule Niederrhein University of Applied Sciences, and native Tunisian student Oussema Haddar. The collection offers a combination of modern, innovative textile techniques inspired by traditional cultural rituals, clothing and aesthetics. Such clothes were inspired by representatives of the Tunisian Berber culture and Tunisian historians. The symbolic tattoos of the Berber people served as inspiration and were respectfully transferred into the collection by implementing a profound design methodology. Referring to chapter 2.2, these tattoos of the Berber people can be seen as cultural codes and part of the cultural DNA that are handed over to the next generation. The aim of the project was to revive Tunisian culture, history and tradition with the opportunity to remember and cherish the culture, thereby ensuring that these

important roots of Tunisian history and traditions are not forgotten. Simultaneously awareness of the culture can grow as it is spread. This design study of the Berber culture showcased the co-designing process with stakeholders of different cultures. This required efficient communication on eye level between all parties involved, as well as an open-mindedness towards other cultures [23]. Finally, the collection debuted at Tunis Fashion Week in the desert at Touzeur, in November 2022.

Establishing sustainable cross-cultural collaboration necessitates conducting interviews with representative indigenous communities to gain insights into their cultural and traditional practices, thereby enabling appropriate communication. Additionally, it is indispensable to ask the cultural representatives for permission to use their cultural codes and understand the meanings of spirituality, religiosity and fertility, so they can be encoded or integrated into the designs [24]. The avoidance of cultural appropriation and the loss of authorship can thus be ensured.

3.4 The challenge of different aesthetic perceptions in fashion and textile design

When it comes to co-designing with multiple cultural stakeholders, we face several challenges within the communication and realisation process. As a medium of cultural identity, fashion and textiles can be seen as an important part of this process [25], especially regarding the fundamental differences between Western and non-Western clothing. The non-western fashion is mostly seen as a perpetual costume associated with profound cultural meaning, identity, group membership or religiosity. In contrast to this, western clothing is fast moving, superficial, and mundane, and it projects personal identity. Over the past decades, the term exotic fashion has established itself in Western culture. Grant David McCracken, a Canadian anthropologist and author, defined this movement as ‘selective borrowing’, as early as 1985. Jennifer Craig, who is an expert in fashion theory and cultural studies, notes that such undertakings may be considered institutionalised plagiarism between different subcultures. Moreover, non-Western clothing continues to evolve under its own resilient cultural dress code, further adopting its own version of Western fashion [26].

As the case study in co-designing and the theoretical comparison has proven that different cultural realities on aesthetics in design must be taken into account and respected in order to be able to compete sustainably in the international globalised market.

4 CULTURAL APPRECIATION AND RESPECT FOR DESIGN OWNERSHIP BY USING 7 INSTRUMENTS FOR SUSTAINABLE & FAIR CO-DESIGNING

4.1 Cross-cultural co-designing as curriculum benefit for a valuable cultural appreciation in design

Evolving lifestyles and transitions demand a stronger commitment to international cultural cooperation and openness to diverse cultures [27], including adaptations in curricula and the competencies to be taught. In this respect, cultural co-designing plays an increasingly important role in stimulating and communicating social, economic, and environmental sustainability [28]. Especially in the sense of SDG 17 ‘Partnerships for the Goals’, which calls for more creative intercultural co-designing communities for sustainable development to be established in the future. Therefore, student projects, such as the example of the Design Summer School in Tunisia, must be offered by universities and cooperation partners at an early stage. According to the latest report by UNESCO, the fields of climate strategies and environmental policy should increasingly focus on such collaborations, as they have the potential to initiate much-needed changes in ways of mindsets, behaviour and integration. For the transmission of this kind of knowledge, interculturality, creativity and education must go hand in hand, to achieve sustainable development – as outlined in SDG 4. These aspects should be considered collectively, from early childhood education to curricula in higher education [29].

4.2 Implementing 7 instruments of performance for progressive cultural co-designing

‘Europe needs a new generation of designers, who are able to reshape behaviours as well as empower and help people walk their way towards a more sustainable lifestyle.’ [30]. This is not only an issue for our future rituals but also often unintentional subconscious design attitudes [31]. In this research study our main intention is sketching a sustainable future in co-designing together with different stakeholders and cultures. Respecting design ownership and the textile cultural heritage of other human beings from *foreign* cultures in Europe and around the globe, means educating through co-designing and learning

how to integrate people from different countries with different aesthetic values. In summary – as it relates to the SDG 4 and 17 – we can formulate the following wish that underlines our common goal: The summer school case study of innovative sustainable textile designs has proven that the cross-cultural co-designing process is the next generation of sustainable approaches involved in the 4th industrial revolution. On the one hand, our new knowledge is connected to tradition, cultural behaviour and old techniques, while on the other hand, we are connected to advancing assistive technologies. Through the digital tools of the 4th industrial (digital) revolution, we are entering the post digitalization era and textile industry 4.0. We are also connected to academic fields in ‘non-hierarchical designing landscapes’ [32]. This is the pre-requisite for co-designing and cultural integration, learning about design provenance and ownership, as well as showing respect toward cultural codes (representing sustainable benefits for SDG 4 and 5). In the end, CAD designing, laser-techniques, and interactive designing togetherness on different media levels, give us the technically sustainable tools and -capital linked to human capital. When it comes to design from ‘foreign’ countries, cultural respect is critical. Our discussion and study have proven that the following seven instruments meet the needs for the sustainable circular (textile) economy of the future:

- Revaluation of and convey the (textile) crafts techniques and traditional codes
- Co-designing together with all integrated partners and stakeholders – collecting experiences through projects early on within the studies
- Creating a unique knowledge archive with ‘foreign’ countries, which leads to respected knowledge banks
- Revaluation of analogue tactile abilities as a part of small exercises throughout the semester
- Respecting design ownership and design rights by discussing the solutions together
- Integration of all partners early on in interdisciplinary projects – matrix management
- Managing transparent communication as a part of design project management, to serve the SDGs – and, consequently our earth and life.

It follows that these cross-cultural co-designing instruments have to be integrated into curricula.

4.3 Cross-Cultural Co-Designing – part of a visionary curriculum in design

It is beneficial for all when the interests of students, industry representatives, and global experts unite to respect cultural design codes and the symbolic meaning of signs of foreign cultures. European partners from the industry will benefit by educating experts about respecting global design ownership and design heritage. This will entail fair integration and ensure the preservation of human capital. It is necessary for academic institutions to educate and integrate future experts at a very early stage, by implementing cross-cultural co-designing projects as part of the curricula. Implementing this could mean building co-design spaces from kindergarten on, and educating citizens about cultural appreciation and tolerance for design ownership. These kinds of cross-cultural projects and unification, in combination with the application of the seven instruments as defined, could help solve problems relating to ‘cultural appropriation’ and the misuse of foreign cultural codes, thus serving SDG 4 and 17. As mentioned in chapter 3.1., social co-designing is becoming an increasingly important area in the design education system. Cultural exchange has the potential to enhance the unique quality of identity, especially for young, educated design experts. Our suggestions seek to achieve the setting of new standards regarding the resilient cultural education of all partners.

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