

# THE PURPOSE OF INDUSTRIAL DESIGN DEVELOPMENT – DILEMMA OF ETHICAL & SOCIAL ASPECTS OF DESIGN BACHELOR AND MASTER PROJECTS IN LATVIA

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## **ABSTRACT**

Industrial production is highlighted as the main source of development and well-being for the people. It is expected that design both as a process and the result helps to generate profit but ethical and social impacts of design are not considered to be the priority of the global market. Nevertheless designers argue that design is human and ethical activity.

What drives product development in industrial production and emerging school projects? Can products, developed according to ethical and social aspects, compete in capitalism economy?

The paper analyses the purpose of creative industry's design and industrially produced product development in a small country (less than 2 million people) and identifies booming design product specialization during financial austerity. Acknowledged and successfully produced niche products in the market are compared with the product development concepts in design education since 2010.

Research defines, that ethical and social aspects, especially identity and belonging as transformation of traditions, wellness and health, are important to a creative industry's design specialization of a small economy rather than industrially produced products. Ethical and social issues are the ground of micro-design-enterprises; however it is not sufficient for their successful development.

Ethical and social aspects, included in the early stage design process, favour the shift of design paradigm under the pressure of the global capitalism economy.

*Keywords: Design purpose and values, ethics, social capital.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Third Industrial revolution and production is highlighted as the main source of growth and well-being, including new product development [1] – to produce more with digitization and technologies, renewable resources [2] and recycle-reuse shortened product life cycle approaches. Product development justifies business, technological or social purpose and mainly has two meanings: to expand company's activities or to design form and function of the product [3]. The latter one as new product development empowers businesses by innovating new products or redesign. New and innovative products embody values of the companies' or designers. Industrial companies need to have range of product collections as diversification or expansion of the market positions.

Niche design products are offered by micro, creative industries companies. "By addressing a customer's need in a way that's never been done before, a company not only stands out but establishes a tie to a niche consumer base" [4]. Therefore niche design products address socio-ethical and environmental aspects and as microbusinesses sustain local economy and employment.

Designers argue that design is human and ethical activity. Also, design helps to generate profit [5] as product competitiveness and added value to the products, the only indicator to prove that is a turnover increase.

The paper analyses the purpose and values of industrially produced and creative industry's design product development compared to student designed products in a small country with population of less than 2 million. The paper proposes the following questions: is highlighting of ethical and social issues a prerogative of design education and creative industry's niche products? Do products, that are developed to fulfil social needs, favour the shift of design paradigm under the pressure of global capitalism?

## 1.1 Methodology

The study is based on structured interviews with industrial designers whose design products are internationally awarded in design competitions. Industrially produced design products are compared to the design of bachelor's and master's product design concepts based on the information provided by industrial designers. Information about design bachelors and masters diploma projects is debriefed by the author during students' supervision process in design research and theoretical study.

Industrially produced products, that have international design awards, and national or international recognition or patented design bachelor's and master's projects since 2010, have been chosen as cases of this study.

The paper analyses design product development purpose and values. Why and what were the idea and meaning of the product development? What values did designer want the product embody?

## 2 THE AIM AND VALUES OF THE INDUSTRIALLY PRODUCED AND INTERNATIONALLY AWARDED PRODUCTS

In the last decade Europe and the world had been affected by the financial, administrative and social crisis that grew into threats of national freedom and independence. After a very rapid growth Latvia was the country that was hit by crisis the worst in the years 2008-2010. The years throughout financial, economic and social crisis have proved that restricted opportunities both for people and businesses open innovativeness and creativity as massive development of new products, business forms and markets. According to the Latvia Registry of Enterprises in 2011 there was a 34% increase of newly registered companies after the last enormous decapitation of labour in 2010. [6] Among them 22% were limited-capital creative industry companies. In 2013 there were 8-10% creative industries enterprises in Latvia. Since 2008 design products and services designed in Latvia have received 19 international design awards such as Red Dot Design Award, iF product design award, International Design Award (USA), Dieline Packaging Design Awards, Creative Business Cup, Swatch Art Rules, etc. Hereafter the study analyses three internationally awarded design products.

**RIGA ChAIR** is founded by the architect and designer Aldis Circenis. At the very beginning of the economic crisis the designer understood the need to produce products with a higher added value than those manufactured before. As the company bought moulded plywood factory in 2010, the primary purpose of new product development was to design a product to be produced in the moulded plywood factory. The designer's challenge was to design a stool without any single screw, which, is always a problem in use. He knew that all stools in the market are structurally primitive and very similar. Designer intuitively felt a new opportunity to design a distinctive, attractive and still functional stool. New product development was based on the knowledge of plywood constructive feasibility. By experimenting the designer came to the principle that defined the shape of the stool. The Bloom stool was the first product of Latvia that won the prestigious Red Dot Design Award in 2012.

The award brought not only a good publicity to the company but also the status. The potential distributors are willing to sell Bloom stool in design shops, where prices are high, but the company's interest is to sell more, not exclusively.

Another award winning product of the company RIGA ChAIR is a rocking toy named *Roo* made of a single moulded part. The *Roo* product development was furthered by a critical thought: why several generations have grown up with the same classic rocking horse? Are all the rocking horse redesign possibilities exhausted? The purpose of the rocking toy *Roo* was to create a toy that is constructively simple, minimalistic and its very archetypal shape makes it an intriguing toy. [7]

According to the designer's view both products embody simplicity, naturalness and high functionality values. [8]



Figure 1. Bloom stool, Red Dot Design product design Award 2012 and International Design Award (USA) 2011, 3rd place. Rocking toy Roo, iF Product design award 2012 and German Design Award 2014, Special Mention. RIGA ChAIR, Designer Aldis Circenis

The design attitude of **Flow Design** by German - Latvian designers Georg Dwalischwili and Janis Karklins „leave-only-what-is-needed” led to the product innovation - the *Cliq* magnetic clothes hanger. [9] “Why keep the metal addition in the hanger design if it's not necessary?” asked designers. Therefore, the aim of designing *Cliq* was functional rearrangement that is reduced to the essential and to surprise and enhance an indispensable everyday utensil. As product values, designer G. Dwalischwili names customer journey improvement, turning shop visitors into brand ambassador, and designing of branding tool for fashion labels and high end boutiques. Also, production is outsourced; *Cliq* is produced locally by using local material - Latvian birch. Designers are convinced that products quality should be controlled locally, thus adding an impact on the local economy. [10]

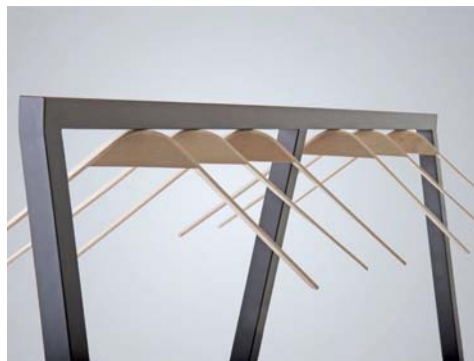


Figure 2. *Cliq Premium*, Red Dot Design product design Award 2014, Design: Flow Design; designers Georg Dwalischwili and Janis Karklins

**GIGI BLOKS** is a set of oversized building blocks to foster children`s creativity [11]. The product idea is based on the childhood dream of the GIGI designer to have gigantic blocks for building houses. A few years ago designer wanted to give a present to her daughter, but large, ecologic and environmentally friendly blocks were still not available. The main values of the product are development of children's creativity, spatial and logical thinking, problem-solving experience and communication skills. [12]



Figure 3. GIGI BLOKS, Creative Business Cup 2014, 2nd place, Designer Ilona Viluma

The purpose of industrially produced and internationally awarded product development is redesign of existing products as new possibilities, based on the material and technological knowledge and the use of new technological possibility. Products embody companies and designer's personal ambitions and values: simplicity, minimalism, use of natural and local materials. All selected designers favoured the view that design products should be manufactured locally or nationally by using local resources. The company that is representing creative industry, promotes social responsibility as children's' creativity development.

### 3 THE AIM AND VALUES OF DESIGN BACHELOR AND MASTERS DIPLOMA PROJECTS

The product **"Meet-me!"** deals with communication problems in the public space. It offers rearrangement of the environment to foster emotional, psychological and social communication processes. "Meet-me!" was created with the idea to provoke a casual conversation, informal meeting, and relaxed communication in the public space. The designer has recently launched a company to develop the product production cycle.



*Figure 4. Design bachelor project "Meet-me!", 2012, designer Ligita Breġe, supervisor assit.prof. Juris Krūmins; 1st place „SaloneSatellite WorldWide Moscow 2012” and Eco-innovation award in new product business competition, Latvia, 2014*

**"KLIKO"** is an inflatable portable kids' toy that is designed for indoor use, playing in the yard and even on the water. The purpose of the toy was development of children's' creativity that is based on children's desire to build various huts, rods and houses from handy materials themselves. The product is produced from used tents and banners creating the value of sustainable thinking.



*Figure 5. Design bachelor project "KLIKO", 2012, designer Rodions Zenevics, supervisor assit.prof. Ervins Pastors; 3rd place „SaloneSatellite WorldWide Moscow 2012”*

**"Scense"**, herbal initiators of senses invite to touch and smell thus provoking sensations and memories. It emphasizes traditions and habits in wellness in the 21st century lifestyle. The aim of the designer was to create additional usability of herbs beyond so widespread tea drinking. The designer is looking for opportunities to develop product manufacturing, by participating in various start-up competitions.



*Figure 6. Design master project "Scense. Initiators if senses", 2014, designer Mara Maizele, supervisor assit.prof. Aija Freimane, The best Latvia representing product at Annual Design award Latvia, 2014*

The product "**Sleep and Sleeplessness**" [13] resulted from the design research path of insomnia as coincidental innovation. The product as transition object provokes impulses to the central nervous system thus causing relaxation and asleep.



*Figure 7. Design master project "Sleep and Sleeplessness", 2012, designer Elita Freimane, supervisor assit.prof. Aija Freimane; the only registered student project patent of the Art Academy of Latvia*

In the bachelor and master's project new product development ideation process, students were encouraged to define design project development purpose by using design research and creative thinking methods. The students had to approve "why is it a design opportunity, what is the novelty of the challenge?" Therefore it is not surprising that 70% of all bachelors' and master's projects since 2010 are innovative solutions with an aim to bring good for people by fulfilling a specific need or opportunity. 30% of designed products are redesign of existing products' function, form, and style as new materiality or target audience. Innovative products and services are designed as niche solutions to identity, tradition and modernity of craft, social and universal design, eco-friendly design, creativity, collaborative solutions to everyday needs, whose main purpose is social and ethical reflexions.

New technological innovations in the student designed projects are limited due to the lack of internship system and access to highly technological workshops. To design for a particular enterprise, the secret of the technological process and knowhow of the company need to be met. Due to this, ethical and human aspects as niche design products are faced in the design bachelor and master projects rather than material and technological innovation as product form and function redesign.

However, only two young designers from around a hundred have started up their businesses based on the bachelor or master design projects since 2010. Although all student designed products are based on profound research, the lack of business partnerships prevents the product from promotion into the market and to the user.

### **3.1 Conclusion - main product development objectives and values**

Industrially produced new product development is based on the narrow product development – form and function redesign of existing products in the market. It is reached by using new material-technologies and technological possibilities to obtain new market positions. Niche products are the ones that differentiate countries and communicate particular culture and lifestyle. Limited economic and human recourse opportunities open new potential of creation as new product and service

development or new business forms. The following examples mentioned serve as a clear evidence: the booming specialization of creative industries enterprises since 2010 as fashion design and accessory design, such as clothing, handbags, scarves, shoes, hats, jewellery; products developing children's creativity; interior accessories - textiles, candles; web-based service solution; office supplies - blocks, planners, typeface design, applications and furniture etc. These products can be acquired worldwide via the internet and export trade opportunities. However, research defined, that the ethical and social aspects, especially identity and belonging as transformation of traditions, wellness and health, are important to a creative industry's design specialization of a small economy rather than industrially produced products. Ethical and social issues are the main factors of micro-niche-design enterprises although it is not sufficient for their fast growth and successful development globally. Ethical and social aspects that are included in the early stage of design process, favour design of paradigm shift under the pressure of the global economy but are not reflected in the industrially produced products.

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