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How can Social Innovation approach feed the Universal Design?

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Abstract

Universal Design(UD) is the product design approach to create solutions that available for overall society. In this context, it is a very important notion that designers put forward designs or proposals that can touch everyone's life, taking into account current and future trends and global crises. While presenting these designs/proposals, the Social Innovation(SI) perspective, which activates social actors and tries to create social benefit by taking advantage of the potential of the society, can be an important actor. In this direction, designers as creative social actors can come up with product/service ideas and suggestions that can serve society in general within the framework of social innovation and sustainability. In this study, the potential contributions of the social innovation approach to the universal design perspective will be discussed with sample cases on a global scale.

Keywords: *universal design, social innovation, designer role*

Introduction

Today, with social and technological developments and global crises, the definition and scope of design are also changing. In this context, approaches, and concepts that aim to benefit humanity and the planet such as inclusion, sustainability, sustainable development, and social welfare gain importance. Considering the current social, economic, and ecological crises, design for all or Universal Design can also be considered as a concept that includes or should include these approaches. In this regard, Manzini (2010) emphasizes that the most feasible way to compete with current problems in the world is to propose ideas that include unexplored models, systems, and innovations. With this perspective, the Social Innovation(SI) approach, whose scope is to meet social needs and provide social benefit through new proposals (Manzini, 2015), can offer a practical perspective to the UD approach by contributing to the individuals, communities, societies and thus the planet. Within the scope of the research, the basic notions of UD and SI approaches will be presented and their intersection points will be discussed in order to point out this potential relationship. Afterward, existing promising examples of SI that fit the UD perspective and are thought to contribute will be presented and discussed to point out the potential benefits of using this relationship.

Definition, principles & goals of Universal Design

The Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University specified UD as design of products and environments usable by as many people as possible, without the need for adaptation or special design (Connell et al., 1997). UD is a design process that enables

and strengthens population diversity by improving people's performance, well-being and social inclusion(Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access, 2012).

UD is not a fad or a trend. It is an enduring design approach based on the belief that the broad spectrum of human abilities is commonplace, not special. UD works on the challenges faced by people with disabilities, the elderly, children and other communities that are often overlooked by the design process. UD prevents such groups from being stigmatized by normal people and benefits everyone(Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access, 2012).

Universal Design Principles

The Principles of UD were written in 1997 to reveal the scope and content of UD and to create a framework to guide both design and evaluation activities (Connell et al. 1997). These principles lead to a design approach that does not discriminate and ensures greater usability for all. These principles are framed as below;

Principle One: Equitable Use refers to the design is useful and suitable for marketing to people with different abilities.

Principle Two: Flexibility in Use refers to the design that accommodates a range of individual preferences and abilities.

Principle Three: Simple and Intuitive Use means creating an easy-to-understand design independent of the user's level.

Principle Four: Perceptible Information refers to a design that effectively communicates the necessary information to the user, independent of ambient conditions.

Principle Five: Tolerance for Error refers to the design that minimizes the negative consequences and hazards that may occur as a result of accidents.

Principle Six: Low Physical Effort refers to an efficient and user-friendly design.

Principle Seven: Size and Space for Approach and Use refers to provide appropriate size and space for access and use, regardless of the wearer's body size, posture or mobility.

Universal Design Goals

The IDeA Center developed the goals of Universal Design to extend UD's original focus to include social issues, health and wellness. These 8 goals cover functional, social and emotional dimensions. However, these goals are supported by an interdisciplinary knowledge base of anthropometrics, biomechanics, perception, cognition, safety, health promotion, and social interaction. (Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access, 2012). The IDeACenter's 8 goals of Universal Design are;

Body Fit means including a variety of body sizes and abilities.

Comfort means keeping user's wishes within the desired limits of body function and perception.

Awareness means protecting that the information necessary for the use of users is easily perceived.

Understanding means creating operation methods and using intuitive, clear and concise.

Wellness means being useful in promotion of health, protection from diseases and dangers.

Social Integration means treating all various user groups with dignity and respect.

Personalization means integrating opportunities user's choice and the expression of their preferences.

Cultural Appropriateness means respecting and reinforcing the cultural values of individuals and the social and environmental context of design projects.

Social innovation and its potential contribution to universal design

As mentioned before, in addition to the Universal Design principles, the definition and principles expanded for containing social involvement, health, and wellness, and has defined eight goals accordingly (2012). These Universal Design goals are framed as **Body Fit, Comfort, Awareness, Understanding, Wellness, Social Integration, Personalization, and Cultural Appropriateness**. In this context, it can be effective to use the social innovation approach by designers who develop products, systems, and models within the framework of UD, especially for the aims that contain social concerns. Because, "Social innovation refers to the design and implementation of new solutions that imply conceptual, process, product, or organizational change, which ultimately aim to improve the welfare and wellbeing of individuals and communities" (OECD, n.d.). In that, SI aims to new proposals for achieving social goals, and SI acts are often new visions that perform to improve people's lives through understanding unsolved necessities and problems (Mulgan et al., 2007). In practice, social innovations can be particular attempts like ideas, actions, experiences, systems, etc. (Nicholls et al., 2015). In a broader definition, social innovation acts are experiences that emerges from the reinterpretation of resources

to achieve socially defined goals with innovative approaches (Manzini, 2014). These values can be considered as resources, knowledge, expertise, stakeholders, and creative actors within society. Accordingly, Manzini et al. (2010) mentioned that social innovation triggers different kinds of resources of society and by doing this, SI can be an important agent for transformation. Thus, social innovation can be a social transformation tool that embodies values around certain issues and transforms these values into social tools (Oliveira, 2021). Considering these values and also the principles and aims of Universal Design, social innovation acts can be associated with UD by considering concepts such as inclusivity, the welfare/benefit of the society rather than the individual, sharing, and access. Therefore, social innovation is the ability to enhance the social benefit and create value for people, places, and organizations (Mortati & Villari, 2014) and design for SI can be an important mediator for this purpose. With this basis, designing for society can be defined as anything that designers can do to encourage, maintain and guide social transformation, and these actions add new connections to the social dialogue about how to do necessary social transformation. So, SI highlights how social transformation process derives from innovative proposals and realizations of these proposals in real context (Cibin et al., 2020). Therefore, using the social innovation approach and its spread examples to achieve UD goals can be an important source and tool for social benefit. Because, if creative approaches and designer's qualifications are used together in a suitable environment, the creation of new life and production styles becomes more possible (Manzini, 2015). As a result, it can be said that there are several intersections in line with the goals of social innovation and UD

approaches, and scenarios, where social innovation methods can contribute to UD, can be created by being aware of these intersections.

Examples of SI on a global scale that could fit into this intersection

In this section, some examples of existing and promising social innovation projects from India and other countries will be presented to demonstrate the potential contribution that was mentioned and proposed in the previous sections of the SI approach to UD. The examples to be presented were determined from different sources of SI in line with the reviews of the authors in line with their design research expertise. The examples to be presented will be briefly defined and their relations with the UD aims will be discussed.

- Digital storytelling

StoryBank Project:The Budikote, India StoryBank project was created to support knowledge sharing and economic development to reverse migration to urban centers in rural India where literacy rates are low. As part of the project, audio-visual stories within a village community and a digital story library were created in the village and displayed for a month through a screen located in the center of the village. Within the project 137 stories generated in different subjects by 79 local people.(Manzini, 2015).

Imagine Milan Project: Similarly, Imagine Milan is an important initiative launched by the Imagis research group in 2009, with the aim of reconstructing the identity of certain neighborhoods of the city. The main scope of the work is the creation of a series of short videos in which local citizens tell stories about their neighborhoods.

In these videos, a rich, multifaceted and deep vision of the city is provided by talking about what the neighborhood used to be, how it is now, and how it could be. This particular experience highlighted the importance of storytelling and how this social approach can serve to reconstruct and sustain the relationships and cultural heritage(Manzini, 2015).

As seen in these two different but similar examples, the social innovation approach can develop inclusive systems for the UD goals such as Understanding, Cultural Appropriateness, and Social Integration by understanding existing values, needs, and requirements, being aware of social and technological resources, and using them together.

- Slow Food

Slow Food is a formation that Carlo Petrini and his friends aim to be a part and partner of production by seeing themselves not as consumers but as co-producers, by having knowledge about production methods of foods and while supporting the producers. In other words, they proposed a fresh perspective on food consumption and focused on the evaluation of products that might vanish in the dominant agro-industrial system. On the need side, they developed food awareness in consumers, and on the supply side, they reached out to producers (farmers, breeders, fishermen, etc.) and encouraged consumers to support them.Slow Food evolved as a movement that includes many people globally and performs to maintain that fair food for every individual. It is a movement that believes all people can have an impact on the food production cycle through their food choices, and eventually change the world. (Manzini, 2015).

So, it can be said that this social innovation attempt includes awareness and innovations created on both the demand and supply sides and UD's Awareness, Understanding, Wellness, and Social Integration targets. In addition, the fact that the movement started in Italy and spread all over the world is an important detail that demonstrates the general inclusiveness of the social innovation approach and its potential contribution to the scope of UD.

- Democratic Psychiatry

The democratic psychiatry movement was founded in 1973 by a psychiatrist named Franco Basaglia. He closed the psychiatric hospital in Trieste, of which he was director, and started cooperative production and service groups that brought together former patients, nurses and doctors. According to Basaglia, the creation of such an organization was very important in terms of overcoming difficulties and discovering their potential talents, for the disadvantaged group, for this example, the mentally ill. The main theme of the project was to see people with intellectual disabilities not only as patients, but also as individuals with abilities. If a person with a mental illness engages in activities such as working outside of being known with his illness, it will be easier to overcome his/her problems and integrate into society. This approach, which Basaglia worked and created years ago, is now used as a normal practice in Italy. Since 1978, "mad men" have been working in many businesses and integrated into social life (Manzini, 2015).

This example of social innovation can be closely associated with wellness and social integration from UD's targets. The state of illness of people with mental illness often overshadows their personal abilities. However, treating these sick people with dignity

and respect and taking into account that they also have talents and motivations will bring them into society. The legalization of this situation, based on an example from the project, proves that a successful social enterprise will be universal.

- TYZE

Another example that Manzini (2015) mentions in his book is Tyze. It is a digital platform created to provide a modern and easy way to connect the complex lives of friends, families and neighbors who are willing to share and help their relatives' health information/status and provide care to someone in need. In addition, it can be said that this digital platform is a way to strengthen family, neighborly and friendship relations that have changed over time.

This example of social innovation can be closely associated with UD's wellness and social integration goals. Tyze develops a valuable resource that would otherwise be lost: people's motivation to support. This kind of digital platform design connects those in need of care with the people around them, providing their social integration by sharing and improving their health problems. The way social innovations emerge is a result of how people's lives develop and come together (Manzini, 2015). Therefore, as in the example of Tyze, the lives of people in need of care become more "normal" through the presence of their relatives who will provide them with this.

- Hosting a student

Hosting A Student, an initiative sponsored by Meglio Milano, a Milan non-profit organization. This initiative is based on the idea that older

people living alone can host and assist students looking for low-cost accommodation. The project can be considered as win-win solution that benefits the good use of existing resources. The aim of the organization was to bring together two groups that are unlikely to come together in daily life, who have complementary personal resources, namely the elderly who live alone and have extra rooms in their homes, and students who need low-cost accommodation. But for this to happen, a trusting organization was needed that would make it easier for both groups to find each other. To achieve this, Meglio Milano created the conditions in which a student and an older person can have a real relationship (Manzini, 2015).

Therefore, it can be said that this example of social innovation includes awareness and solutions created on both the demand and supply side, and UD's Awareness, Understanding, and Social Integration objectives.

- AYZH

One million mothers die each year due to unhygienic birth conditions. That's why the company was founded by Zubaida Bai with the idea of developing affordable healthcare technologies. Thanks to affordable products made by women in rural areas of India, the conditions of women who cannot give birth in healthy conditions are being improved. AYZH's core product, JANMA, Rs 100 clean delivery kit, which includes essential tools recommended by WHO, helps to prevent infection during childbirth and thus reduce maternal and infant mortality. AYZH also allows women in rural India to earn income by being involved in production. (Novak, 2019).

This social innovation project contributes to the promotion of health, avoidance of diseases, and protection from dangers, enabling every woman to give birth under equal conditions. So it's an approach linked to UD's wellness goal.

Conclusion

Within the scope of this study, the proposal that the SI approach can provide an innovative perspective in line with the Universal Design goals has been discussed. In this context, after reviewing the basic notions of UD, and the definition and scope of the SI approach, existing social innovation examples that can be included in the Universal Design framework are presented to emphasize the proposed relationship and potential benefit. Considering the literature presented and the examples discussed, it can be said that the social innovation approach, whose goal is to provide social benefit, will be an important, useful and innovative tool for Universal Design to achieve its goals. In this direction, in today's social, ecological, and economic situations, it can be an important design act for designers to come up with inclusive and innovative ideas, products, systems, and models that aim for social benefit with the designer's point of view, way of thinking and toolkits, by feeding from the intersection of Social Innovation and Universal Design approaches.

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