



Eija Salmi FRSA

Secretary General at Cumulus Association

A global citizen and advocate since 1990 for international education and research in art, design and media. Responsible to empower the next generation of youth by encouraging their alma maters to collaborate and play an impactful role to place the needs of the earth first and to create the right balance between people, planet and any profit.

Background in finance, art history and languages, jumped from finance to university internationalization. Happy to join as speaker, provocateur, participant to inspire and support. Eija has been leading the Secretariat General of Cumulus since 1990, and playing a key role in connecting design education and innovation. Cumulus secretariat is a hub, a centre of the network suggesting connections with satellite activity. Ready to navigate and carry responsibilities to process things in uncontrolled and unlimited situations and environments. To create credibility with thought leadership, able to align and leverage as keys. Optimism and tomorrow are burned in her DNA.

Cumulus is a non-for-profit association, endorsed by UNESCO and the only leading global association of art and design education and research. Cumulus represents a dynamic ecosystem for internationalisation and global mobility, knowledge exchange, and collaboration since 1990 established by Aalto University in Helsinki with Royal College of Art in London. Today 395 members from 71 countries, reaching with partners over 2500,000 students, academics and staff, which demonstrates the importance of collaboration in a 21st century higher education landscape that is increasingly complex and global.

Bring the planet forward. Cumulus is the entry code.

Breaking out of the Glass Jar

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Abstract

As the Secretariat General of Cumulus Association since 1990, I have witnessed the evolution of design education and practice working closely with our members. Every era brought forth its own concerns to sustain quality design education through internationalisation and relevance. This article expresses my personal thoughts to explore the main challenges facing design education and practice from my first-hand position at Cumulus Association, working and collaborating with hundreds of design institutes and programs from around the world. These issues include but are not limited to: Students' employability, the benefits of internationalisation, and higher education funding.

Keywords: Cumulus, Planet, internationalisation, design universities, student employment

Introduction

Having for decades deep dived in and with the operations and strategy of internationalization of design universities, my passion is to ask how to truly impact these institutions in society, and in the business industry? I am not an educated designer, but through my long internationalisation career, I have gained a life-long design experience as the Secretary General of Cumulus, where I have witnessed at first-hand the evolution of design education, research and practice at a global level. Through this experience, one of the many concerns and purpose of the universities has been student employability. This paper will explore the main global challenges

facing design universities more than ever, such as students' employability, internationalisation, funding, and relevance.

University systems and positivity

Is a design degree sufficient to secure student employability? A simple answer is, yes, of course our graduates get properly employed with the knowledge received. However, there is now the question of impact, which influence the universities' funding going beyond just the employability of students. Many universities support various ways of industry impact and learn from them to develop their funding mechanisms provided the funder understands and aligns with the universities' vision. If the university understands what must be done for successful funding, or if it carefully analyses the surrounding environment, locally and globally. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) dictate these funding opportunities, however, who develops the KPIs and how and what is a KPI? The KPI places the responsibility on the university to perform and deliver, however, the student also has the responsibility, not only the institution. How is this responsibility developed? At home, school, the university, or in social or community settings, taking into consideration the interaction between students and the digital environments, such as mobile phone and social media. Who is responsible for these KPIs? An advisory board, or ministry officers, owners of the university? Or does AI tell us what to do? Or aliens from the outer space? Given that this is not a far fetched idea should we activate ourselves with the outer space to be able to break out of these questions?

Breaking the Glass Jar

What does breaking out from the Glass Jar mean? Is it a collective force to strengthen the knowledge used? Research outcomes or the

knowledge by a degree holder in art, design and media. Do we use the design language that is guaranteed for us to understand each other? The power of media and other diverse power mechanisms also impacts this understanding. Should we turn power tools to truly nurture our disciplines, should we start using unmanned systems to help our contribution to serve the planet properly, unmanned systems developed with our strong contribution? We do need to take a new action, however what is an action? To share knowledge without cannibalism, that individual matters in the institutional context and institutions serve the individual. This is a circle that cannot be vicious. It must be fruitful enabling individuals to shine bright.

The institution must be a well functioning leadership, respecting the whole community with careful listening and respecting all, not creating systems that are automated and exclude excellence and by doing so causing disaster to the outcome. This is how university partnerships are destroyed in the first phase of the action. This type of leadership also influence the students' outcome, to offer diversity of design and leadership solutions to analyse the potential. Important for a group not to prevent positive actions by living deep in its own excellence. Following the seven blunders of the world by Mahatma Gandhi, having analysed what may lead to violence or chaos, may inspire us to the next phase of change.

Change

A Change. What do we need change for? Is change a marketing method? We are the dynamic design institutions, where we have the opportunity to interact directly with this planet and ability to break out through design innovation. A well known fact or is it? Is change creating excellence? How can we instigate change in the high-ranked and prestigious universities that exist with their

recognised rooted institutionalisation, we all know and respect universities. Graduating from these universities is a mechanism for success. How about the universities that encourage entrepreneurship endeavours, whose graduates get impact and employ themselves, how do we give these institutions the due respect? These reflections I have witnessed first-hand with our member institutes and so change is coming but how do we as a design community leverage this change?

Conclusion

Respect. Is it the same as recognition? Is it about the work done by a generation at the institution? What happens when the next generation takes over? How do we maintain the excellence and the standards? It would be sad to if the institution loses its ethos, or the next generation does not respect the work done by the past generation. This is an area to explore to ensure continuity of design excellence in education and in practice and to pre-empt these issues and find a way to repair.

Breaking the Glass Jar means going back as a global design community to explore these important values, change, respect, diversity, and Inclusion. Where are we going as a community, and as individuals? Getting involved in competitions such as SDGs by the United Nations, and by UNESCO, European Union, government entities, professional design associations, international professional associations, other universities, industry, and advisory boards, is one way, however is this enough? We continue to live with all of these entities as designers, artists, and as creative people.