
CHALLENGE WORKSHOPS FOSTERING A SPIRIT OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISE



Julia Cassim describes how a new model of social innovation has breathed fresh business life into sheltered workshops for disabled people in the Balkans

There is today a growing emphasis on the role that inclusive design can play in fostering social innovation. Such an approach switches the spotlight onto the broader spectrum of inclusive design activism, away from the development of products, services and environments alone to initiatives involving social enterprises – a growth area given the parlous state of the world economy.

The link between inclusive design and social innovation was the subject of the Include conference, organised by the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design in April 2011, and it has also formed a new context in the former Yugoslavia for the Challenge Workshops, the centre's international knowledge transfer programme for designers.

Our focus in the region is on working directly with sheltered workshops for disabled people, which have long been a feature of the employment scene in many countries. In Western Europe, many have been transformed into social enterprises or subsidised not-for-profit organisations where they involve people with learning disabilities or those deemed unable to take up mainstream employment.

In the countries of the former Socialist bloc however, this has not happened. State-run sheltered

workshops continue to operate but with increasing difficulty as their subsidies are cut or removed wholesale in the switch from a controlled to a market-led economy. Increasingly they are being required to operate as commercially viable enterprises or risk closure.

The disabled or socially marginalised people working there often have high levels of traditional manufacturing skills but lack business know-how, design training or the ability to produce attractive goods that can be sold in the mainstream market. As a result many are struggling. Nowhere is this more evident than in the countries of the former Yugoslavia where the impact of the Bosnian conflict endures at every level.

SOCIAL OUTCOMES

This is the context that the Challenge Workshops has been addressing through the development of a new model funded by local offices of the British Council, and rolled out in Sarajevo (2009), Zagreb (2011), Osijek and Skopje (both 2012). Each interaction has resulted in a new product range and a new visual identity for a sheltered workshop for disabled people under threat.

The four workshops demonstrate

how inclusive design and its participatory methodologies can transform attitudes, help rebuild cultural networks destroyed by civil conflict, and importantly create ongoing local and national partnerships between makers and designers where none had existed before.

For the employees or beneficiaries of these workshops it has been a chance to understand how to use design strategically in product development and marketing so that what they make, they can actually sell. For the designer participants, the workshops have offered an opportunity to brainstorm, co-design and manufacture in a short five-day event and to learn key making skills that are not always part of a design education.

As a result, many of the designers from the UK, Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia who first worked together in Sarajevo have gone on to continue working with the organisations and initiate or participate in the workshops in Zagreb, Osijek and Skopje, thus creating a new cross-national network.

The specific context for each workshop has differed greatly but the central question has been the same. How can we harness an inclusive process to co-design methods and to use mainstream design strategically to transform these organisations conceptually and economically?



1



2

1-3 Outputs and participants in the Osijek workshop, Croatia
4-7 Outputs and participants in the Skopje workshop, Macedonia



3



4



5



6



7



1

- 1,2 Participant and 'everyday products' concept in 24 hour Inclusive Design Challenge, Tullamore, Ireland
- 3 Concept from Oslo Challenge
- 4,5 Participants and museum guidance app from Lisbon Challenge



2



3

The participating organisations ranged from a five-man print and wood workshop run by recovering addicts in Osijek, Croatia, and a vocational school for hearing impaired students in Skopje to a small NGO running a day centre for adults with learning difficulties in Zagreb and its counterpart in Belisce, close to the Croatian border with Serbia and Hungary.

Similarly the design skills and equipment on offer varied widely. In Osijek it was close to zero while in Zagreb and Sarajevo the workshops had highly skilled ceramists, machinists and metalworkers working at the large-scale URIHO factory. For the designers who had to work with these variables in the

workshops, it was a sharp learning curve, but the results are a tribute to the power of good design to transform seemingly intractable situations.

Indeed the striking design and social outcomes cast the Challenge Workshops programme in a new light, presenting a vital chance to develop a new model of participatory design practice that can be applied equally to social enterprises and small businesses that are struggling to compete in an unforgiving commercial world.

Each workshop held its own local exhibition but the entire project has also been showcased internationally. It was seen in Japan as part of the Shared Innovation exhibition at the Gallery

Amu in Tokyo in October 2011 followed by a showing at the Kyoto University Museum in November 2011, which drew more than 5,000 visitors during its two-week run.

OTHER CHALLENGES

Alongside this significant new strand of work, the Challenge Workshops was also been active in other parts of the world during 2011/12, running three 24 Hour Inclusive Design Challenges in Ireland, Norway and Portugal, and a five-day workshop at Hadassah College in Jerusalem where third year industrial design students worked with Shekel, a manufacturing facility employing adults with learning disabilities.



4



5

In Tullamore, the third Challenge organised by Ireland's National Disability Authority, the focus shifted from professional designers to design students and recent graduates from design schools across Ireland. The theme was 'everyday products' but restricted to those that employed no technology and did not rely on apps to be functional. The winner was an ingenious new mechanism to enable anyone to effectively change a light bulb or ceiling fixture.

In Oslo, it was their third Challenge too, organised again with the Norwegian Design Council as part of its biannual conference on the business of inclusive design. An international cohort of

designers joined their Norwegian counterparts to make up four multi-disciplinary teams and the theme centred on how design can promote social inclusion in an era of cultural diversity. The winner was a service that builds on existing information systems and channels them into an accessible and enjoyable digital interface.

The Lisbon Challenge was held in the ornate 19th Century Palacio Menino de Ouro, the headquarters of The British Council, Portugal, which commissioned the event. The brief centred on information and service design for three key cultural venues in the city. The four teams were asked to consider how inclusive design could increase the

24 HOUR INCLUSIVE DESIGN CHALLENGES

TULLAMORE, IRELAND

3-4 Nov 2011
Organised by the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, National Disability Authority (NDA), Dublin, Ireland

OSLO, NORWAY

7-8 June 2012
European Business Workshops in Inclusive Design – Innovation for All
Organised by the Norwegian Design Council

LISBON, PORTUGAL

21-23 June 2012
Organised by: Design Includes You, the British Council, Portugal and the CIAUD (Centro Investigação em Arquitetura, Urbanismo e Design)
Supported by: Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, Departamento de Planeamento de Mobilidade e Transportes and Museum Nacional de História Natural e da Ciência, Lisboa

physical, cognitive and cultural accessibility of an area or a building with a complex identity or history. The winning idea was Sharexp, a device that allows people to share their experiences of the spectacular view from São Pedro de Alcântara Belvedere at the top of the Gloria Funicular.

Julia Cassim is a Visiting Senior Fellow at the RCA and leads the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design's Challenge Workshops programme. She is based in Kyoto, Japan