

The Denizen Designer Project



The Equity and Health Innovations Design Research Lab

Welcome

Who Are We?

The Equity and Health Innovations Design Research Lab at DePaul University focuses on the evaluation and design of technologies that support health-related experiences. We position design as a catalyst for social change related to health and racial equity. We are a group of designers and researchers looking to understand equitable approaches to designing the world around us.

What is a Denizen Designer?

According to Merriam-Webster, a denizen is an “inhabitant” or “one that frequents a place”. In the Denizen Designer Project, we wanted to spotlight those engaging in social and participatory design in their own communities. Thus, a Denizen Designer is one who leverages design as a social practice, or as a catalyst to address social challenges in their local environments. While the word ‘citizen’ is a tempting alternative, we recognized documentation status within a country does not dictate one’s ability to affect change in their community.

How to use this zine

- Read and learn about socially-driven, community-based design and how it can be used/defined
- Learn about the variety of areas that Denizen Designers have worked in
- Learn about the outcomes of Participatory Design, on both communities and designers
- Consider the relevance of design to community projects



Illustration by Sabrina Dorsainvil

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Illustration by Sabrina Dorsainvil

Why a Zine?

Stoddart and Kiser loosely define zines as self-published magazines that provide cultural insight into the times in which they are published (Stoddart & Kiser, 2013). The modern zine bears little resemblance to its cousin, the fanzine. There are many kinds of zines in many sizes. Today's zine is a product of the current technological environment" (Stoddart & Kiser, 2013, p. 191). Physically, zines come in an expansive number of sizes, formats, and aesthetics, but what remains constant is the attitude and cultural significance of the zine. Gisonny et al. writes, "Zines are 'do-it-yourself' (DIY) magazines, independently produced and published for love rather than profit" (Gisonny et al., 2005, p. 26).

The medium of zines has gone from mimeograph and photocopy machines to desktop publishing. However, base sentiment remains the same even today. Throughout their history, zines are known to provide "a forum for marginalized writers, whose ideas give voice to underrepresented points-of-view, and [zines] offer a unique form of expression for anyone who cares to create one" (Gissony, 2005, p. 26).

Zines offer a unique opportunity for relegated or underrepresented communities to communicate, promote, and connect.

In her article, "Why Diverse Zines Matter: A Case Study of the People of Color Zines Project", Bold discusses lack of diversity in cultural output, how the POC Zines Project addresses this media gap, and 'zine-ing' as a social phenomenon. Bold explains that contemporary publishing is controlled. Bold explains that zines have served and continue to serve as an alternative media stream. Quoting Aton, she argues that zines "[offer] the means for democratic communication to people who are normally excluded from media production" (as seen in Bold, 2017, p. 216).

What is Participatory Design?



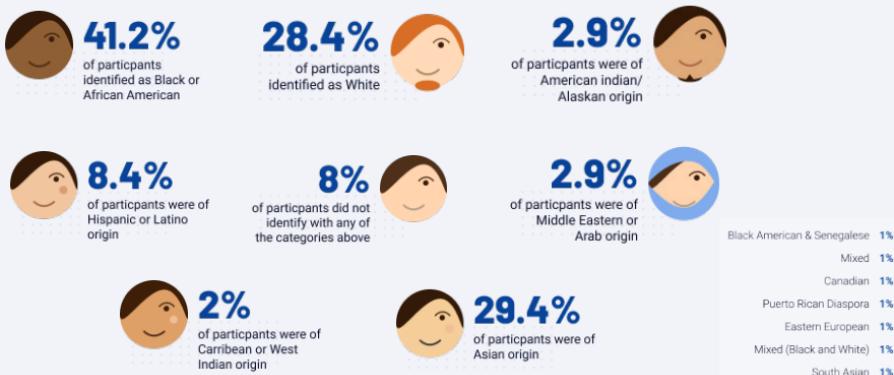
Participatory design is fundamentally value-oriented, embracing discomfort and challenge to inspire innovation and social change.

Participatory design can be traced back to the 1970s, where it was coined in Scandinavia after the rise of workplace democracy and unionization. It was inherently political, and the changing workspaces invited a change in design practice that challenged historical systems of power through open dialogue and democratized input. Designers sided with the workers as the future users of their solutions. This cooperation between unions and employers resulted in legislation like the Worker Protection and Working Environment Act and better negotiation and representation for Scandinavian workers (Gregory, 2003).

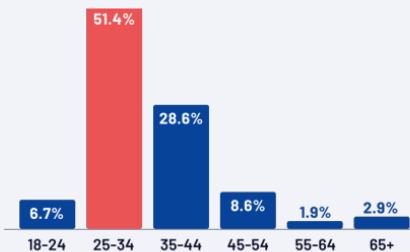
These ideas have since been adopted by designers worldwide who take a collaborative approach to design, and various theories share the roots and principles of participatory design, including co-design, community-based participatory research (CBPR) and participatory action design/research (PAR). While the approaches and theories behind these design and research methods vary, these concepts share the common threads of repositioning designers within communities as participants. Denizen designers work closely with communities, work together to identify their needs, and build collaborative design solutions.

We surveyed....

The Denizen Designer Project Survey was sent out to over 100 people who use design to engage with various types of communities and people. We surveyed respondents from January until August of 2020. To reach a variety of designers, we contacted design collectives, organizations, non-profits, and academic groups across the United States and Canada. Here is what our sample looked like:

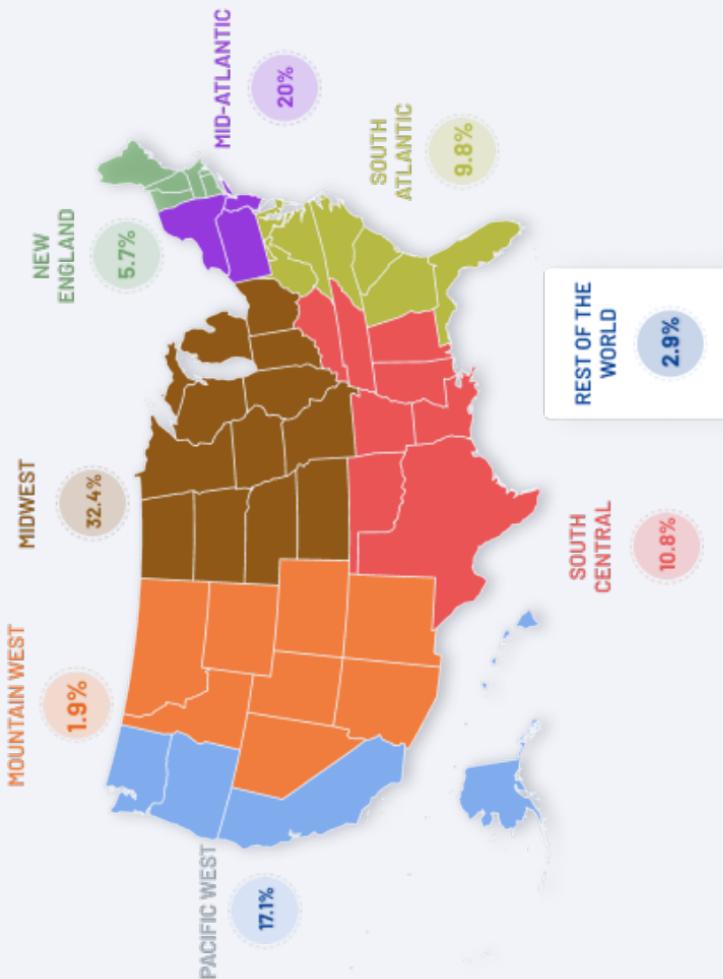


Age

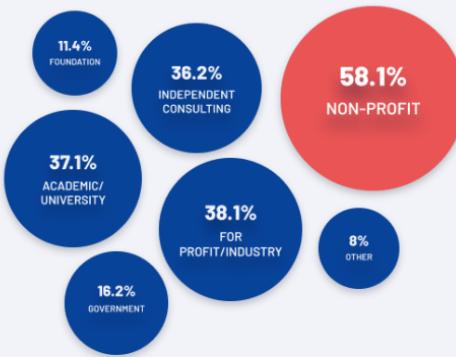


The diversity of the designers allowed the Denizen Designer Project to learn more about the perspectives and challenges that generally underrepresented groups have identified or seen within the design field.

Geographic Spread



Work Sectors



The overlaps in the sectors where designers worked underscores the versatility of community-based design work. The fairly equal percentages of designers working in for-profit/industry, academic/university and independent consulting are suggestive of the increased adaptability of participatory design.

Roles



While the majority of the survey respondents did consider themselves to be designers, the results highlight the difficulty of identifying or describing one's work in a single category, especially given that design work often requires a person to wear multiple hats and adapt to different needs.

Areas of Design Equity Addressed



Community-driven design has great potential to address a wide variety of social, political, economic, and cultural issues. We asked those surveyed to identify the topics that their design work addressed, and this was the spread. We saw a lot of overlap in the types of issues that these designers work to address, and also note the deep interrelatedness of equity issues being approached through design.



Illustration by Sabrina Dorsainvil

Design as a catalyst for change

Anjanette Davenport Hatter is the Founding Executive Director of Your goodVillage Collective, a nonprofit community-based collective with goals of promoting community health education. We spoke with her about how she realized her work in the social work sector mirrored community-led design, and design's role in creating equitable community health tools.

You mentioned equity workshops that you're doing for moms, grandparents. What does that consist of? What do those workshops end up looking like?

"So, they're equity based. So, everything that I do, I do with an equity lens, because my background is as a medical social worker, and so I was a social worker for over a decade, a major health system here in Detroit, and, over that time, I was able to see a lot of health disparities and a lot of implicit and explicit biases as it relates to families of color, and so I decided that whatever I do, I would do with an equity lens to make sure that we're not providing equal services, but equitable, meaning that you're going to get what you need based on your needs, and you can't have a blanket approach, at providing education and support. And so what that looks like is you may have some families who may be more affluent, living in neighborhoods where there's access to transportation, access to family support, and they're able to get around and get what they need, and then you have some families who don't have that type of access, so then we come to you."

From your perspective, what is design's role in addressing social challenges like that? Or is design really even positioned to address those things in any way?

"My exposure to and knowledge of design is from the five-step design process –improvise, define, ideate, prototype, and test. So, I know there's other types of design out there. I think that design has a place, when there's discussion, because it helps create a story. You have the statistics, and you have the research, but when you don't have the stories, when you don't have the story creating the whole, you're not gonna have your ecosystems, and each system affects another system. I think that when you have design in all those systems of telling these stories, to create that impactful task, it just makes it that more impactful. [...] I wanted to introduce design process, because it also gives meat to the context, it's not just fluff, it's not just my position, it's not just what I think, it's not just what the few researchers think. When you go through those five steps of that framework, you just create a more compelling story, as to why this is so necessary."

Defining PD

We asked 33 community practitioners about the role of design in addressing social inequities and their thoughts on where participatory and community-based design comes in to play:



"But instead of just bringing them in at certain points of the design process as "co-creators", how do we just have them - How are we training them to understand design mindsets and capabilities so that they can do it themselves?"

- Chris R., Chicago



"...having more people knowing the power of it, and that it can change people's hearts, minds, spirits."

- Stephanie B., San Francisco



"When you believe that design is about how the future can be shaped, should it be shaped by those with power or should it be shaped by those in community?"

- Bryan L Jr., New Orleans



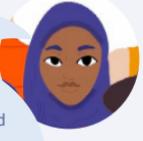
"It was so cool because [the community], they at the end of the day, they knew what it was they wanted to see. They just needed to understand how to get there. We developed a road map for them to do it."

- Katanya R., Chicago



"...social design is a method that produces methods to solve problems."

- Kenneth B., Chicago



"I will say that designers are trained to listen to people and then turn around a visual product or be facilitators, and I think it does benefit certain conversations."

- Jenny L., Los Angeles



"I think any industry is poised to be meeting these challenges. It's just a question of figuring out what your role and responsibility is within them."

- Sabiha B., Oakland



"...our job is to be translators and to communicate and then translate what we learn. So I guess that's it, relationship building, we have to build relationships first and create spaces for that relationship, building that up."

- N'Deye D., Baltimore

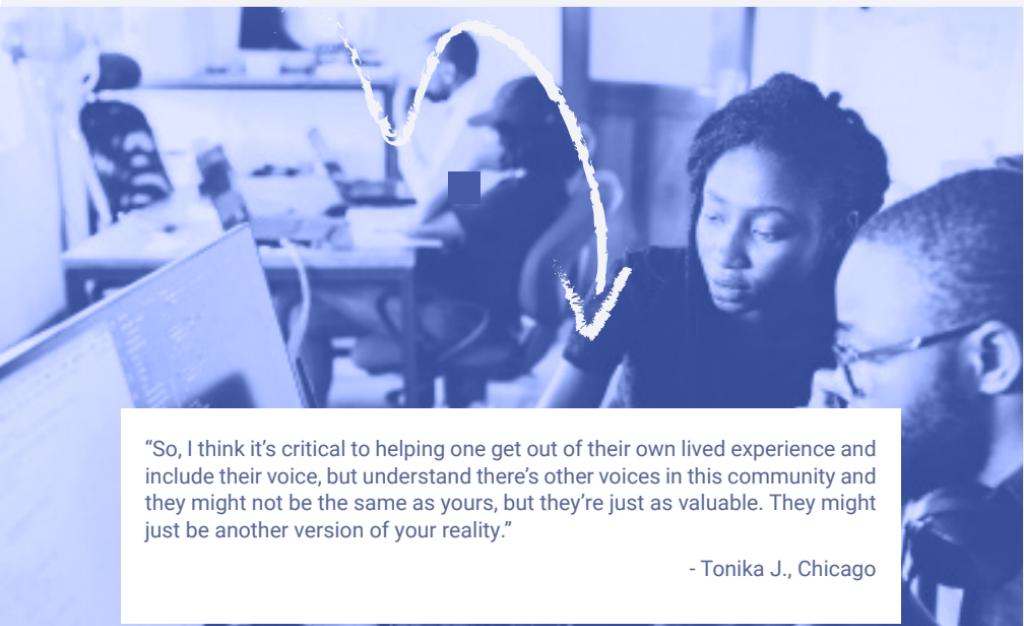
Everyone Designs

“...the definition of design is so broad that people who might be designing might not even know they’re being designers, but calling yourself an artist versus calling yourself a designer is so subjective and up to each person.”

- Taylor H., New Orleans

Anyone can design.

Most people have been designing in some way and don't know it. While formal training is nice to have, it is not a requirement, since knowledge can come from many sources. Often, community members and organizers have valuable insights into their specific needs and have been adapting their own solutions to meet these needs. While the language and the resources used may be different, the same problem-solving drive can be found across disciplines and backgrounds. Thus design is faced with the task of decentralizing creative input by shifting the concept of who is considered a designer. By actively engaging community imagination and innovation there is more possibility to design in ways that minimize harm and maximize impact.



“So, I think it’s critical to helping one get out of their own lived experience and include their voice, but understand there’s other voices in this community and they might not be the same as yours, but they’re just as valuable. They might just be another version of your reality.”

- Tonika J., Chicago



Cedric Douglas

Photo Credit: Christopher Gaines

Can you tell me a little about yourself and the work that you do?

My artist name is VISE1, which stands for Visually Intercepting Society's Emotions. So it's kind of an acronym that I go by. And, the work that I do crosses a lot of different disciplines. It would be design and social intervention I like to say. But it crosses over mural street art, education, public art. It's a lot of different worlds that it crosses.

What is design to you? How would you define design?

Originally, design to me was designing websites, and magazines like the graffiti magazine I showed earlier. And then I learned that, through education, that design is really about problem solving, and it's about connecting to an audience. [...] And the aesthetic is important, but I think solving the problem, I think, is more important. When something's organized in a way where it doesn't work, most people know, even people that aren't designers. And if something's organized in a way that feels right, and makes you feel good, I think that is kind of good design. My design is more about reaching people's hearts or their gut, having the gut reaction, to kinda think about a situation. [...] And making them either happy, mad, or think, "Why didn't I know about this?" That's kind of what I'm trying to do in design.

Do you think people have to understand design to do it?

But I think people are creative and people have creativity, and they might not be designers 'cause they're not trained, they might not be artists, because they're not trained. But people have creativity in them, it's what makes us problem solvers, and solve things for survival. It's our survival. But we just decided to train ourselves to be masters of it.

Understanding power

The problem

Current design practice and institutions create significant barriers

Historically, design practice has not considered the most marginalized and often contributed to inequity. Because designers are often working in profit-focused places rather than community-oriented ones, it can be challenging to implement change within these existing power structures. Traditionally, designers and academics are limited by systems that were not designed to accommodate the most marginalized.

"Who gets to be a professional about it. Who gets to have access to that kind of decision making power, and it's, it's not the people who should.

- Ezra K., Oakland

An academic's responsibilities

We can shift power imbalances by openly sharing knowledge and empowering communities to design for themselves. When they can, academics should strive to center the conversation on communities. Individual academics strive to involve communities at every phase and find a balance between being a facilitator and part of a collective.

"...ultimately, the goal is to shift the power to the communities who are gonna be impacted by what is being proposed. And oftentimes, the stakeholders that we engage with are the ones who are already comfortable with the existing power structures or they seem to benefit by keeping these power structures intact, versus really letting go of that and being comfortable with the shifting or changing power dynamics in the room."

- Navjot H., Chicago



Space Making

The solution



Building trust

Many communities often have valid concerns about the intentions of designers and researchers. It is important to stay transparent about how their data will be used, the goals of a project, and how it will impact them. We can do this by involving their end-users at decision stages of their work and building relationships beyond surface-level community involvement. This trust goes both ways; communities have to have faith in the academics and designers, while designers have to have faith in a community's ability to find solutions.

"...being able to support their voice, their space, and how you can encourage them to self-manage, and you can encourage them to be active collaborators in research projects that really even excite them..."

- Anushka J., Baltimore

Creating emotional and personal connections

Designers galvanize communities by getting them invested in the issues and problems around them. Many denizen designers had backgrounds in community organizing. They used the same strategies for mobilizing communities and applying them to design solutions. This is a process that takes commitment. Participatory design work often goes beyond the traditional design process; it is a growth and learning process for communities and designers. Designers may attend community functions and help with events, building connections that extend beyond what is required. The emotional impact of art and design can be used to spread messages and increase the visibility of voices that aren't being heard.

Personal investment

Community exposure is essential for denizen designers

Designers should prioritize placing themselves within communities and drawing directly from them. Communities are rich with ideas, creativity, and passion that can be encouraged and cultivated if they are valued. We can enable community members to see the power of their own skills and ideas and to use them as a resource to implement change. By attending to a community's contributions and knowledge base, Designers encourage solutions created by and for the people who understand their needs best.

"But in terms of how it helps our actual organizing, you just have to be there. You have to show up and you have to talk to people. You can't just organize from a distance or what they call armchair revolutionary."

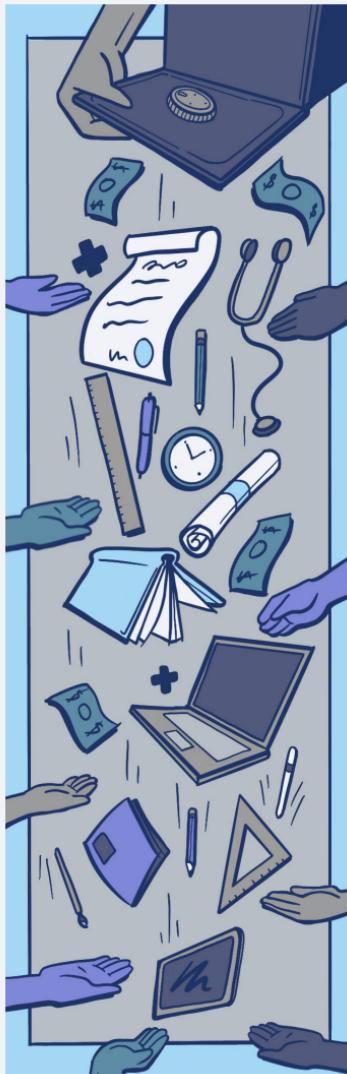
- Jenny L., Los Angeles

Low ego, high impact

In order to do this, Designers take a community-driven approach to design. To position the community voice as their focus, they must actively listen to what needs are being voiced and prioritize meeting those needs first. A flashy design may not be what is most beneficial to the community, and designers must divest themselves from the attachment to formal design practices that are not instigating necessary change. Accessible, diverse design cannot be superficially, so the goals of a Denizen Designer must be the goals of the people it was designed for.



Increasing access/ Knowledge sharing



Democratizing access to design

The unequal distribution of resources is often what brings designers into communities to problem-solve. Design justice centers around identifying and addressing inequity, which often is most easily defined when seeing unequal access to resources like healthcare. Keeping this in mind, is important to remember that access is not limited to a community's access to resources outside of a design space, but within it as well. For instance, designers often have access to resources not available in their communities. Designers with formal schooling mentioned their access to fabrication tools and lessons in design thinking, things that could help support the creativity of communities if they were more widely available.

"Our job is to challenge those systems and to think about the ways in which design solutions can be activated at many different spaces along the design continuum."

- Bryan L Jr., New Orleans

End-users often do not even have access to the spaces where design decisions are being made, and the consequences of this are more critical when the designs have social impacts. Often, the Designer's role is to use their expertise to create solutions people would not otherwise think of. While you're designing, make sure you're actively involving the community with decisions and giving the community tools to work with.

"They shouldn't have to know the principles in a book. I think that the space has to be welcoming and acknowledge that you don't have to know a lot to contribute your feedback."

- Elle R., Chicago

Change-making

The outcome

Design is more than profit

Design work takes money and funding, but it doesn't stop there. The way a building, webpage, or product is designed has lasting impacts. Designers have to consider the outcomes of their work beyond commercial interests in order to address problems.

"I gravitated towards design because it is this process that allows you to clarify your past and present to inform a future vision. There's a hopefulness to the process that gives me purpose and direction."

- Andrea N., Philadelphia

Creating lasting change

Denizen Designers are a part of an ongoing process of identifying and addressing community needs. By working closely with community members, they ensure that they have the tools to continue developing ideas and creating solutions even after the Designer is gone. A Designer must be conscious of their projects' longevity and impact, taking the time to think through the projected outcomes. The first solution may not be the best, so they must allow time for ideas to be thoughtfully considered. Change-making is a collaborative process. Having the input of many disciplines can go a long way towards ensuring solutions are designed to make systemic changes.

"...creating safer, accountable, honest and vulnerable spaces that focus on relationship building, I think, is how you can integrate design or make design accessible is by focusing on the people first."

- N'Deye D., Baltimore



Principles of Community-Based Design



We asked designers about principles that they felt guided their work. We collected over 50 principles and found the following to be salient across the interview conversations.

- Establish trust and be honest
- Listen to the community and value their lived experiences.
- Be patient and empathic with community members
- Be accountable to the community and clear about project goals/outcomes
- Be willing to adapt/be flexible and challenge any assumptions you might have had coming in
- Design with and not for communities
- Be inclusive in all aspects of the design process
- Design is not just a career, but also a lens



Illustration by Katiana Pierre

Makeup of a **DENiZEN DESIGNER**

HAVING A STRONG FOUNDATION

A community designer needs to have a desire / interest to work with others to address a social / environmental / political need

FINDING A FOCUS

While a community designer might have several passions, they start to determine specific social, economical, political or environmental issues that they would like to target



Cultivating Knowledge

a community designer is always learning more about design and how to engage with communities either from their personal network/experience or through more professional channels

NETWORK / COMMUNITY BUILDING

A community designer learns about and interacts with other people who are doing work similar to theirs which builds their sense of community and a support network

"DOING THE WORK"

A community designer is meaningfully involved with the community(ies) they are working with

Glossary of Terms

Participatory design As designed by Sanders, Brandt, and Binder, participatory design is "...an emerging design practice that involved different non-designers in various co-design activities throughout the design process" (1).

Co-design - As defined by Steen, "The term codesign can refer, for example, to the organizing of open innovation processes, in which people from different organizations share and combine ideas and knowledge, or to involving users or customers as participants in the design process"

Participatory action design/research - PAR has multiple principles: "intend liberation from systems of oppression, develop a compassionate culture, participate in a dynamic process of action and reflection, use the present reality as a starting point to build on, collectively investigate and act, and conscientiously produce new knowledge."

Community-based participatory research Community based participatory research (CBPR) as "a collaborative process that equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings."

Community-based participatory design - Most sources use the terms 'participatory design' and 'community-based participatory design' interchangeably.

Community engagement (in participatory design) - Community engagement in participatory design involves making sure communities are closely involved in the design process. Effective community engagement, as defined by Spiegelhalter, Russwick & Noto, is done by "identifying local stakeholders, conducting community assessments, holding community visioning workshops at local intitutions and multilingual outreach."

Design equity - As defined by the Creative Reaction Lab's Design Equity Field Guide, design equity refers to design practices that focus "on a community's culture and needs so they can gain tools to dismantle systemic oppression and create a future with equity for all."

Design justice - The design Justice Network defines design justice as a process that "rethinks design processes, centers people who are normally marginalized in design and uses collaborative, creative practices to address the deepest challenges communities face"

Co-creation - According to Sanders and Stappers, 'co-creation' is often used interchangeably with 'co-design.'

Design ethics - "An important distinction must be made between 'ethics' and 'morality' to determine the virtuousness, or responsibility, of a designer's compliance to some accepted social norms and standards, even when there exist strong incentives to do otherwise" (Barnard, 1968, p. 269).

Glosario de Términos

Diseño Participativo - Según lo definido por Sanders, Brandt y Binder, el diseño participativo es "... una práctica de diseño emergente que involucró a diferentes no diseñadores en varias actividades de codiseño a lo largo del proceso de diseño" (1).

Co-diseño - Como lo define Steen, "El término co-diseño puede referirse, por ejemplo, a la organización de procesos de innovación abierta, en los que personas de diferentes organizaciones comparten y combinan ideas y conocimientos, o para involucrar a usuarios o clientes como participantes en el proceso de diseño".

Investigación Acción Participativa - una cultura compasiva, participar en un proceso dinámico de acción y reflexión, utilizar la realidad presente como punto de partida para construir, investigar y actuar colectivamente, y producir conscientemente nuevos conocimientos."

Investigación Participativa Basada en la Comunidad - La investigación participativa basada en la comunidad (CBPR) como "un proceso de colaboración que involucra equitativamente a todos los socios en el proceso de investigación y reconoce las fortalezas únicas que cada uno aporta".

Diseño Participativo Basado en la Comunidad - La mayoría de las fuentes utilizan los términos "diseño participativo" y "diseño participativo basado en la comunidad" indistintamente.

Participación de la comunidad (en el diseño participativo) - La participación de la comunidad en el diseño participativo implica asegurarse de que las comunidades estén estrechamente involucradas en el proceso de diseño. La participación efectiva de la comunidad, según la definición de Spiegelhalter, Russwick & Noto, se realiza mediante la "identificación de las partes interesadas locales, la realización de evaluaciones de la comunidad, la celebración de talleres de visión comunitaria en instituciones locales y la divulgación multilingüe".

Equidad en el Diseño - Como se define en la Guía de campo de la equidad en el diseño de Creative Reaction Lab, la equidad en el diseño se refiere a las prácticas de diseño que se enfocan "en la cultura y las necesidades de una comunidad para que puedan obtener herramientas para desmantelar la opresión sistémica y crear un futuro con equidad para todos".

Justicia del Diseño - Design Justice Network define la justicia del diseño como un proceso que "repensa los procesos de diseño, centra a las personas que normalmente están marginadas en el diseño y utiliza prácticas colaborativas y creativas para abordar los desafíos más profundos que enfrentan las comunidades"

Co-creación - Según Sanders y Stappers, "co-creación" a menudo se usa indistintamente con "co-diseño".

Ética del Diseño - Se debe hacer una distinción importante entre 'ética' y 'moralidad' para determinar la virtuosidad o responsabilidad del cumplimiento de un diseñador de algunas normas y estándares sociales aceptados, incluso cuando existen fuertes incentivos para hacer lo contrario" (Barnard, 1968, pág.269).

Our work is guided and inspired by the Design Justice Principles defined by the Design Justice Network.

- We use design to sustain, heal, and empower our communities, as well as to seek liberation from exploitative and oppressive systems.
- We center the voices of those who are directly impacted by the outcomes of the design process.
- We prioritize design's impact on the community over the intentions of the designer.
- We view change as emergent from an accountable, accessible, and collaborative process, rather than as a point at the end of a process.*
- We see the role of the designer as a facilitator rather than an expert.
- We believe that everyone is an expert based on their own lived experience, and that we all have unique and brilliant contributions to bring to a design process.
- We share design knowledge and tools with our communities.
- We work towards sustainable, community-led and -controlled outcomes.
- We work towards non-exploitative solutions that reconnect us to the earth and to each other.
- Before seeking new design solutions, we look for what is already working at the community level. We honor and uplift traditional, indigenous, and local knowledge and practices.

(from designjustice.org)



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Notes

Notes

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Interviewees

Nour Arafat Chicago, IL / Detroit, MI	Navjot Heer Chicago, IL	Olivia Nava Oakland, CA
Kenneth Bailey Boston, MA	Taylor Holloway New Orleans, LA	Andrea Ngan Philadelphia, PA
Victoria Barnett Toronto, Canada	Lorin Jackson St. Louis, MO	De Nichols San Francisco, CA
Sabiha Basrai Oakland, CA	Anushka Jajodia Baltimore, MD	Claudia Paraschiv Salem, MA
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