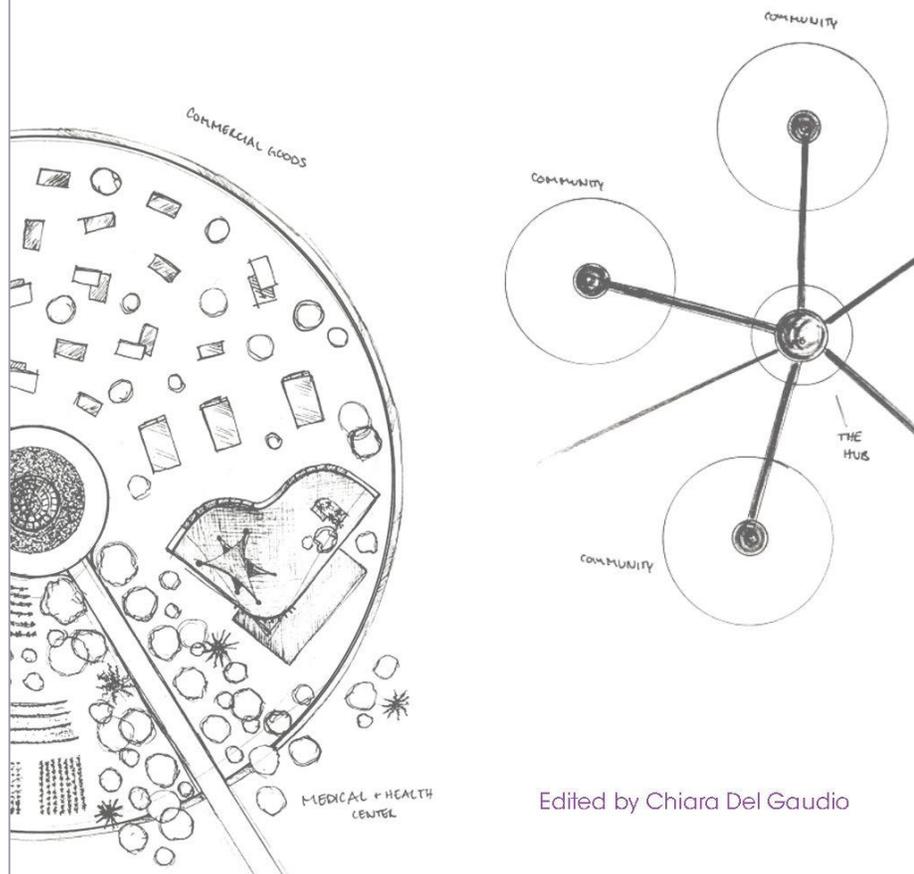Section excerpted from:

INSIGHTS

4th-Year Students' Reflections on
Design for Social Innovation

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Embracing Inclusivity in Design

DEPENDENT USER - INCLUSIVE DESIGN - REDUCTIVE SEDUCTION

The inclusion of dependent users in designing for their community has been a conversation that has gone on for a long time and is just starting to be taken seriously. In this paper, my definition of who is considered a dependent user is expanded on. The focus will be on how this user's design opinions are neglected by the design community. Designers and society are starting to see the benefit of including the perspective of the dependent user in the shaping of the community, but there is still some resistance in the process. The aim of this paper is to create an understanding as to why dependent users are not more involved in their community design process and why this should not be the case. It explains the reason for the resistance in the inclusive design process, the disadvantages of the lack of their inclusion in the process and the benefits of when they are involved in the process. An example of a design experience, in which community members have been neglected in a design process, will be employed to achieve the above aim. By discussing the effects of their exclusion and what could have been done differently, a better understanding of the benefits of an inclusive design is achieved. The importance of an inclusive design process emerges upon understanding the benefits it provides to the designer and the dependent user/community. The claim is that this paper will show that the reason for the lack of inclusion in the design process for dependent users could be "reductive seduction" (Martin, 2019, para. 6).

Reductive seduction is when a person is convinced that they have an easy fix to another community's problems. Designing for social innovation is a topic with multiple approaches and points of view. For the purpose of this paper, social innovation is a process that provokes social progress in a society, by providing solutions to tackle environmental or social issues. This paper focuses on understanding how, and to what extent, dependent users are included in their design process. Dependent users are users unable to design for themselves but who are in need of design help. An example of a dependent user, in context of this paper, would be a village in a economically-deprived, developing country, with a poor drainage system and no resources to design a better system.

The Case of TOMS *One for One*

The outcomes of TOMS *One for One* (Davenport, 2012), *play pump* ("Roundabout PlayPump", 2019) and *one laptop per child* programs (Wooster, 2018) are examples of design solutions provided to dependent users without including them in the process. They all failed initially and only some could be corrected. This paper will be using TOMS *One for One* program as an example to reflect on why dependent users are not more involved in the design process, as they should be.

The TOMS *One for One* program is a program designed to provide kids in developing countries with a free shoe for each TOMS shoe that is purchased. TOMS, an American-based company that focuses on shoes, was created with the aim of providing kids in similar situation with a shoe (Zimmerman, 2009). For each TOM shoe purchased, a kid with similar circumstances as the kids in a village in Argentina, got a shoe. For this reason, it is known as the *One for One* model. The program, just like most of these programs, was perceived to have a positive impact at the beginning. It supplied about 35million pairs over 60 countries, but as stated earlier, it failed to fully understand the needs of the dependent community. On one hand, they successfully solved the lack of shoes in

these communities; on the other hand, they strengthened local poverty issue in the community by putting local entrepreneurs (shoemakers) out of business. Poverty is the underlying cause of the lack of shoes in this community. TOMS figured out that their initial solution had not accounted for the various users. When TOMS understood this, it dedicated more time into creating a full picture of who their users were and involved them in the process. Now TOMS invests in shoemakers in the community, by paying for the kids' shoes to be made by local shoemakers.

Discussion and Final Considerations

The TOMS *One for One* program described above, is an example in which designers based the design solution on what they presumed to be best, without involving the dependent users it concerned. This is the main resistance an inclusive design process faces. Most designers fall into the pattern of basing their knowledge on what they think is best for a dependent user according to their own experiences, because they have a higher standard of living, in comparison to these communities (Martin, 2019). TOMS did not take into account the perspective of the users and that was the main reason that their first attempt was not a success. TOMS designed a solution based on what they thought the problem to be. The issue with this is that a kid not having shoes was only a symptom of the problem. Working with dependent users (the parents of kids, kids and the community) in the design process would have made it clear that the reason for the kids not having shoes to protect their feet was due to parents not being able to afford the shoes. The right

questions were never asked, because all the dependent users were not accounted for. TOMS was unable to grasp the whole picture of the design solution needed, thus their proposed solution was inappropriate. Introducing a foreign product into the community meant that the whole community was going to be affected by that product. Therefore, the rest of the community should have been considered as secondary dependent users (dependent users not affected directly by a design solution). As seen from the above example, a lack of inclusion leads to designers solving the wrong problems. This effect can be very disadvantageous to the designer and dependent user. It is a waste of time and resources to provide a solution that worsens the actual problem. In the case of the TOMS 'One for One' program, the shoes took away businesses, leading to a poorer economy. Including dependent users in their design process might seem exhausting and time consuming, but in the long run it actually saves the time of having to redesign the whole process. Not involving the dependent users in design intended for them will most likely fail.

This paper has clarified how not involving the dependent user can be disadvantageous to the designer. By solving the wrong problem, time and resources will be wasted. Lastly, it explains how inclusion benefits the dependent user by providing them with the right solutions and benefits the designers. With this, this paper has successfully highlighted disadvantages to excluding dependent users from the design process and the benefits of involving them in the design process. It also shows how the root cause for the exclusion of dependent users in the design process could be due to reductive seduction.
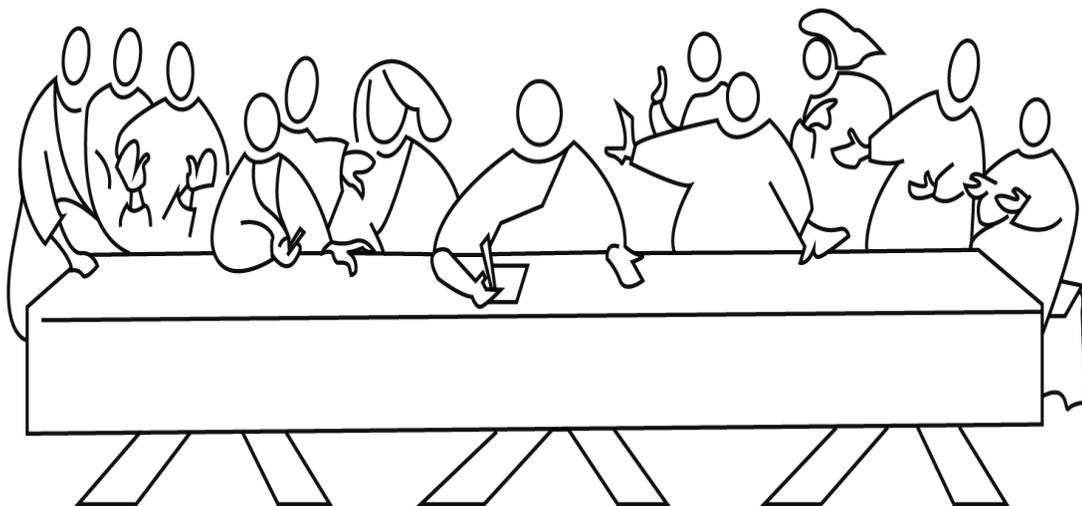
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