



## REPORT

# Design as a catalyst for development: Comments and views on Interdesign 2005 on Sustainable Rural Transport

21 September 2005  
SA Reserve Bank Conference Centre

## INTRODUCTION

Interdesign 2005 with the theme **Sustainable rural transport – technology for developing countries** took place in Rustenburg in the North-West province of South Africa from 3 to 16 April 2005. Over this two-week period designers from 15 countries gave of their time and design capabilities to generate viable and sustainable solutions to challenges surrounding non-motorised rural transport in developing communities.

The main strategic goal of Interdesign 2005 was to show how design excellence could address problems facing developing communities.

The workshop was divided into four focus areas – animal-drawn carts, bicycles and tricycles, alternative modes of transport and communication. The two-week period saw the development of several concepts, 19 of which were eventually considered to have real potential and to possibly alleviate transport problems in the communities. Of these, a number have been developed into prototypes and were field-tested amongst the original communities.

A seminar titled ***Design as a catalyst for development - comments and views on Interdesign 2005 on Sustainable Rural Transport*** was held on 21 September 2005. The day was aimed at reviewing and discussing Interdesign 2005 and looking at ways to harness design for development in South Africa so that the design industry, design education fraternity, government and the country as a whole could benefit from it.

The general consensus of seminar attendees was that although the Interdesign was considered to be a successful design workshop, it was only the start of a process that should be brought to fruition in order to be meaningful as a design promotion activity, as well as a developmental project. The many valuable lessons, experiences and positive results gained, should be harnessed creatively to create structures to enhance similar projects in future.

### 1. PURPOSE OF DAY

- To review the perceptions formed and suggestions made during and after the Interdesign workshop;
- to review the possibilities for implementing the Interdesign concepts and outcomes;
- to create an awareness of Interdesigns amongst the local design community;
- to initiate a discussion on the possibilities of using design as a realistic change agent within a developing environment through the format of Interdesigns;
- to indicate how co-operation between designers and government can result in a win-win situation for the country;
- to broaden the discussion about a Centre for Design for Development in South Africa; and
- to illustrate and discuss the positive contribution Interdesign could make to design education.

## 2. PROGRAMME AND SPEAKERS

The morning session was aimed at creating a backdrop for the discussions on the value of the Interdesign that followed in the afternoon sessions. It created an awareness of what the Interdesign was all about and how it was experienced and perceived by those involved, including participants, experts, communities and organisers. It also illustrated the potential of Interdesigns to address development issues.

Positive results and proposals were considered during the afternoon session. The discussion focused on the implications of an Interdesign on South Africa's development, as well as on proposals to make the process more beneficial to everybody involved.

The complete programme is attached.

## 3. FEEDBACK AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 3.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE INTERDESIGNS

#### 3.1.1 Planning procedure

- Intellectual property issues should be resolved before a future Interdesign is planned.
- The Design Institute should clearly define the extent of its involvement in the next Interdesign and indicate where its responsibilities end.
- A chat forum should be created before the event.
- Community activities should be researched beforehand to decide on the most appropriate time for field trips (we missed market day).
- The list of experts should include social and business expertise.
- The steering committee should have direct entry to high level government structures.
- Organisers should use service providers such as transport operators from the region where the workshop is planned.
- Group leaders should be trained for their task.
- The Interdesign concept should be explained and promoted amongst visual communication practitioners.
- Possible participants should be invited/approached early on to allow them the opportunity to integrate Interdesign participation in their projects.
- Visual communicators should do "dry-runs" into the communities.
- June/July will be a more appropriate time for the workshop to be held because it will allow proper preparation time for the students.
- A preliminary report and survey on the chosen communities are essential.

#### 3.1.2 Design process

##### 3.1.2.1 Process:

- Possible process:
  1. Start with team building
  2. spend time with experts on the subject
  3. decide on design process
  4. go on field trips
  5. design
  6. present an interim presentation
  7. go back to communities
  8. design
  9. present final presentation.
- Groups should write reports on their activities, not only present it by means of PowerPoint presentations.
- Visual communicators prefer to work on Macs.

### **3.1.2.2 Research methodology**

- A more structured research method should be followed – for eg. Participatory Action Research (PAR). This methodology involves the academic society (researchers, designers and experts), civil society (communities) and policy makers (government) in a way that allows them to interact closely with each other.
- Researchers with specific expertise should start the research process well in advance of the workshop.
- The analysis of the research study should be presented to the designers and this will then form the basis for designers further interacting with the communities.

### **3.1.2.3 Field trips:**

- Local customs and culture should be explained before the field trips.
- Each group should plan the research to be undertaken during the field trips.
- The participants should approach the communities in smaller groups for more effective interaction.
- Groups should visit communities in smaller groups with mini-buses - not all together in one big bus. Smaller groups will be able to work in a more focused manner with the communities.
- Designers should spend more time in the communities and perhaps stay over for a few days.

### **3.1.2.4 Community representatives**

- They should be better informed about their role and become involved earlier on in the process.
- They should be better informed on the specific issues addressed by the Interdesign.
- They should interact more with groups or even form part of the groups.

## **3.1.3 Structure**

### **3.1.3.1 Product design teams**

- Teams should comprise diverse disciplines – sociologists, anthropologists, business people, field researchers and more.
- Each group should have its own translator.
- Experts should work closer with groups and be more involved in the groups.
- Groups should be smaller.
- A design team from the community should be appointed.

### **3.1.3.2 Visual communication team**

- A visual communication team/expertise is essential.
- Communication for development is a specialised discipline and experts should deal with it.
- Members of the communication group can be integrated in all the other groups as interpreters, but not as translators.
- The group can be used to create awareness of design as a discipline amongst the teachers and learners in the communities.
- The role of the visual communication group defined itself on a meta-planning level in the past Interdesign. In order to give input on a real and synthetic level, the group will have to be involved over a longer period and will have to include the involvement of business developers.

## 3.2 GENERAL FEEDBACK

### 3.2.1 Design education

- The Interdesign model can be successfully adapted to for educational purposes.
- The Interdesign experience enriched the students' training by exposing them to a consultation process that directly involved the user from initiation to the point of testing the prototypes.
- The Interdesign enhanced the awareness for addressing local needs.
- The Interdesign generated possible research themes for post-graduate students.
- The Interdesign created an opportunity for inter-disciplinary, as well as inter-institutional participation.
- It also allowed academia and private sector to work side by side.

### 3.2.2 Prototype field testing

- Three students from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CAPUT) took their prototypes back to the villages for community members to test, to collect feedback from the users and to observe the users' interaction with the products.
- Students reported that they found that the Interdesign experience enriched their training because of the exposure to local needs and the hands-on experience.

#### **Feedback:**

*Method:* Field testers explained the products to users, let them use it and observed their usage. Care was taken to explain that the exchange of information was a very important factor in the process.

*Users:* School children, people at home and an artisan.

*Period:* One week.

*Observations:* Initially the novelty value was very high, but when that wore off the potential uses of the prototypes were appreciated; the designers observed uses that they did not foresee themselves; the younger members of community displayed a low level responsibility towards the products and some abusive behaviour was observed.

*Technical issues:* Some low quality parts used in the products needed replacement during the week of testing but were not easily available in the vicinity of the village. Some preferred parts identified during the Interdesign workshop and used in the prototypes, were shown to be unsuitable during the testing.

#### *Conclusions:*

- Community will need training on the maintenance of the products;
- Parts will have to be provided to area;
- Standards on parts are lacking;
- Better quality parts at a reasonable price should be imported. At the moment parts are either very low quality at a low price or a good quality at a high price;
- Products will have to be subsidised as the community will not be able to afford them,
- Transport businesses within the communities will have to be reconsidered.

### 3.2.3 Industrial design industry

- Interdesign is a challenge for private sector designers, as they to donate two income-generating weeks when participating in a workshop of this nature.
- Designers from the private sector feel that they have a social responsibility towards the country and its citizens and would therefore like to be involved in development projects.
- Private sector designers believe that helping people and making money can go hand-in-hand.

### 3.2.4 Research methodology

A properly structured research method should govern the design process. The research should start before the Interdesign workshop and carry on afterwards.

### **3.2.5 Visual communication**

The visual communication discipline (schools and industry) should be made aware of and sensitised to the benefits of Interdesign participation to allow for professional people to take part and for schools to incorporate future Interdesigns in their course material.

### **3.2.6 Funding**

- Business developers who were reluctant to support the project when approached initially, should be approached again for support.
- Possible funding for future activities could be sourced from SAFRI – Daimler-Chrysler's Aid project for Africa.
- UNESCO has a department for Craftsmanship and Design. They are active in Africa with regard to crafts, but not design. This could possibly be because they have not been approached for assistance. They are also a possible source for funding and assistance.
- Tax incentives should be made available for industrial designers who contribute to development projects.

### **3.2.7 Public communication**

- A massive sales job is needed to give development projects like the Interdesign a high profile.
- The success of the Interdesign project should be communicated on a high level.

### **3.3.8 Centre for Design for Development**

- The industrial design industry in South Africa will have to make a creative leap in order to address the Design for Development challenges – it cannot be approached along familiar routes.
- The Interdesign requires a business plan, funding, manufacturing and marketing strategies and a mechanism to handle all of these.
- A Centre for Design for Development should be created. This can enable
- Design for Development projects to be placed on the national agenda and become a branded programme to raise the national profile of projects such as Interdesign.

## **4. PROPOSALS**

### **4.1 The Interdesign project has to proceed to delivery level**

The Design Institute's mandate is design promotion and as such, it initiated, organised and drove the Interdesign project to illustrate how design can be used as a catalyst for development. The project now has to move forward to delivery level in order to conclude the role that design can play as a change agent. The Design Institute cannot be responsible for handling this phase of the project, as it falls outside its mandate. However, it would like to make use of the eventual results for design promotion purposes and therefore deems delivery essential.

The existing Interdesign Steering Committee should meet in October to decide on the way forward. Volunteers from the audience, who indicated that they would like to be involved in Design for Development projects that would benefit the country, would also be invited to the meeting.

### **4.2 A legal entity should be established**

The current Steering Committee should become a legal entity with the mandate to drive Design for Development projects. This entity should take the Interdesign project further, handle future actions in this regard and deal with future Design for Development projects.

A legal entity with a specific mandate

- could approach government more effectively for assistance,
- could attract investors and raise funds, and
- will have the status to negotiate deals.

This entity could be a NGO or a Public-Private Partnership.

#### **4.3 A champion is needed to drive project forward**

A business visionary is needed as a champion for the project. Non-conventional, creative industrial business sense and vision are needed to create a system or a business model for sustainable entrepreneurial action that can benefit all parties involved.

The system should include a formalised process mobilising provincial and municipal governments.

#### **4.4 Request from The Bojanala Platinum District Municipality**

The Bojanala Platinum District Municipality requested that a project should be piloted in Pitsedilesulejang where local artisans can be empowered and trained to produce and maintain some of the design concepts that have been developed together with that community during the Interdesign workshop. The municipality is willing to fund the project. The funding should be requested before February 2006.

#### **4.5 Proposal for a follow-up workshop in the communities**

A follow-up workshop with local design students should be held with the specific intention to work directly with the community and to develop specific and workable interpretations from the initial design concepts to meet the communities' specific needs within their environment. The design intervention should facilitate and provide an opportunity for the community to create their own ideas and interpretations to meet their needs. This will instil a self-help attitude and build confidence. A small budget is needed for such a project. Political and ideological will is essential for the success of such a project and combined with the existing enthusiasm, the project will create its own momentum. It will generate entrepreneurial action at grassroots level with the potential to spread and become a new kind of entrepreneurship.

#### **4.6 Identified needs to be communicated to government**

The needs identified during the feedback session should be compiled in a comprehensive report and circulated to a wide audience of government departments: The dti, DoT, DST, Department of Agriculture, DoE and the President's Office.

### **5. CONCLUSION AND ACTIONS**

As an event, the Interdesign was a resounding success. Many valuable lessons and experiences were gained. However, the concepts that were developed should be carried through to prototype development and field-testing, commercialisation and implementation in order to ensure sustained success.

#### **Immediate follow-up action:**

The Steering Committee will meet in October 2005, together with the volunteers who generously offered their time and resources to become part of the way forward for the Interdesign. The meeting will focus on developing an implementation plan.

*Compiled by  
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SABS Design Institute  
October 2005*

## PROGRAMME AND SPEAKERS

### **09:00 – 13:00 Telling the story**

This session is aimed at creating a backdrop for the discussions on the value of the Interdesign that will follow in the afternoon sessions. It should create an awareness of what the Interdesign was all about and how it was experienced and perceived by those involved, including participants, experts, communities and organisers. It should also illustrate the potential of Interdesigns to address development issues and what is needed to formally use Interdesigns to establish design as a real change agent.

**09:00 Welcome** - Adrienne Viljoen, Manager: SABS Design Institute

**09:20 Video and overview of Interdesign process and approach** –  
Bart Verveckken, Design Director of the Interdesign,

### **09:40 Feedback / overview by groups**

Alternative modes 1 – Prof George Teodorescu – Group Leader

Discussion

Alternative modes – Tasos Calantzis – acting for Prof P M Ranjan, Group Leader

Discussion

Communication – Ria van Zyl – Group Leader

Discussion

### **11:15 Feedback / overview by groups**

Animal-drawn carts – Chris Bradnum – Group Leader

Discussion

Bicycles – Roelf Mulder- Group Leader

Discussion

Government's feedback (national and provincial) - Marlene Ronald acting for  
Ms Angeline Nchabeleng, National Department of Transport

Discussion

Feedback from Bojanala Platinum District Municipality – Linda Jele, co-ordinator  
of Community Representatives participating in the Interdesign

Discussion

### **12:55 General panel discussion**

**Chairperson:** Zen Fourie – Research & Development Division, SABS

**Panel:** Bart Verveckken, Prof George Teodorescu, Tasos Calantzis, Ria van Zyl, Chris Bradnum, Roelf Mulder, Marlene Ronald, Linda Jele

### **14:00 – 17:00 Afternoon: Positive results & Proposals**

The discussion focussed on the positive implications for SA's development that could result from an Interdesign, as well as on proposals to make the process more beneficial to everyone involved.

### **14:00 How design education can be sensitised to national needs through Interdesign participation**

Implications for design education – lecturers (Ria van Zyl, Angus Campbell – lecturer in Industrial Design at the University of Johannesburg)

The role of research in Interdesigns (Hettie du Plessis – Senior Research Fellow at the Faculty of Art, Design & Architecture at the University of Johannesburg)

15:10 Panel discussion

**Chairperson:** Bart Verveckken

**Panel:** Chris Bradnum, Ria van Zyl, Angus Campbell, Rael Futerma, John Vermeulen, Francois Visser (students from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology).

**15:50 Valuable participation in future Interdesigns**

Feedback from the prototype-testing team (Rael Futerma, John Vermeulen, Francois Visser)

Implication for the industrial design industry and South Africa – People who make a living through design (Roelf Mulder & Tasos Calantzis)

16:30 Panel discussion

**Chairperson:** Bart Verveckken

**Panel:** Prof George Teodorescu, Tasos Calantzis, Ria van Zyl, Chris Bradnum, Roelf Mulder, Hettie du Plessis