

Vida Brazil:**Connecting Design for Living in Brazil**

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Introduction

Over thirty years ago, the British pop artist Richard Hamilton published a text entitled, *Popular Culture and Personal Responsibility*, in which he defined an ideal culture as, “one in which awareness of its condition is universal”¹

Good design can be achieved by focusing the efforts of designers to develop products and environments that will be more inclusive—as opposed to preferential, in enhancing and facilitating the areas of urban community development.

How do designers work with communities, respond to constraints, and maximize ownership by users and other stakeholders? The new paradigm shift in expanding the role of designers in the 21st century must continue to promote exemplary projects with an emphasis on participatory design, universal design, and social responsibility.

Design expresses the economic, social, political, and cultural complexion of our society. It renders an image of the conditions of our society and the communities that directly profit, or are contingent to its benefits. In this sense, it communicates a vast amount about the priorities and values of our society. Nigel Whitley's *Design for Society* (1993) critically asserts this observation in an attempt to establish a foundation for a more socially responsive development of design.²

This design sabbatical research investigates the role of design and designers within various social, economic, and political contexts. It explores our values and ethics as designers to better understand what, why, and for whom we are designing.

Historically, the principle role of the designer was to increase the sales and profitability of a product. However, in today's society, there is a paramount need to broaden the awareness of the designer with respect to the economic livelihood and sustainability, of urban inner-city communities in Asia, Europe, and the U.S., as well as the emerging nations in our global society.

Today, in the global paradigm shift that is currently in flux, we are looking at a “majority” designer and marketplace that does not design for the “majority” world. The majority of the design world largely facilitates in urban contemporary society, but the majority of the world lives outside of that urban Westernized contemporary sphere of influence. So the question and objective of design should be how can we better design and respond to the basic well being of the majority world in an inclusive and sustainable manner, from an environmental, economic and social level?

The field research study that was conducted between November 2003 and February 2005, evaluates the various approaches and resources utilized by various universities, research centers, government and non-governmental agencies concerned with Accessibility and Universal Design issues in the U.S., Brazil, and Argentina. This study examines the objectives, resources and applications of these centers in respect to what distinguishes, as well as characterizes, their research and practical approaches to universal design, accessibility programs, policies and implementation. The research also assesses the diverse and equitable approaches to universal and inclusive design that will be more responsive to the inherent needs and sustainable implementation of indigenous society's cultural values, resources, and economies of

¹ Hamilton, R. (1960) Popular culture and personal responsibility: material culture and everyday life. *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, Kristine Stiles, Peter Selz, (Eds.) pr. 298, University of California Press, Apr 18, 1996.

² Whitely, N. (1993) *Design for Society*, Reaktion Books, London, p. 158.

scale. The objectives of establishing such resources are to formulate a network of compatible linkages that are interested in sharing common interest and consonant goals. The results of this study will be utilized to establish the Design Center for Global Needs (DCGN) at SFSU as a viable center for universal design research and inclusive environments. The DCGN seeks to promote academic and applied research projects in this domain in the western region of the U.S. in conjunction with neighboring interest in Latin America and the Pacific Rim.

During this one-year research period, meetings, lectures, presentations and workshops were conducted at 17 universities and schools; 22 government and non-government agencies; and 10 professional design centers and organizations throughout the United States, Brazil, and Argentina. These organizations and agencies were comprised of:

- Institutional – NGO
- Institutional/Professional – NGO
- University/Institutional – NGO
- Government Agency

The study offers visual abstracts of successful outcomes that integrate three key components of any successful, socially sensitive design endeavor. All the solutions respect

- (1) local context (culture and identity)
- (2) community partnerships (inclusive)
- (3) seek sustainable and universal solutions.

Universal Design Centers and Agencies in Brazil (University/Institutional – NGOs)

The Center of Independent Life of Rio De Janeiro (CVI-Rio), established in 1988, is an extremely dedicated and influential non-government organization with modest financial resources that are bolstered by an abundance of dedication, commitment and valor. As a leader in the independent living movement, it was the first “flagship” CVI organization in Brazil. Currently, there is a nationwide network of 22 CVI organizations throughout the urban centers in Brazil.³ These centers are led by outstanding UD luminaries such as Regina Atalla of CVI–Salvador and Romeu Kazumi Sasaki of CVI–Araci Nallin.

Today, CVI–Brazil continues to trail blaze the burgeoning independent living movement in many countries of Latin America. CVI-Rio, led by Lilia Pintos Martin and Veronica Camisao, is affiliated with the Catholic University in Rio de Janeiro (PUC–Rio) and located on the campus. It is an NGO and one of the more active and productive independent living centers in Brazil with a well experienced and professional staff and personnel. The center has a direct association with the Industrial Design Department, its faculty and students who contribute to the wide range of publications and partnerships that have been established with the city government in Rio de Janeiro.

Many of the efforts that have been made in Brazil relative to accessibility and universal design have been led by organizations such as CVI–Rio through some of the publications that have initiated. These informative and educational guidelines that have focused on making the urban environment more accessible, particularly in regards to the urban commercial center in Rio de Janeiro.

In addition to the outstanding efforts that have been established as a result of the CVI organizations, there are a host of equally dedicated and prevailing NGO associations that are either have direct partnerships with academic institutions; design professional organizations, such as

- Pro Nucleo Acesso located within the School of Architecture and Planning at the Federal University in Rio de Janeiro led by Regina Cohen
- The Universal Design Center in the School of Architecture and Design Federal University of Santa Catarina Florianopolis, Brazil, led by Professors Vera Moro Bins Ely and Marta Dischinger.
- VIDA Brazil is an NGO organization in Salvador, Bahia, whose objectives is to engage and disseminate information to design professionals, architects, and engineers regarding accessible

³ Centro de Vida Independents do Rio de Janeiro (CVI–Rio), <http://www.cvi-rio.org.br/cvi.asp>

and equitable built environments. In this effort, VIDA Brazil seeks to guide and raise the awareness of the public and private sectors to inclusive and universal design measures.

For this the organization executes research, training, workshops, lectures, public policy campaigns. For the past three years, they have had a partnership with the Commission of Accessibility of Salvador - COCAS.

Despite the broad network of CVI organizations, university-affiliated and government agencies, communications amongst these individual organizations needs to be better facilitated and disseminated. Although the CVI groups maintain a supportive network, some groups are often so overwhelmed with their local constituencies, that they often do not have the time, or resources to look beyond their immediate locale. There is no question that the motivation, efforts, and objectives of the independent living community in Brazil are well integrated and representative of the vibrant and unabashed festive fabric of Brazilian life, spirit, and exuberant ambiance.

One of the most effective, constructive, visionary, and resourceful agencies with the potential for the greatest influence in Brazil was the Comissão Permanente de Acessibilidade (CPA). CPA is a Sao Paulo Municipal Government agency under the Secretary of Habitat and Urban Development (SEHAB), was led by Edisson Passafaro in 2004 (Figure 1). This agency put together a series of very resourceful guides for public buildings, streetscapes, transportation and the overall urban built environment.



Figure 1. CPA—Permanent Commission on Accessibility for the Sao Paulo City Municipality; SEHAB—Secretary of Habitat and Urban Development.

As shown in Figure 1, CPA employed a successful identity branding and marketing scheme through the design and application of its “A” logo, as a way to promote accessibility awareness and compliance. The bold black capital A in the center of a bold red circle outline was used as a symbol of certification for publicly recognizing buildings, offices, stores, restaurants and establishments that had met the CPA codes. The letter A symbolizes A-quality, awareness, accessibility, and acceptance for all!

A noteworthy and exemplary project that CPA has conducted in Sao Paulo region under the design direction of former CPA architect Gustavo Partezani was the development of the prefabricated concrete ramp for the improved access of to and from the street corners of Sao Paulo metropolis (Figure 2). This collaborative and resourceful venture was done in partnership with the Portland Cement Association of Brazil. In order to effectively move forward the agenda and goals of universal design beyond the voice of the advocates, one must identify and promote the benefits of universal design to potential stakeholders and beneficiaries in the government, business and the manufacturing sectors. Such is the case with the partnership of a proactive agency like CPA in aligning itself through its government affiliation in establishing profitable and beneficial municipal contracts with industry.

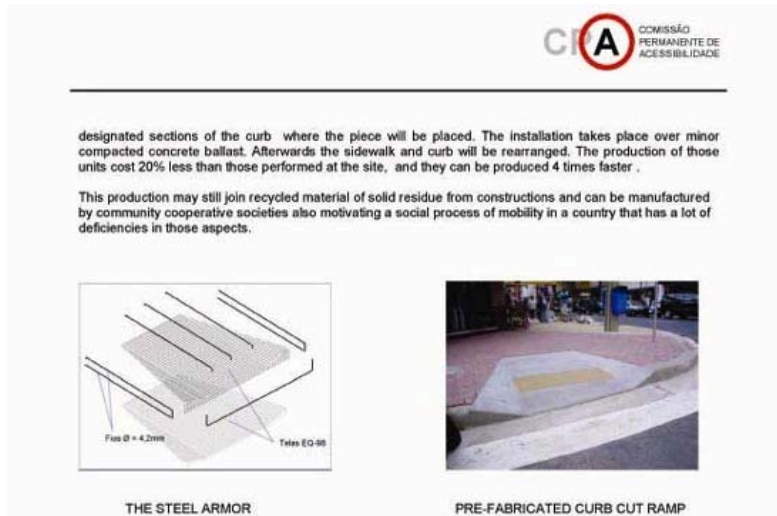


Figure 2. Image courtesy of the Comissao Permanente de Acessibilidade (CPA).

The megalopolis of Sao Paulo, is a city of over 18 million people, the third largest city in the world. Do you think the Portland Cement Association is not aware of how many potential cement street corners with curb cut ramps that such a mega-city of this size will yield? As one can easily see, everyone benefits from Universal Design in the improvement and upgrading of the urban streetscape and built environment.

In the area of Outdoor/Public environments, the city government of Curitiba leads the way from its legendary hallmark urban transportation, city planning, streetscapes, and recycling system through its Institute for Research and Urban Planning of Curitiba (IPPUC) and Urbanizacao de Curitiba S.A. (URBS). As admired as the accomplishments and revered models of equitable social democratization have been established and documented in Curitiba, the city continues to strive to improve beyond its achievements.

The “Rua 24 Horas” (24 Hours Avenue) is a wonderful example of an inclusive city street mall in Curitiba. The street mall and its services are available and “accessible” to the public 24 hours, 365 days of the year. Street mall contains “accessible” public toilets, free internet service, “Inclusive Digital” for persons with disabilities, the poor and the homeless, cafes, bookstore, etc. Mall pathway and surrounding city sidewalks feature tactile “caning” surfaces to facilitate the visually-impaired

In many of the older, historical and tourist areas of urban centers, such as in Salvador (Pelhourino) and Rio de Janeiro (Corcovado and Sugar Loaf Mountain) the streetscape and building access problems of older buildings need to be upgraded to better facilitate general access for all users of varying physical abilities. This problem is certainly not unique to Brazil, but is a more common dilemma in older, historical centers in Europe, the U.S. and Asia. One of the unique features towards inclusive design in Brazil that wonderfully exemplifies the outgoing Brazilian lifestyle and affinity with its plethora of costal beaches is an accessible urban beach in Salvador (Figure 3). This public accessible beachfront area had direct access to an accessible bus stop and public transportation.



Figure 3. A wheelchair-accessible public beach in Salvador, Bahia.

Because the tourist industry is more economically developed and established in the traditional and more popular U.S., European, and Asia venues, there tends to be a more structured and regulated standard. Since many baby boomers, retirees, and older individuals have more leisure time and disposable income, they comprise a significant and influential segment of tourist travelers. In addition, many families travel together, which may be comprised of small children to grandparents. Such diverse transgenerational needs must be accommodated in an inclusive and universal manner. Consequently, there is a greater need to accommodate these users if you desire to attract visitors, tourists and businesses in your city. So there's a challenge to make these cities more accessible. Barcelona and Valencia, Spain, has established themselves as "accessible" tourist and business environment. Their tourist bureaus promote how the city is as a tourist attraction because of its appealing accessibility, which makes the city more inviting, attractive environment for all users.

Community Partnerships

The physical features and aspects of inclusive design are improving the quality of life. Well-being is only the beginning: Infrastructure and facilities programming offer opportunities for earning income that, in turn, enhance the general economic health of a community. But, the most important element for success is commitment by all, resulting in a true sense of partnership. The benefits are that people obtain an improved, healthy and secure living environment without being displaced. Experience has shown that urban upgrading projects are associated with strong social and economic benefits.

The point-of-view of the study affirms what the renowned economist-philosopher and author of Small is Beautiful, E.F. Schumacher, believed when he called for a reassessment of the role and status of design in society. Schumacher states:

"What is at stake is not economics, but culture; not the standard of living, but the quality of life"⁴

Urban upgrading customarily provides a package of improvements in streets, footpaths, and drainage as well.⁵ It is an "inclusive" approach to the overall and sustainable improvement of the environment for all. When one refers to the "sustainable" factors in a project, this reference is not only environmental, but also economic in respect to the investment, growth, supervision, and maintenance of the project.

Urban Upgrading is an area that you have not customarily seen addressed in the conventional concept of Universal Design. How does inclusive, or universal design, relate to low-income economies of the "Majority" World? How does inclusive, or universal design, relate to the informal sector of our society; the slums, the nonindustrial or rural areas? How does a conventional designer address an unconventional basic environmental infrastructure? So when you package the basic services in respect to access, clean water supply, adequate sewage disposal, this is where you can begin to establish an inclusive, universal design process with accessible measures. Such an "unconventional" design process is a very distinct approach that goes well beyond the conventional design process of passive brainstorming, sketching, visualizing and prototyping. It is not an esoteric, stylized design approach, but a more applied and essential approach that celebrates efficiency, comfort and environmental well-being.

It may be as simple as designing a sustainable urban pathway that can optimize the creative and feasible use of ramps. The physical improvement process is only the beginning of what must be a holistic and comprehensive process that incorporates income-generating opportunities and social incentives in terms of dealing with the economics and the health of the community. Essentially, upgrading is an inclusive and participatory design development process that embarks the end-user on a path to becoming a recognized or regularized citizen.

Some of the basic infrastructural services and developments that are taking place, in terms of urban upgrading, are both feasible and practical in respect to the improvement of the community environment and means of accessibility. So, what is needed to make upgrading work? One must first identify the

⁴ Eliahoo, R. (1984) Designer ethics. *Creative Review*, March, p. 44.

⁵ *<http://www.thinkcycle.org/dtm/>

stakeholders and beneficiaries of the projects, as well as the incentives that will stimulate their interest and commitment to the project. You have to keep people informed, and you have to be clearly defined the roles and responsibilities of the various agencies that are working together.

A classic case study that best exemplifies this development application has been conducted by the Monte Azul Community Association in the Monte Azul favela, probably one of the more well-known urban developments in Sao Paulo, or in Brazil (Figure 4). The Monte Azul Community Association is a NGO community development project that was established in 1979 by a German Waldorf School teacher, Ute Craemer. The mission and goals of the association is to promote equal opportunities through education, culture, and health, especially to underprivileged people. The association's objective is to develop the material, social, conscience, and spiritual well being of its constituents.



Figure 4. Monte Azul Favela (slum), Sao Paulo, Brazil.

The association currently works on basic hygiene, environment, and sanitation programs. In the favela (slum), pathways, bridges, clean water, and sewage systems are built in association with the urbanization program of the City of São Paulo. One of the most positive results and indicators of the success of the community efforts in all sectors of local life is a significant decline of the rate of crime and violence. Monte Azul is not only physically visible but is also a place where people of different social levels and different cultures and countries meet to start transformation programs and improved way of life.⁶

Some of the services and resources that the association facilitates in the Monte Azul community are

- Education and skill development (technology/computer lab)
- Primary health and dental care facility
- Food store and bakery (health/nutrition/community business)
- Children's furniture/toy store, design/production facility
- Community theater and art center
- Cultural exchange program

Inclusive Design in the Majority World

Progressive designers are beginning to respond to the demographic, environmental, and economic realities of the 21st century. Designers, educators, and students should be encouraged to work and function outside of their "comfort zone" or sphere of influence.

An effort to realize this dynamic, practical, and participatory concept of a more inclusive universal design approach was implemented as part of the overall objectives of an international student design competition. This design competition was formulated in conjunction with Adaptive Environments in Boston, MA, the host of the "Designing for the 21st Century III: International Conference on Universal Design" in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, held in December 2004. This competition, which was one of the key

⁶ <http://www.southerncrossreview.org/9/montezul.htm>, June 15, 2006

drivers for the D21 conference, was a model for expanding the global perspective of universal design beyond the established mainstream convention. The objectives of this design mandate was to advocate designers, educators, students and policy-makers to address the evolution of universal, inclusive, and sustainable design in diverse cultures and economies of scale.

The Designing for the 21st Century student design competition was a call to design visionaries to expand the power of design for the majority world that has traditionally been marginalized from the benefits of responsible design practice. The overall objective of the design competition was to generate innovative, resourceful, and responsible design concepts and solutions for a Community Health Center that would be located at designated sites in the majority world regions of Africa, Asia, and Latin America/Caribbean. Student Teams also had the choice of designating a site within the continents of these regions. The site specific community centers was made available through the competition web site with details and images of the neighborhood or village culture, demographics, local norms of design and materials, economic conditions, assets, needs, and local resources.

In preparation for this student design competition, research was conducted through the Design Center for Global Needs at San Francisco State University to collect data profiling design programs at universities and colleges around the world. Research was conducted to identify and compile a comprehensive listing of over 600 architectural, landscape, industrial and interior design programs at universities and colleges around the world. Team project proposals were encouraged to be multidisciplinary in their consideration of more than one design discipline. As a result, nearly 200 registered projects from over 34 countries were received for the competition, representing regions in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the U.S.

An international jury of 14 members from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America complimented the international forum of student design teams. The entire project submissions and jury process was conducted on-line through the Adaptive Environments/D21 Competition web site: <http://www.designfor21st.org> The project proposals and final project design concepts were required to meet four criteria for all aspects of the design relative to universal design, sustainable design, low cost, and design excellence.

The competition schedule began in December 2003 and concluded with the final submission of work in August of 2004. The international panel of jurors selected a very diverse and unique international pool of 14 Finalist from a final submission of 45 projects from 31 universities and 16 countries from Japan to South Africa. In the end, the top three competition finalists were from the Universidade de Mayor, School of Architecture; the University of New Mexico, USA; and San Francisco State University, USA (Figure 5). Each concept validated the need to recognize and embrace the expanded scope and applications of universal design in a unique and responsible manner, particularly as it related to the practical needs of the majority world on an equitable scale.



Figure 5. Universidade de Mayor, Santiago, Chile / University of Buffalo (SUNY), / San Francisco State University

What's Next?

How do designers in the 21st century

1. Work with communities, respond to constraints, and maximize ownership by users and other stakeholders? *(By promoting exemplary projects with an emphasis on participatory design, universal*

design, and social responsibility.)

2. Find ways to mobilize the resources to promote the creation of job skills training, mentoring, and capital recycling in low-income communities. (*Designers can influence change and redefine the priorities and values of our society through such indirect methods.*)

3. Conduct workshops and symposia that address these issues ones that are ideally sponsored by local universities, professional design and industry organizations

In 1963, the late Selby Mvusi, a prolific South African industrial designer, wrote:

“The truly excellent designed object is not the object that is rare or expensive... This rightness of form and function before and after the object is made is both individual and social. It is in this sense of that society and culture, form intrinsic elements of design.

We do not therefore design for society or for that matter design in order to design society. We design because society and ourselves are, in fact, design.

We do not design for living. We design to live”⁷

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