

# Design for Sustainable Prosperity

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## Abstract

This paper is the tale of a journey towards design for sustainable prosperity. It shares the exploration through my own work as a designer and through working with groups of design students in the last three years as part of an academic exploration at the social-environmental design study program in our design institute.

Various study cases will be presented according to five sustainable design strategies that were designed with the intention of addressing the individual, communal and environmental scopes, offering an applicable path towards design for Prosperous Sustainability.

## Introduction

*'We should go about in the manner of a bee collecting nectar from a flower: The bee harms neither the fragrance nor the beauty of the flower, but gathers nectar and turns it into sweet honey.'*

This vision for the way humanity should act on earth taught by the Buddhist Saint Arahnt, has become an important inspiration for my work as a designer seeking the path towards design for sustainability.

Searching through contemporary literature pertaining to sustainability I came across the definition by 'The Natural Step' that to some extent corresponds with the allegory of the bee. It states: 'the practice of sustainability is about creating new ways to live and prosper while ensuring an equitable, healthy future for all people and the planet.'

The combination of words "to live and prosper" as a sustainability ideal can make one wonder – we are normally told to shrink, minimize, eliminate, strive for zero impact.. What could it mean to live and prosper in a sustainable world? Can we create life habits in which prosperity and sustainability are synonyms? Can the wolf dwell with the lamb?

In my perception, the task of Sustainable Design is precisely that – outlining the way to Sustainable Prosperity. Such design action supports the process of envisioning and realizing life habits that create Prosperous Sustainability.

This paper naturally does not hold all the answers, but it is the story of a genuine search, a search that is conducted through my own work as a designer and through working with groups of design students in the last three years as part of an academic exploration at the social-environmental design study program in our design institute.

The paper will be structured according to five sustainable design strategies based on 'The Bridge' sustainable design methodology which was formed as part of my Master thesis research in 2003-2004.

The five strategies were designed with the intention of addressing the individual, communal and environmental scopes, offering an invitation to a holistic view of sustainability by exposing its various layers and interdependencies.

## Design Strategy 1 – DO THE CHI DANCE

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This field of search evolves through exploring ways in which human needs can be answered through participating in natural processes. The vision that drives this strategy is that the array of products supporting our basic activities can be redesigned to enable human everyday deeds to become another one of the natural chains of reaction.

The vision shows that similarly to a partner in a Tai Chi (a 'soft style' martial art) dialogue, we could participate in nature allowing the natural energy to empower us and move on unchanged to the next cycle.

The various projects developed in this field of exploration aspire to locate spaces in which we can react within our surrounding environment, enabling the movement to enrich us, while allowing it to continue forward to the next cycle.

#### **Selected study cases:**

- **WindyLight by designer x**

WindyLight is a collection of self-sufficient outdoor lights operated by wind energy. Windylight is created from a repetitive element which integrates wind collection and a light source into one element.

Windylight is designed to utilize an urban gentle breeze. Through the use of a weathercock that acts as the repetitive energy collecting element, the capacity of the wind determines the intensity of light.

- **The Water Parasol by designer x**

The Water Parasol is designed to be placed in any backyard and integrate the collection of rain and dew water into one element.

- **SinkTank by designer x**

SinkTank is a series of washbasins that enable the collection and use of secondary water in the household.

Figure 1: Windylight by designer x



### **Design Strategy 2 – REVIVE OBJECTS**

Reviving objects refers to exploring ways in which our artifacts participate in the changeability of nature and re-enter the living realm. It is an invitation to let go of attempting to make things that 'stop', but rather things that grow, change and react to diverse phenomena through their life span.

This strategy is explored by designing objects that react to and/or are nourished by the natural or man-made occurrence in their surroundings.

On the other hand it promotes the design of objects that change through their life-span according to the changing needs of the user and/or changes in technology, lifestyle etc.

### **Selected study cases:**

- **A DIY Shaded Roof-Garden by designer x**

A simply assembled construction and special terrace planters create a gardened environment for tenants on their roof-top. The system is self-transportable and self-assembled and fits any roof. Climbing Plants create a cover which has all the environmental benefits of green-roofs, while the planters provide a space for urban agriculture. This object changes throughout the year according to the seasons.

- **Alive Bus Stop by designer x**

Alive bus stop was designed to join 'the living realm' by allowing climbing plants to grow over its poles and roof. The roof is designed to collect rain water and direct it to water the plants.

Figure 2: A DIY shaded roof garden by designer x



### **Design Strategy 3 – DESIGN THE MIDDLEMAN**

Designing the middleman relates to empowering people to regain their capacity to participate in designing their own environment and using their unique creative skills to create the artifacts they need.

From a sustainable development point of view, this strategy addresses the potential of design to become a mediation tool that supports people in adopting a sustainable lifestyle. It also alludes to the view that as designers we should address human needs and not necessarily strive for the industrial production of more products.

This notion is explored by creating designs that mediate between an individual and the materials or resources he might find in his surrounding environment, thus enabling him to locate and use the existing potential.

On another level a design can create ways for the user to participate in a product's creation process by introducing creative kits that support users in producing their own daily objects.

### **Selected study cases:**

- **A DIY bicycle seat and storage by Designer x**

The design is based on the re-use of a plastic milk bottle box. The designer created an instruction form and a kit of appliances that enables the user to create his own 2 in 1 bicycle seat and storage.

- **A DIY home water purifier by Designer x**

This design enables anyone to create a home water purifier by following a simple set of instructions.

- **Bacbucon by Designer x**

Bacbucon gives children free play opportunities utilizing "clean garbage" to create a personal outdoor play space. Bacbucon consists of a set of connectors that enable the re-use of empty plastic bottles to create an endless spectrum of open ended structures.

Figure 3: Bacbucon by designer x



#### **Design Strategy 4 – DISCOVER ABUNDANCE**

The call to Discover Abundance invites us to participate in the way things are 'right now' and make an attempt to identify sources of abundance that we usually tend to overlook.

Our ability to challenge, using design tools, the prevalent paradigm stating that abundance and sustainability are contradictory might become one of our greatest tasks.

In relation to this strategy diverse work is done with the aim of putting to use unseen sources of abundance that could be revealed at various layers of object, infrastructure and community.

Connecting to already existing situations can reveal abundant hidden potential that can manifest as industrial waste, agricultural refuse, natural processes and space that is used very few hours of the day, etc.

##### **Selected study cases:**

- **Rolling Shelf by Designer x**

A modular shelf created from veneer industrial waste. This shelf was designed to be manufactured in a rehabilitation center for the mentally ill. It is now being produced in the centre while creating jobs for 50 of its members.

- **Working with date wands by Designer x**

A project conducted in collaboration with a women empowerment organization. This project was developed around the idea of giving a new life to date wands, a unique material that is considered to be agricultural waste. The purpose of this project is to create a unique source of income for an income-deprived female community.

Figure 4: Rolling shelf by designer x



### Design Strategy 5 – CREATE SHARING

'Create Sharing' alludes to designers creating platforms for people to collaborate for a common goal. It strives for the strengthening of community ties and on a larger scale - strengthening the local social fabric.

This area of search is explored by creating experiences that would initiate shared common moments in which people are playing or working together to address common goals that are either long term outcomes or spontaneous moments of joy.

#### Selected study cases:

- **Zocolo by Designer x**

El Zocalo is a public square commonly used as a meeting point although it has no resting or shaded areas. Zocolo is a human powered shadow system, which becomes effective only when a number of people use it together. This system promotes interaction between people sharing the same space while creating a shared shaded waiting area.

- **Interactice bus station by Designer x**

An interactive game board which can be placed at bus stands and other public locations, thus encouraging dialogue and interaction between passers-by in public space.

Figure 5: Zocolo by designer x



## Conclusion

The search towards design for sustainable prosperity is a fascinating journey inlaid with many riddles. It is a journey that challenges us to encompass a wide scope of search and at the same time apply our insights to hands-on everyday life study cases.

The work with various groups of students and professionals during the last three years shows that formulating design strategies that illustrate possible application channels to the wide scope of sustainable design supports many designers in identifying their unique applicable approach to this vast field.

In many cases working with the design strategies allowed students who had little or no background in sustainable design to grasp its essence swiftly and address the design and reflective challenges it contains.

The challenge for the near future is to maintain a genuine quest towards revealing new layers of understanding to the term sustainable prosperity and simultaneously attempting to identify and design the applicable aspects of these revelations.

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