



BIO 21 Quality Concept Award.  
Dinner set for hospitals and retirement homes.  
Designer: Gyula Mihaly, Budapest, Hungary  
Tutor: Éva Kádasi, Göd, Hungary  
Client: Hollóházi Porcelain Factory, Hollóháza, Hungary 2007

**MÁRTON SZENTPÉTERI** is an intellectual and cultural historian and design critic. He holds a PhD in Literary Studies and a Master's in Literary Studies and Linguistics from the Eötvös Loránd University of Arts and Sciences, Budapest. He is currently Associate Professor in Design Culture at Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, Budapest (MOME). His main interest lies in early modern intellectual history and modern design culture.

# Socially Responsible Design Initiatives in Hungarian Design Education

THE ROLE OF DESIGN IN POST-SOCIALIST COUNTRIES STILL IN TRANSITION TO CAPITALISM HAS CHANGED DRAMATICALLY OVER THE LAST TWO DECADES. INDUSTRIAL DECLINE HAS LED TO A SOCIAL LEGITIMACY CRISIS SUFFERED BY INDUSTRIAL DESIGNERS, WHO HAD SO FAR LED THE SECTOR. ALTHOUGH NEW FORMS OF DESIGNER IDENTITIES HAVE SPORADICALLY EMERGED, THIS LEGITIMACY CRISIS IS STILL APPARENT AND CLAMOURS FOR A RADICAL SHIFT FROM THE TRADITIONAL IMAGE OF DESIGNERS TO THAT OF THOSE WHO ARE ACKNOWLEDGING NEW AND EXPANDING ROLES FOR DESIGN. THE GLOBAL FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC CRISIS PARALLEL TO THE EVER-DEEPENING GENERAL SYSTEM CRISIS IN HUNGARY IS AN ACUTE REMINDER OF THIS NEED. SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE DESIGN INTERVENTIONS GUARANTEE PROFOUND CHANGES IN THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL SITUATION AND SUBSEQUENTLY PROVIDE A NEW AND SOLID LEGITIMACY FOR DESIGNERS. IN ORDER TO REACH THIS GOAL, HOWEVER, HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS SHOULD INTRODUCE RESEARCH-DRIVEN DESIGN INTO THEIR CURRICULA, INVITING EXPERTS IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES AND INTEGRATING THEORY AND PRACTICE.

## Transition to Capitalism

Hungarian design culture is still heavily influenced by the consequences of the country's three decades of transition to capitalism and liberal democracy insofar as the system change has indeed taken place in positive terms, although the corresponding cultural change is yet to come<sup>1</sup>. In fact, the Hungary of today undeniably faces anomic sociocultural conditions that stand between European values and factually experienced regional everyday practices<sup>2</sup>. Without doubt, the most important collective disillusionment comes from the universal devaluation of leftist values that did not stem so much from the outward cultural opposition to the era of 'existing socialism', as from the fact that the emerging new elites—alongside the post-communists—have gradually disclaimed the idea of social market economy (*Soziale Marktwirtschaft*) frequently and hypocritically advertised by almost all parties before the first democratic elections in 1990, in favour of the laissez-faire capitalist programme of neo-liberal globalisation<sup>3</sup>. This turn has proved highly disadvantageous not only to the socially oriented attitude of designing but to the great generation of socialist industrial designers with reasonably important cultural influence, for structural changes in the economy have virtually destroyed the industries that originated most of their former design assignments. Therefore, the greater part of the leading elite of Hungarian designers (most of whom are today seniors at public universities) conceive of their social role as severely diminishing, and consider their social legitimacy crisis the result of dramatic changes in the economy which gravely

deteriorated their working potential in competition with designers from developed countries backed by global companies entering the now completely open Hungarian market<sup>4</sup>. Hungary—once the 'best student' among transitional countries—now struggles against deep economic, social and political adversities intensified by the global financial and economic crisis. Paradoxically enough, the current crisis has a lot to do with our former eminent position among post-socialist countries providing excellent test beds for neo-liberal reforms. Among others, the then fashionable triple dogma of liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation led to a certain 'hyper-correction' in which not only the obviously unproductive and disproportionately large sectors of the socialist industry were restructured (or simply abolished, to put it less euphemistically), but so were renowned state companies such as Ganz Mávag or Ikarusz, companies which could have pulled through as serious private competitors in terms of global markets. After decades of changes, nevertheless, it is now fairly clear that there is no turning back and the depressing consequences of global strategic management for our region have to be acknowledged immediately<sup>5</sup>. The successful recovery of Hungarian design culture, therefore, could no longer be attached to the state of the industry and consequently we should beware the trends exclusively promoted by design councils in central capitalist countries, according to which the project of making small and medium enterprises design-conscious supports the revitalisation of the economy. We should not seriously consider the latter option in Hungary since the SME sector has struggled to survive in constant instability

1. Since the objective requirements of constitutionality, multi-party parliamentarism, market economy based on private ownership, human rights and basic freedoms have existed since 1990, there is no reason to question that the system change has in fact taken place in positive terms. See KORNAL János [2008]. "What Does 'Change of System' Mean?", in *From Socialism to Capitalism. Eight Essays*. Budapest-New York: Central European University Press, pp. 123-150.

2. See JAKAB György and VARGA Attila [2007]. *A fenntarthatóság pedagógiája* [Pedagogy of Sustainability]. Budapest: L'Harmattan, pp. 7-15.

3. The idea of a social market economy is even declared in the planned Constitution of the European Union: "The Union shall work for the sustainable development of Europe based on balanced economic growth and price stability, a highly competitive social market economy, aiming at full employment and social progress, and a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment." Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe. The Union's Objectives, Art. 1-3, 3. Cf. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2004:310:0011:0040:EN:PDF> Last visited on 22 July 2009.

4. SZENTPÉTERI Márton [2006]. 'A kortárs design dilemmái' [Dilemmas of Contemporary Design Culture], in ANTALÓCZY Tímea and KAPITÁNY Ágnes (Eds.) *Az iparművészet változó szerepe az átalakuló vizuális kultúrában* [New Roles of Art and Design in Changing Visual Culture]. Budapest: Moholy-Nagy Művészeti Egyetem–Nemzeti Kulturális Alap, pp. 35-62. In general, see POHÁRNOK Mihály [2001]. 'A design helyzete és fejlesztésének lehetőségei Magyarországon. Összegző tanulmány a 2001. évi kutatásról' [The State of Design in Hungary and the Potentials of its Development. Research Report], in KAPITÁNY Ágnes and POHÁRNOK Mihály (Eds.) *A design helyzete és fejlesztésének lehetőségei Magyarországon* [The State of Design in Hungary and the Potentials of its Development]. Budapest: Magyar Iparművészeti Egyetem–Magyar Szabadalmi Hivatal, pp. 5-32.

5. On issues of global strategic management see LASSERRE, Philippe [2003]. *Global Strategic Management*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, especially pp. 9-12.

due to the governmental tax policies and bureaucracy in force before the onset of the global economic crisis; moreover, the sector's innovative and management potential have been definitely low. Currently, the sector simply cannot afford hiring designers of the traditional 'fast' sort,<sup>6</sup> so a completely different, 'slow' revival of Hungarian design culture has to be figured out.<sup>7</sup> No doubt, one of the best possible ways of going about this is through a policy that relies on inclusive design understood in very broad terms on the one hand, and community economic development (CED), on the other<sup>8</sup>.

### Socially Responsible Design and Community Economic Development

In the twenty-first century the philosophy and practice of inclusive design (which originally focused on the elderly and individuals with special needs) is gradually becoming a universal design paradigm, providing the framework for a design culture driven by the Papanekian idea of design for the real world, conceived of as an agency by which "the world can be changed".<sup>9</sup> This attitude also meets the basic requirements of sustainable development, given that design for sustainability combines not only ergonomic, safe, economic and aesthetic design with environmental-friendly and ecological features, but furthermore stresses the importance of socio-ethical—that is, human ecological—issues<sup>10</sup>. In essence, therefore, and unlike the neo-liberal model, it combines economic, ecological and social issues with matching consumption or consuming design attitudes

with which none of the serious forms of sustainable development could be reconciled in the long term—except, perhaps, in the case of the rhetoric of political marketing and media policy. Inclusive design, as we conceive it, promotes the idea of social inclusion essentially driven by design according to which in our complex world no social inclusion issues could be tackled by politicians and other decision-makers alone without fundamental designerly interventions. Accordingly, designers should be included in decision-making at every level, just as, in their turn, decision-makers should be involved in the different phases of design processes. Taking into consideration the current socio-cultural and economic conditions of Hungary, inclusive design should primarily address local problems, encouraging the use of local intelligence, seeking low-budget and hence low technology solutions supported by local creativity and innovation. Given that party politics is virtually unable to deal with local and regional issues in sustainable ways, local civil society should be hired to this end. In our opinion, the best possible means of arriving at this level is to foster a new design policy relying on the mind-set of community economic development, according to which CED is a "community-based and community-directed process that explicitly combines social and economic development and is directed towards fostering the economic, social, ecological and cultural well-being of communities and regions. As such it recognises, affirms and supports all the paid and unpaid activity that contributes to the realisation of this well-being. CED has emerged as an alternative to conventional approaches to economic development. It is founded on the belief that

6. Concerning the corresponding survey conducted by *Coface Hungary* and the periodical *Az Úzletárs*, see "Száz kis tigris a pannon puma országában" [One Hundred Small Tigers in the Country of Pannon Puma], *Index*, 14 December 2006. <http://index.hu/gazdasag/magyar/cef061214/> Last visited on 20 July 2008.

7. On slow design in detail, see FUAD-LUKE, Alistair (2004–2005). *Slow Design. A Paradigm for living Sustainably?* <http://www.slowdesign.org/pdf/Slow%20design.pdf> Last visited on 20 July 2009.

8. ROSELAND, MARK-SOOTS, Lena (2007). "Strengthening Local Economies", in BROWN, Lester R. and STARKE, Linda (Eds.) *State of the World: A World Watch Institute Report on Progress toward a Sustainable Society*. London: Earth Scan, pp. 152–169. See also the web database of the Center for Sustainable Community Development, *CED Gateway*. <http://www.sfu.ca/cscd/gateway/contents.htm> Last visited on 20 July 2009. Also known as sustainable community development (SCD).

9. PAPANEK, Victor (1984). *Design for the Real World. Human Ecology and Social Change*, 2nd edition, London: Thames and Hudson. JULIER, Guy, "From Visual Culture to Design Culture". *Design Issues*, 22/1 (Winter 2006), p. 71. See also *Ibid.*, "Introducing Design Culture", in *The Culture of Design*, 2nd edition, London: Sage, p. 5. On a current broad interpretation of inclusive design, see CLARKSON, John, COLEMAN, Roger, HOSKING, Ian and WALLER, Sam (Eds.) (2007). *Inclusive Design Toolkit*, Cambridge: Cambridge Engineering Design Centre. See also <http://www.inclusivedesigntoolkit.com>

10. See TISCHNER, Ursula (2006). *Sustainable Design and Ecodesign. An Introduction for Designers*, Eindhoven: Design Academy–Sustainable Design Lectorate, p. 15.

problems facing communities—unemployment, poverty, job loss, environmental degradation, economic instability and loss of community control—need to be addressed in a holistic and participatory way<sup>11</sup>.”

No doubt, this holistic and participatory approach has to be driven, among others, by a highly inclusive and socially responsible ‘slow design’ strategy which improves the potential of communities to generate well-being for their members<sup>12</sup>. Acting with such fundamental social responsibility, younger generations of Hungarian designers could gain new legitimacy for themselves.

### **Designerly Ways of Knowing: Integrating Theory and Practice**

However, in order to recruit designers capable of working as social agents seriously committed to CED we must radically change our regional and traditional conceptions of design. Instead of further maintaining the existing practices of product development conceived of as ‘product cosmetics’ we should eventually turn towards the idea of design as an agency that requires skills and knowledge common to the social sciences and the cultural attitudes represented by the humanities. First and foremost, however, we should provide the basic requirements for teaching research-driven design. As for Hungarian higher education, and design education in particular, it is truly a great challenge since the current state of design research is definitely troubled for design

educators and students due to rather awkward misconceptions which either regard design research as a light version of scientific research in engineering or as an utterly intuitive artistic procedure. If at all, theoreticians at art and design or technical universities mostly teach research methodologies that focus mainly on the craft of research in the social sciences and the humanities, rarely comparing it to the research methods of the hard sciences or vice versa. In addition, these research cultures are introduced *per se*, speculatively separated from the realms of designerly practices and design culture; as a result, virtually no one acknowledges the peculiarities of design research compared to other previously mentioned types of research. One of the reasons why the particular characteristics of design research are seriously misunderstood or simply ignored is that Hungary has practically no previous experience of the emerging multidisciplinary field of design thinking and designerly ways of knowing<sup>13</sup>. As a result, our very first task is to introduce design research into the curricula as an autonomous and legitimate type of research, combining several techniques of explicit or coded knowledge, on the one hand, and different thumb rules of implicit or tacit knowledge, on the other<sup>14</sup>. In other words, design thinking is a unique combination of analytical reasoning and creative thinking; it therefore has its own style of research with its own special features. Perhaps the best and most concise formulation of this double-faced nature of design thinking is Victor Papanek’s 1984 definition of design: “Design is the conscious and intuitive effort to impose meaningful order<sup>15</sup>.” Having acknowledged the peculiarities of designerly

11. Source: <http://www.sfu.ca/cscd/gateway/sharing/principles.htm> Centre for Sustainable Community Development at Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada. Last visited on 20 July 2009. See also the definition by The Canadian CED Network: “CED is action by people locally to create economic opportunities and better social conditions, particularly for those who are most disadvantaged. CED is an approach that recognizes that economic, environmental and social challenges are interdependent, complex and ever-changing. To be effective, solutions must be rooted in local knowledge and led by community members. CED promotes holistic approaches, addressing individual, community and regional levels, recognizing that these levels are interconnected.” [Http://www.ccednet-rcdec.ca/?q=en/what\\_is\\_ced](http://www.ccednet-rcdec.ca/?q=en/what_is_ced) Last visited on 20 July 2009.

12. Our inclusive design initiative also gained knowledge from socially responsible design (SRD), on SRD see DAVEY, C. L., WOOTTON, A. B. et al. (2004). Design of the Surreal World, colloquium paper submitted to the European Academy of Design (EAD) 2005 conference, 29–31 March 2005: University of the Arts, Bremen, Germany. See also <http://www.sociallyresponsibledesign.org>

13. See, for example, LAWSON, Bryan (2004). What Designers Know, Oxford–Burlington, Massachusetts: Architectural Press–Elsevier. Ibid. (2005). How Designers Think. The Design Process Demystified. 4th edition, Oxford–Burlington, Massachusetts: Architectural Press–Elsevier. CROSS, Nigel. 2007. Designerly Ways of Knowing. 2nd edition, Basel–Boston–Berlin: Birkhäuser.

14. HESKETT, John (2005). Design. A Very Short Introduction, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 47–48. DORST, Kees (2006). Understanding Design. 175 Reflections on Being a Designer, 2nd edition, Amsterdam: Bis, p. 64.

15. PAPANEK, op. cit., p. 3. The definition by Papanek could remind us of Blaise Pascal’s notes on the difference between geometric and intuitive minds. See his Pensées (2004). Roger ARIEW (editor and translator). Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., pp. 206–208. Following the analogy, one might state that in the Papanekian way design thinking is a strange combination of the operation of both of geometric and intuitive minds.

ways of knowing, another step forward would be to set up an agenda for research-driven design in Hungarian higher education. This is an indispensable prerequisite in the training of designers to act as social agents, in which methodologies taken from the social sciences and the cultural attitudes of the humanities play a crucial role. The first branch of disciplines helps designers to take action—to come into contact with communities and users in order to realise their needs and appreciate their experiences; the second correspondingly provides excellent models of reflecting on and understanding the cultural meaning and significance of design.<sup>16</sup>

### **Inclusive Design, Inclusive University**

The introduction of inclusive design into the curricula of Hungarian design education has already produced modest results. After some preparatory work carried out in my design theory courses and at international colloquia, in collaboration with my colleagues Csaba Szilágyi and Vladimir Monostori, the very first inclusive design course was launched in the autumn semester of the 2007-2008 academic year at the Product Design Department of MOME. Entitled *Inclusive University, Inclusive Design*, it intended to follow the suggestions contained in the resolutions issued by the Council of Europe: Resolution ResAP(2001)1 on the introduction of the principles of universal design into the curricula of all occupations working on the built environment (also known as Tomar Resolution), and Resolution ResAP(2007)3 'Achieving full participation through Universal Design'.<sup>17</sup> Besides striking up a lively debate on the basic tenets of inclusive design, universal design and design for all agendas, we also emphasised the integration of theory and practice in design education applying methods taken from visual anthropology, sociology and psychology, among other fields. Working in two teams, our students

had to free themselves from the barriers of common design assignments in Hungarian design education, which at best focused chiefly on further developing existing products or services. In doing so, first of all they had to identify the problems and then find conceptual solutions to them. So the general goal of the course was to introduce the basic concepts and history of inclusive design, although it also offered the possibility of meeting practical challenges of design for inclusiveness by means of specific design assignments, according to which students had to prepare detailed documentation of low-budget and low technology design concepts in order to make our university more advantageous for as many users (i.e. students, teaching and administrative staff) as possible, providing universal accessibility to our facilities and enhancing the way-finding system of the university. The next semester Csaba Szilágyi and I successfully applied for an advisory position in universal design within the framework of the Social Renewal Operational Programme (SROP / TÁMOP 5.4.5) funded by the European Union and run by the National Development Agency and Public Foundation for the Equal Opportunities of Persons with Disabilities (FSZK, for its Hungarian acronym). Between 2008 and 2010 we, as advisors, could implement the experiences of our experimental course into higher education in general, preparing study plans, course structures and text books in the field of universal design. The major goal of SROP 5.4.5 is fairly similar to our previous aims but is set in the greater spectrum of higher education. One of our current major objectives is to introduce inclusive design into the new Masters programmes at MOME currently under supervision by the National Accreditation Committee. Accordingly, our MA courses will consist of a four-credit unit for multidisciplinary design assignments providing opportunity for joint projects. The underlying theoretical framework of this unit will, of course, be that of the inclusive design agenda.

16. See, for example, *Design and the Social Sciences: Making Connections* (2002). Jorge FRASCARA [Ed.], London: Taylor & Francis. On design culture, see above all VITTA, Maurizio (1989). "The Meaning of Design", in Victor MARGOLIN [Ed.] *Design Discourse. History, Theory, Criticism*. Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 31-36. SPARKE, Penny (2004). *An Introduction to Design and Culture. 1900 to the Present*. 2nd edition, London-New York: Routledge. JULIER, The Culture of Design, op. cit.

17. For details see our report on [epiteszforum.hu](http://epiteszforum.hu): <http://epiteszforum.hu/node/9669> Last visited on 20 July 2009.