WIPO | MAGAZINE

Perspectives on design

August 2013

*By **Catherine Jewell**, Communications Division, WIPO*

Three big names in the world of design - Argentinian designer Adrián Cohan, Indian design educator, Darlie Koshy and South African design activist and founder of Design Indaba, Ravi Naidoo, came together at WIPO's Innovation by Design Forum in May 2013 to highlight the huge potential of design as a driver of innovation and wealth creation. The Forum took place on the sidelines of the Standing Committee on Trademarks, Geographical Indications and Industrial Designs (SCT), where WIPO member states are developing an international legal framework to simplify design registration procedures. The three panelists shared their unique perspectives with WIPO Magazine.

A designer's perspective

Policymakers increasingly recognize the key role design plays in driving economic development and social progress, but what is it about designers and how they work that is attracting so much attention?

"Designers have a unique ability to interpret reality and the capacity to look at the same problems in a different way and come up with new solutions," Mr. Adrián Cohán explained.

"We add value by connecting the dots between what companies are able to make and what people need. It's about finding the best solution between the possible and the desirable," he said.

There is still some way to go however, before the contribution that designers can make in driving innovation, creating value and developing workable solutions to many tough social challenges is fully recognized. "The design profession is still a poor cousin," Mr. Cohan noted. "For a handful of companies, design is core to their business strategy, but for thousands of others it isn't," he said. Beyond an unjustifiable lack of formal recognition, Mr. Cohan explained that some of the toughest practical challenges facing designers arise from the complexity of the legal landscape. "I would like to see one law everywhere," Mr. Cohan said.)"Making the system cheaper and easier to use would be good, but at [the] core you need a law that protects everything in a similar way with minimal scope for interpretation. That's not happening. Policymakers need to synthesize laws and procedures so they are easier to use. "

(Photo: Design Indaba/Adrián Cohan

An educator's perspective

Simplifying the legal framework and streamlining design registration procedures is also on the mind of Dr. Darlie Koshy, Director General and CEO of India's Institute of Apparel Management and Apparel Training and Design Centre with its main campus in Gurgaon. Complex procedures mean that "designers do not have the understanding, the time or the money to secure the protection they need," he said.

India's implementation of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS Agreement), administered by the World Trade Organization (WTO), has increased awareness of the need for and use of the intellectual property (IP) system in India. However, "we are still at a nascent stage in terms of IP usage and our capacity is still very low, but with simplified, rapid procedures and lower registration fees this will continue to grow," he said.

Creative ecosystems boost economic growth

Commenting on the link between creative ecosystems and economic growth, he said that a country's competitiveness, economic progress and ability to improve living standards are increasingly linked to its capacity to innovate. For this reason, "we need to embrace IP to stimulate wealth creation and make a far greater impact on the value chain; innovation and design are very important elements in achieving this," he said. Regarding India's textiles and garment sector, which currently directly employs over 45 million people, he cautioned that, "unless we encourage small businesses to protect their designs they will not flourish. We are part of a global marketplace, and we need to create original designs for that market. In a globalized world, it is doubly important that small businesses use IP to protect their territorial presence. " Engaging and expanding participation of the creative class to around 25 percent (from the current level of 14 percent) is key to securing the "multiplier effect" of the creative sector on the Indian economy he said.

India's textile and garment sector currently directly employs over 45 million people. Awareness of the need
for and use of IP within the sector has increased but remains low. Indian fashion designers who have successfully protected their designs in the courts include
Ritu Kumar (design featured above).
(Photo: Design Indaba/Ritu Kumar)

Despite major improvements in India's design education landscape, Dr. Koshy underlined the need for policymakers and universities "to think about ways to encourage India's creators to create, protect, manage, monetize and enforce their IP rights. We need to move away from assembly-line schooling and allow people to think for themselves. Education needs to be more focused on leadership, entrepreneurship, design and innovation. We need to encourage risk and tolerate mistakes. In a risk-averse society, there is no innovation," he said.

A need for stronger university-industry links

Stronger university-industry collaboration and the development of business incubators would enable stronger market-based design research, create employment and support university start-ups, he noted.

He further underlined the benefits of embedding IP and industrial design cells in major academic institutions to help design students develop their ideas and commercialize them. "If you want to create a creative class, you need to encourage the creation of IP within design institutions and support the development of microenterprises, which can result in wealth creation. Students have good ideas, but they don't know how to take them forward. If they had someone to advise them, the scenario would really change," he said.

"Universities and policymakers need to look at the entire chain - creating, protecting, managing, monetizing and enforcing IP," he said. "Our job is to make simplicity out of complexity and bring that simplicity to the layman so that small inventors in villages across India understand they can earn money from their work, and are doing something important for the country. When such consciousness is widespread, a society becomes innovative. " Vocational training to relieve skills shortages and the availability of practical.

IP-related information to support creators in protecting and leveraging their work are also essential.

Looking forward, Dr. Koshy underlined the increasingly collaborative nature of design. He further highlighted an emerging trend - the rise of the new Chief Emotion Officers (CEOs) whose role is to develop strategies to create an emotional connection with consumers. "Every manufacturer wants their product to stand out in the minds of consumers, because mind share leads to market share and profitability," he said. "People want to reignite their lives, so products have to become services and services have to become experiences. This transformation is the key to design success. No product today is without service, and no service can exist today without experience. In linking these, designers become very effective creatures," he stresses.

A design activist's view

For Mr. Ravi Naidoo, Managing Director of Interactive Africa in Cape Town and founder of the internationally-renowned Design Indaba, design goes beyond consumers and is, more broadly, about servicing community needs. "Design is a vital component of the economy, and it plays a crucial role in enabling us to reimagine our societies," he said.

"Creativity is the ultimate renewable resource. In a world that is resource-challenged, you will always have an idea. There is never a bad time for a good idea," he said pointing to economic benefits flowing from the creative industries globally. "Design can give you a competitive advantage and can be a unique differentiator for the economy. "

"Ideas are currency and a country's most valuable capital. The real estate between your ears is vital," he said, noting "the real gold is not mined three kilometers below Johannesburg; the real gold is walking on the streets of Johannesburg. "

Design Indaba - creating a bushfire of creativity

In 1994, at the dawn of democracy in South Africa, and convinced of the transformative power of creativity, Mr. Naidoo set up Design Indaba. Initially a conference to exchange ideas, Design Indaba has become the biggest creative design platform in the southern hemisphere and now boasts a huge exhibition (with 487 exhibitors from South Africa), a film festival and various music events. This annual event has added an estimated 1 billion rand (approximately US$10 billion) to the economy and is now firmly established on the global design circuit. "Design is going to continue to play a huge role in South Africa's economy and is also going to help solve some of our most vexing problems," Mr. Naidoo said. "There is vibrant, intelligent life in Africa, and people are getting up early in the morning, pedaling hard and producing some amazing things. "

Design Indaba brings together the world's creative leaders to "create a 'bushfire' of creativity," Mr. Naidoo explains. "We want to crank up Africa, give it a stretch by exposing its people to the best of the class in every sector of creative endeavor. We want to inspire a new generation of African innovators " The Expo creates opportunities for indigenous people to learn about IP and to work with top designers, using their traditional skills to create high-value products and offering a way for Africans to "sell their wares to the world," Mr. Naidoo said.

South Africa emerges as a creative hub

South Africa is fast becoming a creative hub. "We are not only starting to generate creative products for ourselves but we are starting to share and sell them to the world," he said, pointing to growing international recognition that South Africa is a "creativity outsource hub", the place to go for quirky and imaginative content. The Design Indaba team is now working with its international partners to establish similar platforms in other cities, including Amsterdam and Shanghai. Such is the power of example.

Designing solutions to social problems

As proof of how design can improve lives, the Design Indaba team set a number of challenges to address acute social problems, such as low-cost housing. "We corralled the world's best architectural brains to help 'crack the code' for low-cost housing," Mr. Naidoo said. The resulting dwellings have been built in a squatter settlement in Cape Town and are now being built elsewhere in Africa.

Similarly, through its "Your Street Challenge" initiative, which is running in eight cities around the world, Design Indaba encourages designers to go into their streets and imagine ways to improve the quality of life of those living in them, in return for a grant to make the project happen. "There have been some amazing results. There is lots of scope for creativity and design to be used in a more civic-minded way, and to improve existing infrastructure," said Mr. Naidoo, explaining that he believed such challenges are an effective means of encouraging change and promoting excellence.
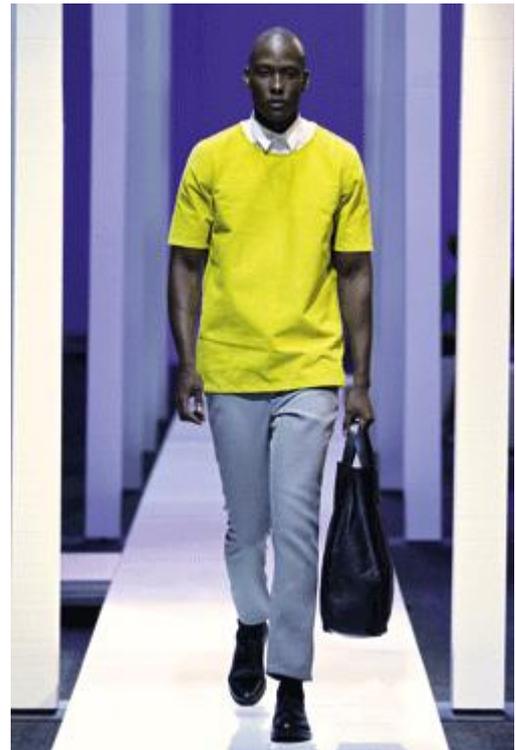
Design Indaba is inspiring a new generation of African creators. The country's flourishing design sector is starting to have a significant impact on the economy.
(Photo: Design Indaba/Adriaan Kuiters)

Advice for young designers starting out:

Adrián Cohan: "Design is not an art. It's a profession, and you need to be passionate about design to overcome the problems that arise. You need to get really involved in it if you want to succeed. "

Darlie Koshy: "Designers should stay away from copying at all costs and believe in originality even if success is delayed or a flood of work does not come their way. To succeed, designers need to know their customers and the materials they work with. It is a tough profession. Even a small mistake can completely damage a product and eventually cause irreparable harm to a designers' reputation. "

Ravi Naidoo: "Out of the deeply personal comes the universal. Solve your problem, solve the problem on your street and you may find that your solution is relevant to 10,000 streets. When you design for 10,000 streets, you design for no street, but when you design for your street, it could be applicable to 10,000 of them. "

Article link: http://www.wipo.int/wipo_magazine/en/2013/04/article_0008.html