Reflection

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Intercultural Design DCB210

This reflection is about the course Intercultural Design I followed in quartile 4, year 2022. This course is about different cultures and how to improve your designs based on the culture you are designing for.

In the first lecture we immediately got some examples. An example of an advertisement of Coca-Cola that didn't work in the Arabic countries. This example showed two pictures, one with an almost death person and one with a very enthusiastic person. If you read this like Dutch people from left to right, you understand Coca-Cola makes you feel better, but when you read it the other way around, the meaning shifts. This example stuck with me as I met people from Saudi-Arabia when I went to English school in England. I was so confused that they were writing in the other direction, but still forgot it when I saw this example, just because you are not used to this writing style, and you don't see or use it. By this first lecture I got an impression of how you should look/think when designing for multiple cultures.

At the beginning of this course, I did know that cultures differ, I knew the basics like food habits of eating with cutlery or chop sticks and I can imagine how other people feel. But this course showed me that there are so much more ways you should look to other cultures and see how they differ in behaviours. By chatting with them, visiting them when possible. To see how they behave, what their manners are and their behaviours during certain circumstances or tasks. By doing this you understand better when entering a house that you should remove your shoes or that you should have a drink with some beverage first before starting the real conversation. This knowledge could be used in the future and expanded. By doing some more research into countries we haven't spoken over yet during the course, by meeting people of that country and chatting with them.

By rereading my 'Who am I?' story I saw that I wrote down a lot, but not much about my behaviour. This course was less about how old you are which sports you played, but more about the rituals you had during the sports events or the way you interact with your teammates. I described in my story about the holidays we celebrate, these holidays are specific for our country. Visiting rituals here are different in every culture, although we do take our shoes off when we get home, just to keep the dirt of the shoes out of the house, it's not a religious behaviour but it has some similarities with Islamic cultures when visiting. This could make visiting each other easier.

During the interview with our expat from Colombia I experienced some quiet big differences in culture. I am from myself a planner, but my friends are also only meeting with each other or me if we have a set appointment. In Colombia this was way less, they just meet. This could have something to do with the uncertainty avoidance index we talked about in the course. The uncertainty avoidance index is about how comfortable people from that culture feel with uncertainty and ambiguity. In this case the Netherlands is probably less comfortable with future planning's that are uncertain than Colombia is. In the Netherlands 'time is money' is a very important sentence. Planning's should be made to know if there is time left to be filled for work or meetings.

Hofstede's paper thought more about individualistic and collectivistic countries. I learned a new word collectivistic, and I learned the meaning of it. Before this course I already experienced that the Netherlands is individualistic, because we want to solve our own problems and not asking others to help. As an individualistic country we therefore have also a mortgage, which not a lot of countries have. Collectivistic countries help within families. They help each other pay for college or are living with the whole family in one big house, that is paid by the grandparents and is now taken care of by the younger generations. I hadn't realized that those living traditions are also there, when I heard this for the first time from an Italian friend of English school.

I am a very driven and competitive person, but never thought this could be due to our culture that is quiet masculine. When competing we always want to win, but this isn't the case in every country, so when designing a product that has a game in it, the culture should be taken into consideration. Should I make the game competitive or just for fun within groups? Which could be very important to consider for your user as this could make or break the concept.

By our own presentation of Schwartz, I better understood how the circle of Schwartz works. Which I could than implement with my groupmates in our redesign process. We saw that our redesign had for example the values of achievement, benevolence-caring, face and some more values. These values give more insights in what the product does for the user. Does it help for the problem that was situated? Also, if it is in harmony with the culture, for example if those values are important for that culture.

When designing for a company I learned to keep the power distance in mind. When you know how the power distance is in that culture, you know if they accept the inequality of power in societies or not. This way you won't make a product that stimulates frustration in the inequality of power.

By these new theories I read and got explained I learned to redesign existing designs. I learned that you should consider for who you are designing, in which culture they are living. This way you can better understand the user and what his/her needs and behaviours are against your new idea. I learned to have interviews with your possible user and that in keeping the interview general at the start you can get a lot of information you didn't know you would get. Information in behaviours, rituals and desires. Before this course I did once an interview, but we didn't discuss the user's culture and I didn't do research after the interview about the culture. During the lectures we got a lot of feedback by giving presentations about our redesign. This helps in the process of designing. It helped me rethink of ideas we had, like creating a game for some competitions, but than on the other hand you should be careful by adding a game as this could create more individualistic behaviour instead of the collectivistic behaviour you wanted.

I will use this new knowledge in my future designs. How will I do this? Interviewing my possible users. Asking them questions about their background, their culture and their interests. After this I can do some more research into the specific culture. By this I can make of the idea a prototype with the right cultural touches. This prototype can be shown to the user and tested by. Which will create the best product for the targeted end user.

Papers

In the paper of Gardien, et al (2014) there are mentioned a lot of design methods and tools. They start with some basic tools that exist now and talk about new tools created, like the

Experiential Design Challenge of Van Gent. But are those tools not a bit much? Should there not be one tool to compare between cultures if you want to know the difference for your design. Every tool could be uniquely used for different cultures, but how do you know which tool is best for the chosen culture? Should you first do some trial and error, which takes a lot of time you maybe don't have.

"It may not even be possible to enter a new paradigm without fulfilling the requirements from an older paradigm." States the paper of Gardien, et al (2014). But how is it then possible that there are now 4 paradigms evolved. Because their where written down some improvements, flaws and similarities of these paradigms in the text. Will there be a fifth one in the future, or will it stay like this as the basis for all the designs? Or will the fifth one be a summary of the 4 paradigms with only the best features? Or will the paradigm be created on the new century because there will be another important topic, more important than for example cradle to cradle and sustainability?

In the paper of Ross, et al (2012) they include one aspect. This way sometimes other minorities are forgotten. The paper of Schultz (2018) mentions the Australian history, but no other country. Which creates a bias.

Looking at most of the papers, they are written most of the time from the authors perspective, they mention some sources to ground their arguments, but this implies also some bias.

New theory ideas

Unger, et al. (2021) their paper shows that during this COVID-19 pandemic we should quickly create new ideas/products in the area health, education, and business. I think that this is a bit of an example of how Paradigm 4 also started. Maybe this is an example that Paradigm 5 has already begun. That our new starting point for design is the Pandemic. The paper shows that the research could be done in multiple African countries, but how about other culturally different countries? If so, then it could be a good example for the world. But in this case the power distance in African countries is different to European countries for example. The individualistic and collectivist side could be very different as well, due to other government rules.

Due to the Corona Pandemic working from home began to be the standard. With this school and work had to be digitalized. Teachers must give their lessons virtual, which could be very different and therefore difficult to implement. The paper from Foerster, et al (2021) suggests this change and already researched into the VR framework possibility of the teacher and how to work with this new teaching method for students. They evaluated their learning experiences. This study with the previous mentioned paper could show the evolving of education in this century.

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