

social capital: Greece

Social capital here refers to features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action.

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DESIGN HAS BEEN UNDERGOING A PROFOUND, IF UNREMARKED, RENAISSANCE IN THE EARLY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY. IN FACT, AS A SYSTEM OF THINKING, THE FIELD REMAINS UNIQUELY POSITIONED TO MATERIALIZE THE IMMATERIAL. FROM LONDON TO CAPE TOWN, LOS ANGELES TO LAHORE, DESIGN METHODS AND RESEARCH HAVE OPENED NEW OPPORTUNITIES TO INTERVENE IN LARGE AND COMPLEX SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SYSTEMS. AS “SOCIAL CAPITAL” MAKES CLEAR, DESIGNERS ARE INCREASINGLY ENGAGING WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES TO DRAW ON IDEAS, EXPERIENCES AND COLLECTIVELY HELD KNOWLEDGE IN A MANNER THAT IS TRULY COLLABORATIVE. BUT MAKING THIS WORK VISIBLE TO OUTSIDE AUDIENCES IS OFTEN DIFFICULT.

Elizabeth Guffey

Creating “Social Capital”

Of course, in the past, visibility was a hallmark of graphic communications; for some time, they were a prominent part of our public spaces. To this day, posters and billboards decorate alleyways and roads, while wayfinding and directional signs fill civic squares and attach themselves to buildings. These older design forms proved potent and influential when they were first developed in the great cities of the nineteenth century. An excellent case in point, the modern poster is a product of the Industrial Revolution. These printed advertisements often covered the walls of commercial establishments and houses alike. And if such postings weren’t enough, they appeared on sidewalk flagstones, covered vans and commercial carriages that slowly trundled through city streets, and even appeared on the sides of boats on the Hudson and Thames rivers. The theorist Walter Benjamin later complained that, with such visual communications, “script is pitilessly dragged out into the street by advertisements.” Of course, as at least one historian has also noted, such design forms had “a spectacular energy” when they bounded into the nineteenth-century scene; and through the twentieth century visual communications continued to grow first with the rise of mass-market magazines, then television and finally with the internet today.

Of course, now websites and email, tweets and Tumblr feeds, not to mention postcards, booklets, and any number of intimately scaled printed items seem to have superseded older forms of public communications. In fact, much of the material stuff of graphic design, for example posters, can seem today “to be lost in a time warp, endlessly repeating formal routines long since drained of any expressive or persuasive power. . . .” Desktop publishing, the internet, and a host of new imaging and publishing practices have not destroyed design; but, the field is being reinvented, often in surprising ways and in unexpected places.





As “Social Capital” suggests, amid all these changes, not all design today is as visible as older forms like posters. The terrain of design has shifted considerably. But a different strain has also emerged. From the late 1960s to the present, design research has followed more ambitious ideas and asked bigger questions. In this newer realm, designers are often asked to function as ethnographers or anthropologists. Indeed, “Social Capital” draws our attention toward these newer forms of public design projects. By turning away from strictly commercial activities, we are asked to consider how design for social innovation might engage a community’s real social needs?

In this case, “Social Capital” addresses a complex set of circumstances arising from a vexed period of recent Greek history. Understanding the social and economic background to the project is significant. With the financial crisis and European debt woes of the Greek state, in recent years

the nation has strained to stave off bankruptcy.

Bailout negotiations, austerity measures, and increasingly strained relations with the European Union left the country in a state of uncertainty. Such complex situations can lead to a loss of agency in local communities. Against this background, “Social Capital” marks an important moment for researchers to leverage design’s ability to problem solve. In so doing, it also echoes the recent work of design theorist Ezio Manzini. The latter has argued that designers



can help reinforce and bolster communities through carefully researched collaborations with local cultural and social groups. His is a generous approach, meant to transcend the economic, social, and political pressures of globalization. Manzini urges work be done on small-scale but still significant projects. But Manzini also asks us to reconsider definitions of expertise. Where designers have long been considered “experts” because of their professional training, Manzini urges us to rethink their role. Instead, he urges us to consider working and designing with the people primarily concerned with a project. Thus, the design process begins with their experiences and needs. In this way, working with the local communities in Kefalonia, the designers shaping “Social Capital” began a conversation about design as a form of social engagement. As the designers learned,

the region provided profoundly rich cultural roots in the area. Kefalonia sits at the intersection between the Latin and Orthodox churches, and slipped between the Ottoman and Venetian territories, then from French, British, Italian and German rule. Having negotiated cultural complexity through several millennia, the populace was deeply engaged.



Measuring and mapping, interviewing and collaborating with communities, the designers engaged grassroots groups as well as public and documenting histories of Kefalonia. One such project, for example, focused on rediscovering buildings lost to the 1953 earthquake (an event that destroyed most of the island's structures and changed the social and culture fabric of the region). This project, a collaboration between American and Greek students, proved fruitful. The student designers discovered that the local communities and regional government were not always in agreement on key points. And issues like cultural preservation could sometimes ignore community needs. As the designers pressed forward with their project, however, what emerged was a strong sense of place, a portrait of a resilient communities, and a larger sense of engagement; the surrounding community felt active not only in preserving recent history, but also gained a sense of ownership of the historical projects themselves. As “Social Capital” suggests, the careful examination of complex issues of identity and agency can bring a sense of collaborative cohesiveness to such projects. But also, if design research is to continue to develop, we need to highlight exemplary design projects that show us how the field can be shaped and grown. “Social Capital” is one such project, providing a reference point for how design research can impact larger communities far beyond the confines of classrooms and the design studio itself.



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1- Semi-structured interviews

Οδηγός εικονιδίων στα κουτιά



Religion and Cephalonia
Ορησκία και Κεφάλονια



Absent Family Abroad



Emmigration



Traditional ways to work



Ionian Islands



Citizenship



New ways to work



European Union



History



Older beliefs



Economy



The Church



European Networks



Mobility



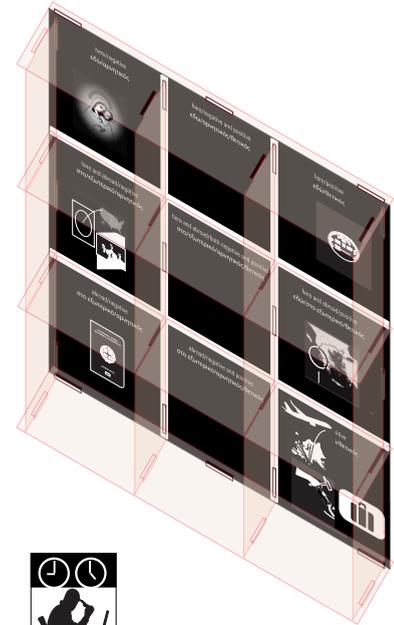
Science and Technology



Nature and Environment



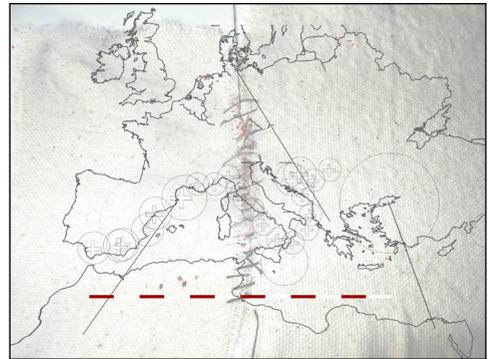
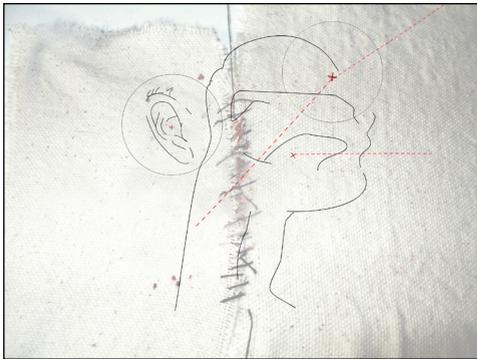
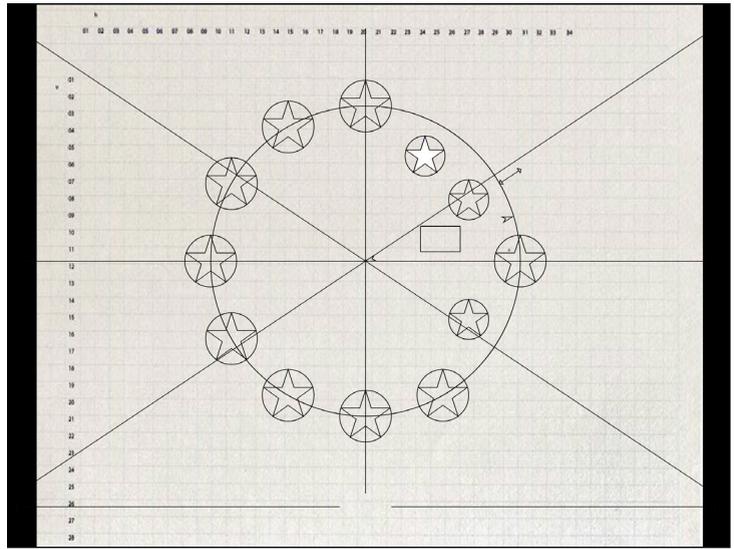
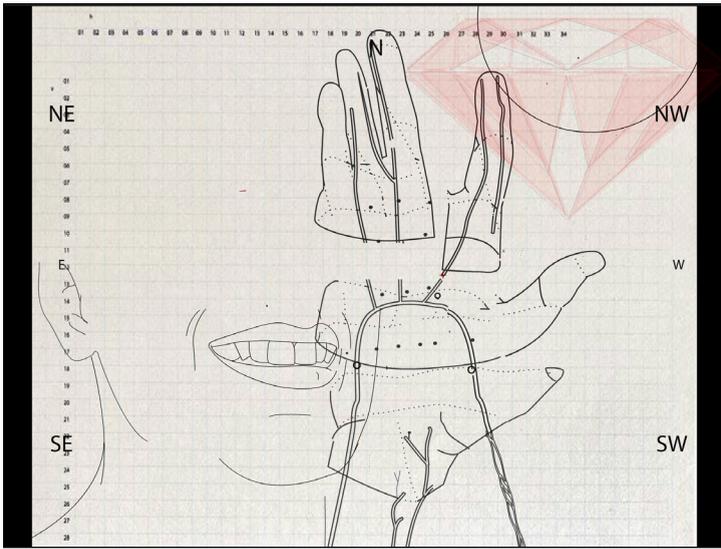
Personal Isolation



Interviews.

Portable boxes as matrix based on cross referenced categories with 17 visual references. The references are placed in the box depending on how people sort both value and settings based on a set criteria. The boxes are also used in negotiating issues in dialogue between individuals in small groups.

Visual animations based on the predominant themes: borders and exchange, EU membership, etc. in consultation with interviewees.



Maria Patsarika and Scott Townsend

A discussion about ongoing work

In the summer of 2017, a joint project began in Thessaloniki, Greece between Dr. Maria Patsarika of the American College of Thessaloniki and Scott Townsend of North Carolina State University, and their students (Social Sciences and Design respectively) researching the Stoa (“Arcade”) Malakopi, a once thriving commercial center now in the process of reinvention as a new public space. Rather than disseminating the results only to an outside body of academics or policy makers, design strategies are developed to encourage participation in the community, to visualize and communicate different practices and ideas about the space, as well as to invite authorities to find ways to work with innovation and resources that the community has developed.



ST: One of the things we have talked about is learning from local knowledge. That’s an important part of the work in western Greece, especially since I had well-meaning misconceptions at the beginning. In 2015 as I began new work in Kefalonia, “Grexit” focused a lot of media attention on Greece. It seemed that the country was coming apart. For example the *New York Times* presented a photo-essay done in the style of *Life* magazine photographers like W. Eugene Smith et all in the mid-twentieth century. Part of the essay revolved around a heroin addicted prostitute and her partner in Athens. The look was more about how Americans cre-

ated images at a certain time and place rather than what was going on in 2015 in Greece. Even though I was self-critical going into this, my original exploratory research was framed partially based on those kinds of views.

MP: This makes me think how important it is to be active readers and listeners: there

are many voices behind what gets attention in what we read and see. Depending on the source, the same story comes with alternative meanings and we, too, re-tell that story trying to figure it out based on who we are and what we believe. What made you challenge your preconceptions?

ST: Many people had a kind of opinion that reflected their political bias, while daily life became much more of a focus as we talked.

What was more important was how issues played into daily life and livelihood, things like a son or daughter who has to live abroad to find a job, (and for some, remembering a time when the interviewee also did the same thing) or personal histories about living part of your life abroad due to various political issues and coming back with a strong commitment to do something positive in the community you grew up in.

MP: Another way, maybe, of saying “the personal is political?” During our exploration of people’s entrepreneurial trajectories at Stoa Malakopi, interviewees casually interweaved so called higher-level narratives related to the historical, heritage character

of the building and more quotidian issues concerning the maintenance of the building or the cleanliness of toilets. The identities that stakeholders attached to the landmark



building varied. Their personal experience of place was different and so what one might consider as “culture” another would



interpret as “problem” or, even, both! The hype surrounding the area over the last couple of decades as a club zone and the emergence of various youth cultures and

creative classes were interpreted by many as hopeful signs of neighborhood renewal—all this in years of acute financial crisis for Greece. Recently, a more gentrified sense of place surfaced: under the financial burden long-standing small businesses closed and problem such as noise, vandalism and unauthorized appropriation of public space by shop owners, became prominent. Stoa Malakopi thus seems to be imbued with multiple, contested meanings... this ambivalence actually helped myself and students to pay closer attention, loosen our researcher/outsider approach and try to listen more, understand and, effectively, engage more.

ST: Trying to understand really comes down to observing and participating in what people do as daily practice rather than putting people into formal roles where they ended up formulating a cosmopolitan opinion in an interview.

This is one of the things that’s hard to get across in an exhibition like this. We tend to think more about our identity first and how our opinions reflect that, rather than dealing with the ambiguity of a place we really do not know, yet where people are just trying to get on with their lives.

MP: It’s hard to maintain this kind of openness, particularly when the dogma of correctness, political or other, has spilled over into so many arenas and has come to replace the simpler “respect for difference.”

There's a tendency, starting from school, to embrace or condemn ideas and practices de facto, based on whether they are deemed "correct" or not, without necessarily discussing and evaluating the particular circumstances, the context, the culture within which they are born. Dialogue is often regarded as argument and debate, and ambiguity difficult to accept.

ST: I think that somehow goes back to the photo-essay comment about so called life in Greece in 2015. Somehow when we try to

tell the story through representation that is not part of lived experience we miss out on what people are actually saying.

MP: Part of the difficulty I believe also stems from a growing pressure to adopt the interculturalism mantra, very popular in political discourse, when the sheer di-

versity of lifestyles, perspectives and values renders the acceptance alone of multiculturalism a challenging task. Multiculturalism, very much like dialogue does, leaves issues open to interpretation; interculturalism, on the other hand, a policy mechanism

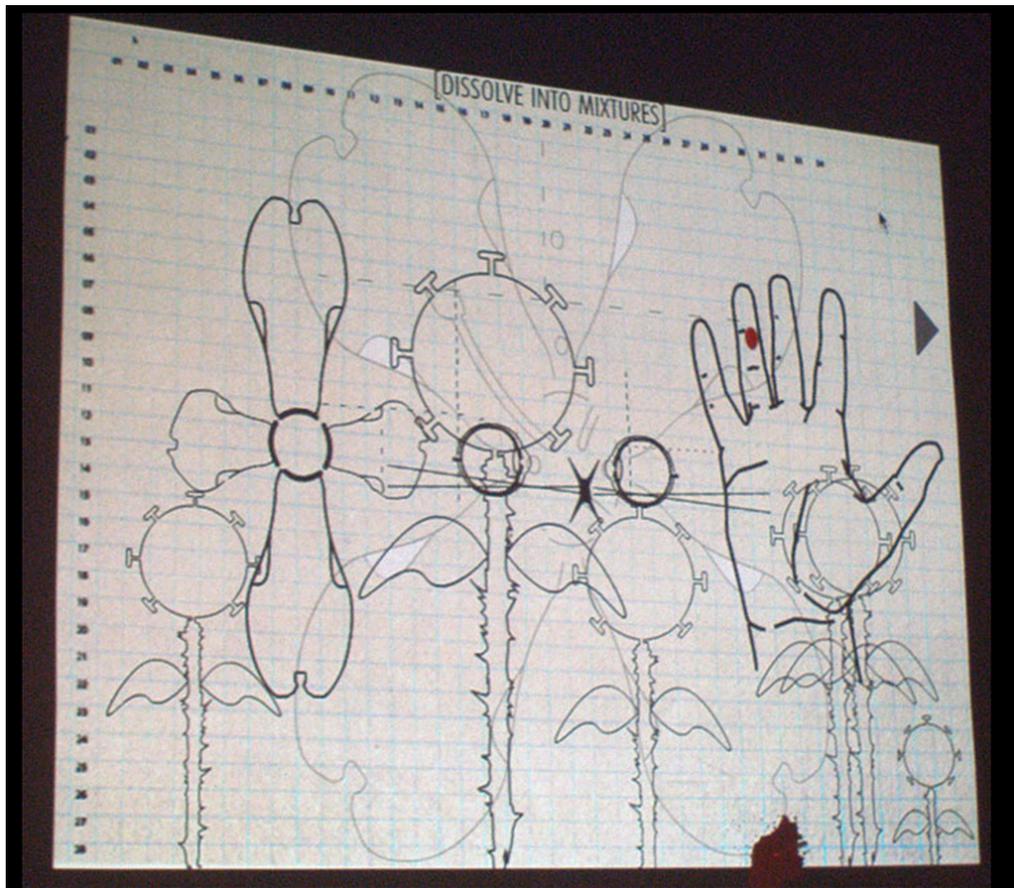
as it is, seems to prioritize a shared ground for dialogue, which is inherently controversial. Subsuming diversity in enforced shared understandings smacks of homogeneity, while I'm not sure if it's feasible in the first place. I suppose what I'm trying to say is that we need to understand the story first before trying to represent it. Perhaps we need more dialogic participatory spaces in research and elsewhere, spaces where emerging differences in perspective constitute meaning. This exhibition is a good place to start.

Work group Kefalonia.

Projected animation.

Installation of interviews and tangible visualizations.





Man: No, Austrian. Our gardens are different.
 Interviewee: I have visited Vienna. We have some similar plants but here, it's a free landscape.
 Man: That's the difference between the two countries.
 Woman: You're not allowed to step on the grass.
 Man: So you were visiting the Austrian cities to see how Austrian tribes live?
 Interviewee: Yes. We went to Salzburg. I like your towns really.
 Man: It's a very small, controlled country.
 Interviewee: Controlled, clean.
 Man: I like to live there, kids and stores, everything is working perfect, cool system.
 Interviewee: I know hospital services.
 Man: Still a good place to live. No sea, it has one big problem.
 Interviewee: You cannot have everything. You have the lake.
 Man: We have the lake. We have the mountains.
 Interviewee: Now also the mountains are fantastic, in spring or in the summer. The winter is full of snow.
 Man: And you cannot see.
 Woman: We use the mountains a lot, like you use the sea all year. Okay, nice. Thank you.
 Interviewee: Thank you very much. Bye.
 Do you think the issue of environmentalism and a common shared environment is a powerful issue that helps keep Europe together?
 Here and abroad in the present.
 I don't think that Europe is together. I think they are trying to find things that connect them. German, Spanish or Austrians and Greeks, so I don't know, we are trying to find things connecting us. Maybe nature. For example, "They said you are used to the view of the mountains, we also have mountains."
 This is a common thing in the whole of Europe. The environment is very important. There are also European programs that also Greece is involved. I agree absolutely that nature is something that connects Europe. Here in the garden, I can see that. Everyone comes to see the garden and they may be from Spain, France, Austria, UK, England, Germany. We all have the same awareness. We talk about plants and biodiversity and the differences between this garden and how they design gardens in their towns.
 So people from other European countries can discuss the difference between your garden and theirs, and how they have different practices in the work that they put into them.
 Everyone must work in the way that he thinks is the best. The thing is to have good results. It's not the way you are working. It's the result. This must be respected. We must judge from the results, think, and not the differences. Here in the garden, we preserve the plants but we don't have

