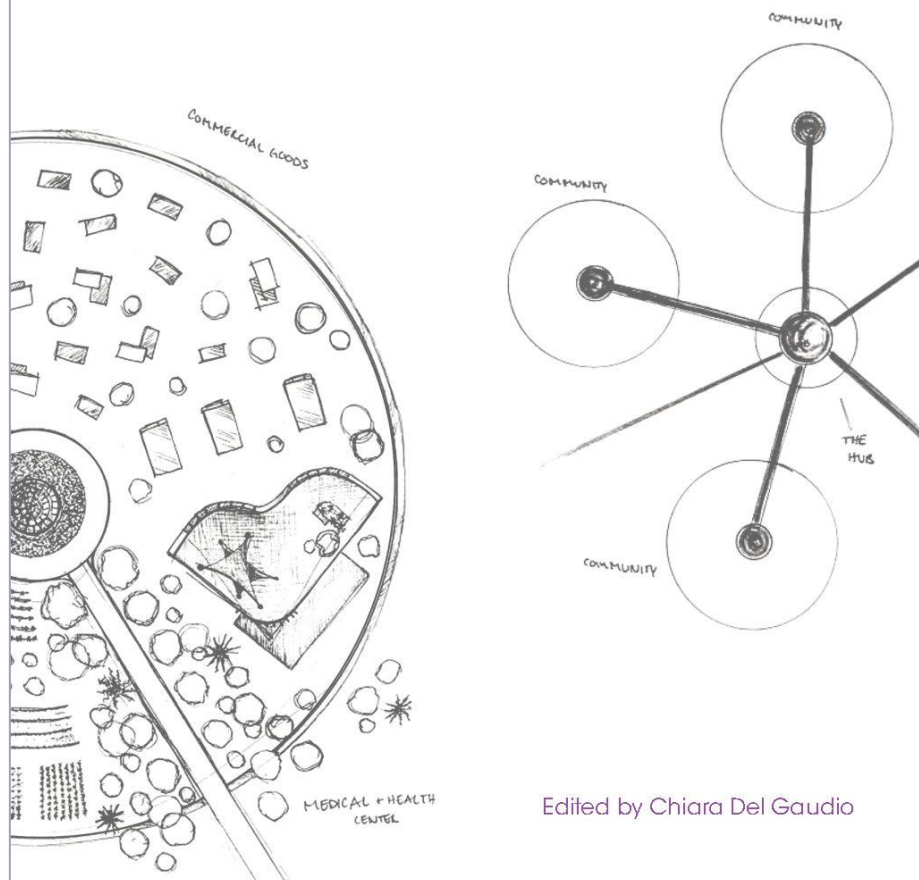


Section excerpted from:

# INSIGHTS

4th-Year Students' Reflections on  
Design for Social Innovation



Edited by Chiara Del Gaudio

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# Introduction & Acknowledgements

This book is the result of *IDES4001 A – Industrial design seminar*, a 4<sup>th</sup>-year theoretical course of the School of Industrial Design at Carleton University that was held in the fall term 2019.

*IDES4001* is a course for undergraduate students that focuses on the exploration of a key contemporary design topic, through readings, debates, and writing. Topics vary yearly. In fall 2019, I had the opportunity and pleasure to teach this course and I chose the topic of *Design for social innovation*. Design for social innovation was chosen as the topic for the year not only because it brings together a variety of innovative contemporary design practices and experiences, but also and mainly because it represents a relevant pivotal point within the design field. Since the beginning of this century, discussions concerning design for social innovation have led to the amplification of the contribution by design to our society, the re-interpretation and better understanding of the essence and qualities of design, and the exploration of new methodological territories and fields for design practice. The emerging worldwide interest for these new possibilities, and the subsequent explorations and experimentations, have, over time, allowed for the emergence of crucial related discussions, such as an in-depth reflection on logic behind Western design, how it informs design processes and outputs, and the need for processes that are more representative of plural possibilities of being, which could strengthen the ethical qualities of design practice. I wanted the students to gain knowledge on the origin of discussions concerning design for social innovation as well as on current debates about it, to develop their own understanding of the topic, and then to draw a connection with their design practice – that is, to understand the implications that this concept brings to their way of being designers.

Based on this background, I structured the course into

five main stages: (1) gathering a broad understanding of the current design approaches for social change; (2) collective exploration on what social innovation means and its main features - what design for social innovation stands for, and the socio-cultural framework within which the concepts emerged; (3) collective exploration and reflection on what designing for social innovation might mean in Canada and Ottawa – through debates and practical exercises; (4) exploration on how design for social innovation might influence their own way (and vision) of being a designer, and on how it can enrich their practice; (5) finally, framing their own understanding of design for social innovation within the current discourse on design for social innovation.

All this happened through not only readings and debates, but also through practical exercises of investigation and of speculation of possibilities for design and for our societies. Among themselves, students engaged with indigenous worldviews and attempted to explore their own environment through them, with the aim of re-interpreting existing relationships - between human actors, as well as between human and non-human actors- and thinking about different ways for designing them in the future. They also engaged with their territory looking for signs of social innovations and, using them as a starting point, they designed future scenarios for Ottawa. Later, each one of them explored a topic and area of their interest – within this framework - and wrote a paper in which they showed their understanding of the potential contribution of design for social innovation in that area. In doing this, they engaged with current scholars' work. Throughout the course they had the opportunity to discuss their papers and understanding of design for social innovation with design experts: Lois Frankel and Chantal Trudel, associate professors of the School of Industrial Design at Carleton University, and Gustavo

Severo de Borba, professor of the Graduate Program in Strategic Design at Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos (Brazil).

Finally, they presented their papers in the *2019 Annual Seminar Celebration*: an event held yearly at the School of Industrial Design open to the students of the school, to design professionals and to other community experts. This book is a compilation of the papers they wrote. The papers here presented clearly show a variety of ways in which students interpreted what design for social innovation can be and its relevance for their design practice: design for health and wellbeing, design and communities, social entrepreneurship, local businesses and revitalization of the social fabric, industry 4.0, maker movements, inclusivity and situatedness of design practice, Indigenous worldviews and human-non-human relationships, design and gender, design and education, social media, and urban context, to name but a few.

The papers are preceded by some reflections on students' works and on the course provided by Gustavo Severo de Borba, guest speaker at the Annual Seminar Celebration, and by the design experts who participated in the seminar discussions.

In a moment in which we are facing incommensurable challenges, and in which all professionals are called upon to contribute to addressing relevant worldwide issues such as climate change, pandemics, growing inequalities, dissolution of social skills and weakening of the social fabric, courses such as this one are crucial to encouraging discussion among future professionals on ethics within design practice, and on designers' responsibility towards our society. It also stimulates exploring and imagining together possibilities for plural and democratic futures, to understand the connection between global and local, and to engage with the latter by discovering and exploring designers' contribution for their own context.

It gives students and instructors the possibility to think about design, to talk about design and to advance design. This book was possible thanks to each student's effort and contribution.

It would also not have been possible without the support of Bjarki Hallgrímsson, the director of the School of Industrial Design, Anna Kim, school administrator, and Tammy Tracey, graduate and administrative assistant, and all my colleagues.

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Chiara Del Gaudio  
Ottawa, November 2020