DESIGN FOR SOCIAL CAUSES

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Abstract: The paper examines the symbiosis between design and society's social engagement. It describes the power of visual communication in conveying and suggesting messages. It presents the features of the social poster and its role in conveying messages and promoting social causes, because a social poster is primary means of that. Its main goal is to convey messages and information between people all issues related to human existence. Global social causes dedicated to human health are examined. It concerns the social aspect in design education, because social causes are initiated and implemented by educated people who realize their responsibility not only to themselves, but also to others, especially to those of lower social status. It describes the exercise that is been done in the course of study on "Creative methods in Design" of the students for the 3rd academic year of the "Engineering design" specialty at the Technical University-Sofia, which topics is "social poster". Paper presents and analyzed the obtained results (in points).

Keywords: Design, social cause, visual communication, social poster, design education

INTRODUCTION

In our days the design is not only new, useful product-maker, but social responsibility influencer. The implication of good design is like "umami" taste. The responsibility of designers is increasing and they should to be, above all else, socially responsible professionals who can cause positive change in societies.

The contemporary world is filled with violence and disasters. That's why it would be well every one of us to remember that the suffering of one individual is the suffering for all, and the personal well-being of every one person is well-being for all.

Design for social causes is aimed at the targeted use of messaging approaches that lead to positive behavior change. It is worked together with specialists from the relevant fields in which change is sought. When designing products are aimed

at health causes, it is well to be looked for cooperation with medical professionals and statistical institutions to provide reliable information for designers to "translate" into an understandable to a wide audience language.

MAIN TEXT

Social problems affect many people in a society and unite them in their efforts to solve them. Some problems are the result of factors beyond the individual's human control. Although social problems are distinct from economic problems, they are almost always interrelated, and solving one will lead to the elimination of the other. In order to eliminate or at least minimize a given social problem, a number of events are held, often on a voluntary basis, or foundations and non-profit organizations are created and dedicated to a given cause.

A social cause is an organized effort to improve conditions or change in society. It is aimed at a positive change that affects a large percentage of people in the world, and it is characterized by a long-life cycle and cyclical repeatability. It is realized by social project.

The main thing about social projects is that their results are measured based on the effectiveness of the project and the benefits generated both for the individual and for society as a whole. Each such project is strictly specific, this specificity being determined by the context of the problem, the nature of the cause being promoted, the target audience, etc. However, a successful, generalized life cycle model for social impact has been derived (fig. 1).

Another specific feature of projects with a social focus is that stricter rules should be followed when developing them. The main ones are:

> ➢ The design is subordinate to the mission of the cause and the messages it conveys.
> ➢ The design evokes a certain emotion in the audience.
> ➢ The design tells the story of the cause, provides credible data and information.
> ➢ The design educates what actions should be taken and/or what habits should be changed to eliminate or minimize the problem. (Anderson, 2015)
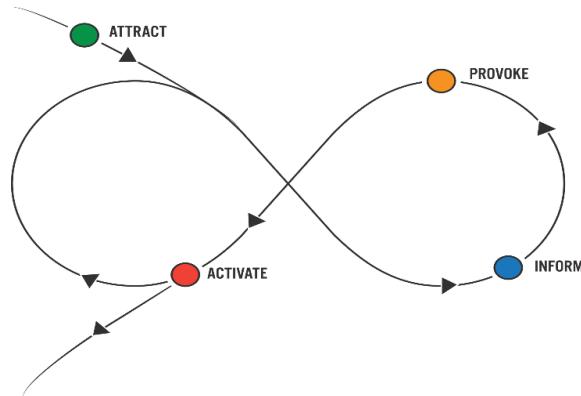
fig. 1 – cycle model for social impact (Anderson, 2015)

Too many and varied causes sometimes cause apathy or even hostility in a part of society, so the design must provoke emotions that cannot be ignored. The easiest, fastest and most permanent way to do this is through the simultaneous transmission of text and images in an attractive way. This is also one of the tasks of Graphic Design – to provoke curiosity in a wide range of users with different user profiles. A primary means of conveying memorable messages is the poster. It is one of the most successful products of Graphic Design. From its very beginning, when it was rather a leaflet with a short informative text, through works of art, its development through a gradual division into genres (advertising, theatrical, propaganda, etc.) – it has always been and will be a universal form of communication. The concise and mostly visual information it presents make it a preferred medium for conveying messages and suggesting ideas. *The more emotional the content, the longer it is stored in the users' memory.* (Drumeva 2016, p. 208) In the contemporary the advertising and informational function of the poster can be realized through a variety of means of expression, technologies, including artificial intelligence. *To be effective, the poster uses the methods of semiotics and artistic metaphor as a means of expression. Because it must be seen from a distance, the layout of the poster can be cheeky, provocative and attractive. Bright colours, shapes, symbols, font, images and generally anything that attracts*

attention are used. The message embedded in the poster should be accessible and easily communicated to the viewer. (Ilieva 2020, p. 113)

A social poster is primary means of promoting causes. It deals with all issues related to human existence – donation campaigns, promotion of environmental issues, peace advocacy and anti-war programs, humanitarian crises, political events, health problems etc. It may also feature events that are not related to a specific conflict or other dramatic situation, but to a celebratory occasion – for example, anniversaries, human achievement awards, or other special events.

The following text below presents global social causes dedicated to health. Health – physical and mental – is one of the main prerequisites for people's joy, happiness and well-being. Unfortunately, despite the progress of medicine, in the 21st Century there are still diseases that are widespread around the world and for which there is no cure. The World Health Organization (WHO) works both in the direction of research and the search for successful drugs and vaccines, and in the direction of educating the population with the aim of health prevention. For this, days are designated (outside of the year-round efforts of doctors and researchers) that are dedicated to a specific disease or group of diseases (fig.2.1÷7).
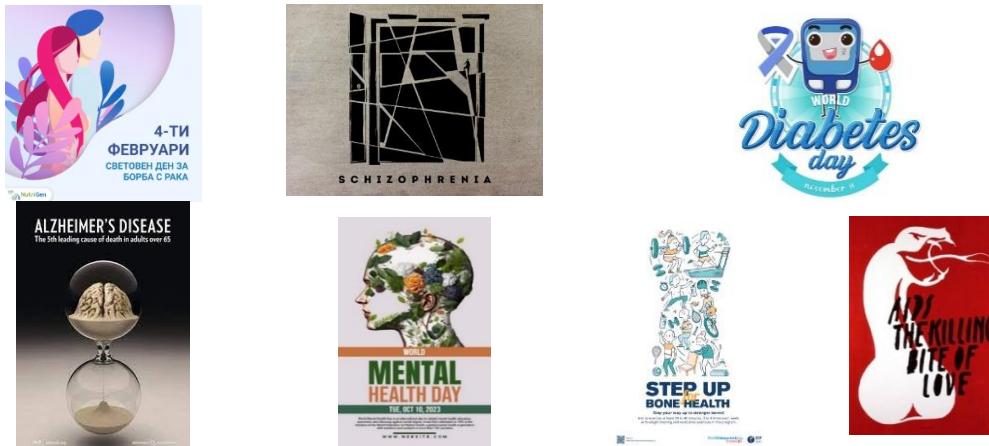
fig 2. – posters for global social causes dedicated to health

On these days, the suffering of thousands of people around the world is remembered and active events are held for education and prevention. Some of these days (in chronological order) are:

- ➢ February 4 – World Cancer Day (summarized). There are over 100 different types of cancer in humans. According to WHO data, more than 12 million people are diagnosed every year, and about 7.6 million die from the disease. About 40% of oncological diseases can be cured if they are diagnosed in time.
- ➢ April 11 – World Schizophrenia Day – a serious mental illness that affects emotions, will and thinking. 1% of people in the world suffer from schizophrenia, which means that it is a disease of great social importance because it starts at an early age and leads to rapid disability. WHO research shows that the percentage of people with schizophrenia is the same in all cultures and all countries.
- ➢ September 21 – World Alzheimer's Day. It is the most common cause of dementia – about 70% of cases. The causes of Alzheimer's disease are not sufficiently well established. About 70% of the risk is thought to be hereditary. According to a WHO report, 7.7 million new cases of dementia are registered every year. There are about 47 million people suffering in the world. This number is expected to double by 2030 and more than triple by 2050.
- ➢ October 10 – World Mental Health Day. It has been celebrated since 1992 with the aim of raising awareness of mental health issues around the world and increasing support, care and treatment efforts for better mental well-being.
- ➢ October 20 – World day to fight osteoporosis – a disease that affects every third woman and every fifth man over the age of 50. The aim is to direct public attention and provoke measures (in a global and individual aspect) to help limit the spread of the so-called "silent epidemic" which imperceptibly and mercilessly destroys the bones, and hence the possibility of independent and full life of the ill people.

➢ November 14 – World Diabetes Day. This chronic disease takes on the scale of a global epidemic – more than 360 million people suffer from it. Every 10 seconds, two people get diabetes and one person dies from the disease. 7 million people get diabetes every year, 70,000 of them are children. Among the predictions of the WHO, by 2030, more than 500 million people will be affected by diabetes.

➢ December 1 – World AIDS Day. For 30 years now, the epidemic has been a global health, social and economic problem and one of the causes of high mortality of people around the world. The UN program on HIV/AIDS emphasizes that active prevention and access to antiretroviral treatment can reverse this negative trend. (www.coe.int, www.mh.government.bg)

Education and design for social causes

Since the main function of design is to sell goods or services and is aimed at the mass consumer, a large part of the tasks set in the learning process and, accordingly, the ideas generated are aimed at successfully positioned and marketable products and/or services. The social aspect of design is no less important. Yes, UX design is studied, but it is also, in the mass case, aimed at successful market implementation with the aim of financial gain. (Anderson, 2015, Margolin V., S. Margolin, 2002)

When its talking about socially oriented design in the learning process, it is good to emphasize that products and/or services are designed to inspire empathy, to help people make long-term, positive changes in their behavior. The design targets all social groups, especially those of lower social status, and not primarily those who are the most favored social group. Socially oriented projects have a low tolerance for risky decisions, therefore non-standard ideas must be very carefully considered and presented. Humor can be used to convey visual messages, but it should help make suffering easier to accept and uplift those suffering, not ironize. (Anderson, 2015, Margolin V., S. Margolin, 2002)

Designing for social causes heightens the emotional and psychological impact. That is why it would be well to set specific assignments related to design for social causes in any design training course.

In three academic years in the course of study on "Creative methods in Design" of the students for the 3rd year of the "Engineering design" specialty at the Technical University-Sofia, one of the topics that is given for work in the exercises is "social poster". The course takes place during the winter semester, and according to the logical sequence of the curriculum, this topic is developed at the end of November and the beginning of December. The period coincides with various initiatives dedicated to December 1 – World AIDS Day, so the theme of the poster is dedicated to this cause. As this course of study in the specialty precedes the "Graphic Design" course and students are not familiar with the principles of poster construction, they are required to present a conceptual solution with sketches. The task is as follows: *to present an author's concept for a social poster dedicated to the world day to fight the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). The concept is presented through an author's design sketch and is accompanied by a short explanatory note that argues for the proposal. It is allowed that the sketch is computer-generated, and the protocol must include photos of the work process, indicate the software used, as well as the font used.* The maximum number of points that the student can receive for completing the task is 10. The submitted sketches are made by hand and on a graphics tablet. Some of the students also offer ready-made poster solutions made both hand-made or with software (fig.3).

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Stefan Christov
fig. 3 – student projects

Beloslava Karamfilova

The topic is set in 2018, 2021 and 2022. The obtained results in points (based on transmitted protocols) are shown in fig. 4.
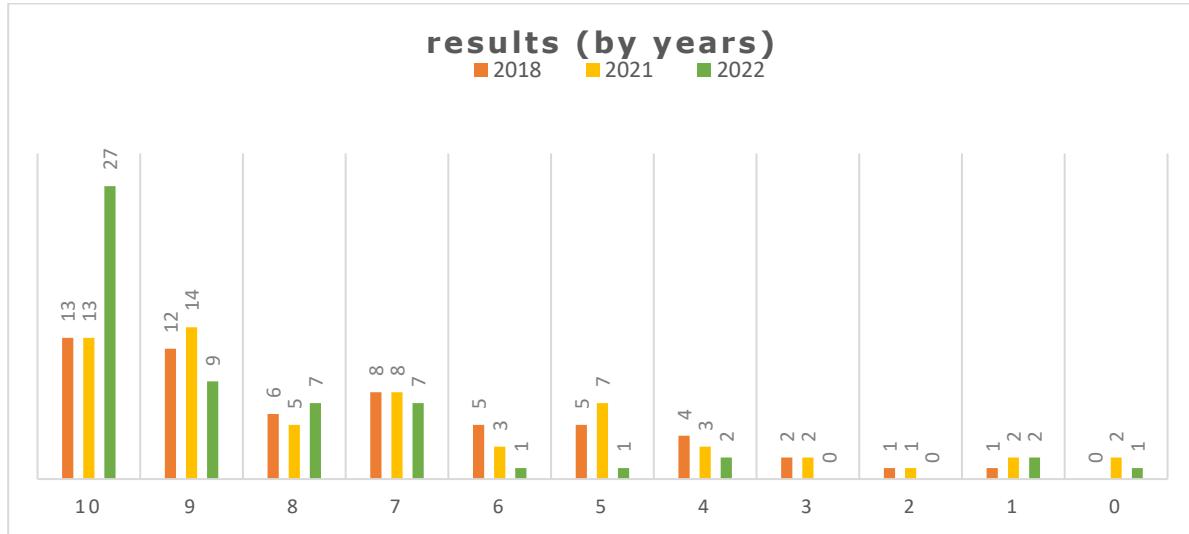

fig. 4 – chart of results by year

A total of 177 protocols were submitted. The total number of points achieved is 1350 out of a maximum of 1770 (422, 451 and 477 respectively). From the results shown, it can be concluded that the students understand the essence of the task, they are dedicated of the idea and cope well with the task.

CONCLUSION

Social causes are initiated and implemented by educated people who realize their responsibility not only to themselves, but also to others, especially to those of lower social status. An educated society is open to change. Design is one of the professions to which there are increased requirements for environmental friendliness, ethics, tolerance, etc. In the training process, the conduct of specialized courses with a social orientation is not widespread, but it finds its place in every educational discipline in design. The ability to design for a specific user

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group or for a specific situation, according to the particular circumstances, is something which is brought up purposefully. Designing for social causes requires knowledge of psychology, sociology, public relations and, to some extent, politics.

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