

Are we the sustainable designers in our work?

The backpack loaded with objects

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For any object to be sustainable it must take into account the three aspects that comprise sustainability: the impact on nature, the loss of biodiversity and the vulnerability of natural systems. According to the definition contained in the *Brundtland Report* (1987) for the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, «sustainability is the characteristic according to which the needs of the present population can be met without compromising the ability of future generations or peoples from other regions to meet their own needs».

The questioning regarding the continuity of current lifestyles and the need for these to be subjected to deep qualitative changes has been the object of intense debate. This very same reasoning should also be applied to our work as designers.

sustainable design	<p>Does this mean that we can design without taking into account sustainability? It does not have to be like this, however it is true that the vast majority of the designs that come onto the market do not pass a sustainability test.</p> <p>To speak of sustainable design is to emphasize a polarity that exists between design professionals.</p>	<p>towards the application of principles that make one object more sustainable than the other; in short, it concerns achieving a reduction in the ecological load or in the ecological backpack.</p>
responsability	<p>It appears that over the past years, designers have had to follow the sustainability route more out of a question of responsibility than due to conviction, as the limitation of the material and its relation to the transformation processes substantially increases if the abovementioned criteria are applied.</p>	<p>The classic distinction between fine or luxury materials and those that are not, will have to be replaced by good design that offers a cultural contribution above and beyond the distinction of the material itself and well away from the patterns of possessing peculiarities or objects that are in short supply.</p>
luxury	<p>Does this mean that there will be limits on the raw materials that can be used? If we apply considerations regarding the impact on nature, loss of biodiversity and vulnerability of natural systems, we could say that, at least, a distinction will be established and products will be labeled as designed as hardly or very sustainable depending on whether they are produced under one or another umbrella.</p>	<p>When luxury manages to position itself among life orders that are different to those of the present day, such as the availability of time, perhaps the world of luxury will open up to the cultural aspects that design achieves in everyday objects.</p>
nature	<p>As such, should we resort to the systematic use of procedures such as the recovery, the reuse or standardization of materials as already happened, for example, prior to the Industrial Revolution, when the main raw material was wood and the issue of cataloging «fine materials» and «poor materials» arose?</p>	<p>As such, it could be concluded that design and sustainability go hand in hand with the very essence of the activity and is the responsibility of those of us that work as designers.</p>
Industrial Revolution	<p>This is an interesting discussion point that will result in the material, the processes and localization having to be conclusively reconverted so that the balance leans</p>	<p>To paraphrase the words of Victor Papanek, to design a better world, a real world, is no utopia. This is not a case of adopting attitudes such as designing for the rich or for the poor, but of designing to conserve the resources of the place in which the designer works and thinking about the generations to come.</p>
		<p>Every process that involves starting off with a raw material and finally getting the product to the shop represents a cost in terms of materials, natural resources and energy that, at times, is very considerable.</p> <p>As such, when we design, we should take</p>

impact	<p>into account aspects such as the need and opportunity of the design, the materials used, the consumption, the effort and energy that are invested in the different processes: conception, manufacture and distribution of the goods, the life of the product and whether to recover or reuse its material waste. In other words, to reduce as far as possible the size of what we call the ecological backpack of the product. (Ecological backpack: the quantity of material that adds up throughout the entire lifecycle of that product).</p>	<p>To be sustainable and to design sustainably does not only mean to say a return to working with natural, classified materials that are planted to be used. It means not creating an impact on nature, not generating a loss of biodiversity and not damaging the natural systems. This translates into working with clean processes and controlled, certified raw materials.</p>
ecological backpack	<p>Neither cheapness nor dearness have a place in this discussion. A hugely economical product could have a bigger ecological backpack than another, much more expensive one, and vice versa.</p>	<p>As regards oil reference materials (plastics), the ideal is that, at least, these are thermoplastics thereby avoiding the thermoset plastics that are much harder to reuse or recycle. Also in the case of metals that consume a large amount of energy when being transformed, it is preferable that these come from secondary foundries.</p>
energy	<p>Another issue that is important to highlight is the excessively quick turnover of a product. This can result in higher global energy consumption than if the product were not changed so frequently. As such, we have to look for a balance between the efficiency that is achieved by using the best technologies in the operation of the product and the energy it needs taking into account its full lifecycle.</p>	<p>I therefore anticipate a new scenario in which some materials will be substituted by others that are newly-fledged, whose transformation carries less weight. The rest will fall within the scope of our conscience. This is what makes mankind and its objects the focus of a more sustainable design.</p>
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