SUSTAINIST DESIGN GUIDE

How sharing, localism, connectedness and proportionality are creating a new agenda for social design

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WITH THE BEACH NETWORK

Content

Preface:
a guide of exploration

This book charts a future that we already inhabit. It connects a vision of a changing culture to what's already happening today in the "design" of a better world. Although there is much talk about a crisis, we feel the future is bright. When we go back to its roots, the word "crisis" means "turning point." It offers an opportunity to transition into a fundamentally new stage.

Cultural boundaries are shifting. There's an enormous wave of new social initiatives worldwide, where millions of dedicated people are beginning to "design" a different kind of environment for themselves that is more collaborative, more socially just, and more sustainable. This movement is what the Sustainist Design Guide is all about.

We build on the perspective of "sustainism"—a concept that one of us, Michiel Schwarz (in collaboration with Joost Elffers), has advanced to mark the new ethos of our day and age. Sustainism represents a shift not only in thinking and doing but in the collective perception of how we live, do business, feed ourselves, build our communities and communicate, as much as how we deal with nature.

The cultural movement that we're seeing offers opportunities for lasting social change, but until now a comprehensive framework has been lacking. We need new ways of looking and of doing in order to play a meaningful part in it. The need for relevant perspectives is what has inspired us to compile this Sustainist Design Guide. The promise is considerable: design can be a tool for social change. And we think it should be. It is no longer a matter of designing for society, but within it.

There is a sense of urgency as well as opportunity. Whilst a global movement is picking up speed, many of us are searching for ways to make meaningful contributions. Creating social value is increasingly becoming a strong incentive for designers as the cultural transformation we are witnessing is emphasising the importance of their role. Meanwhile, the very word "designer" is taking a new shape. Essentially, everyone is now a designer in his or her own right, as people are increasingly able to take their lives in their own hands and redesign their own brand of society.

A CALL FOR ACTION

What we have produced is no ordinary guide. It is an exploration that ventures into new territory, mapping the new domain of design thinking and practice that we have called "sustainist design." This new territory cannot be wholly understood if we apply terminology to it that originated in the previous era. A new language is needed in order to grasp what is happening and how we can make a difference. We have used case studies to try to load our new language with meaning. Each of these case studies holds a promise. Each of them teaches us important lessons, but they also have collective symbolic value. Their global scope tells us that we are now talking about a worldwide movement.

In that sense, this guide is a call to action. Ultimately, by making this book, we intend to shift the design agenda a little. But first and foremost, we hope to shift the discourse of the design agenda. We wish to extend an open invitation to jointly explore the social role of design and designers in shaping our joint future. We have laid down some markers, but the real start is now. We hope our guide will encourage a fruitful dialogue, regardless of its precise content. It should represent a design approach within society: it is a design challenge in itself.

COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

This book grew out of our combined interest in connecting the ideas of sustainist culture to real-life initiatives and opportunities in "social design." Embracing an open source approach, we opened up the research process through an online platform (opensustainistdesign.net) and invited others to contribute social design stories. Both the web platform and this Sustainist Design Guide were developed in close partnership with a small editorial team from the Amsterdam-based The Beach network, including Bas Ruyssenaars, Mira de Graaf, Steffie Verstappen, and designer Robin Uleman. Their contributions, along with those that were made on our web platform, represent a significant part of our collaborative effort.

Now that the guide is out here, it's up to you, and all of us, to further explore how the concept of sustainist design might lead us to a daily practice that is both socially and ecologically sustainable.

Michiel Schwarz and Diana Krabbendam
Amsterdam, April 2013

"There is something going on in design—something powerful. People have realised a simple truth: design is a legitimate way to change the world"

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SOCIAL DESIGN IN THE ERA OF SUSTAINISM

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Sustainism as lens:
shifting our perspective on social design

Sustainism, or whatever we wish to call the current cultural movement, provides us with a perspective through which to look at problems. Equally, it will shape what we perceive to be solutions to those problems. Such is the power of culture: we share a collective view of the world and we organise and design our lives accordingly. The idea of sustainist culture not only captures the current *zeitgeist*, it also provides us with a lens through which to (re)view design for social impact and sustainable life.

A sustainist take on the social design agenda literally begins with a shift in perspective, a different way of looking at the world. That's what those calling sustainism the "new ethos for design" refer to. It captures a way of seeing, a perception of the world, and what we value. But when paradigms change, there is much more going on than a shift in collective perception. The transition to sustainist culture consists not just of what we "see" and value (*ethos*), it also involves what we "think" (*eidos*) and "do" (*praxis*).

A sustainist stance on design, therefore, is more than just a point of view: it is also a mentality and a way of doing. That is what we wish to bring into perspective when we look at the agenda and practice of social design.

ETHOS-EIDOS-PRAXIS

Understanding the sustainist paradigm shift in terms of ethos-eidos-praxis leads us to raise three kinds of questions in relation to our exploration of sustainist design:

HOW DO WE ENVISION AND <u>VALUE</u> SOCIAL AND SUSTAINABLE DESIGN?

WHAT ARE THE RELEVANT GUIDING <u>CONCEPTS</u> THAT ARE ADVANCING SUSTAINABLE AND SOCIAL DESIGN?

AND, WHAT <u>PRACTICES</u> ARE EMERGING IN SUSTAINIST DESIGN?

Together as well as separately they point us towards a road map to review the agenda for social and sustainable design in the sustainist era.

"Sharing is cool: It's good for business, the community and the planet"

→ RACHEL BOTSMAN,
global thought leader on collaborative consumption

THE SHARING SOCIETY IS HERE

New sharing-based initiatives in business and social entrepreneurship are being launched everyday. So much so that we can rightly speak of the emergence of a "sharing society" and a "sharing economy." In the sharing society, people share tools, services, knowledge, places, and skills. We have seen the success of car sharing as a prominent example, including local initiatives that enable us to rent our neighbour's car. The sharing economy has grown rapidly. We now see local sharing systems for a wide variety of things, from textbooks to tools and from toys to clothing. Online sharing of knowledge and expertise has been at the forefront of this trend. This is reflected by worldwide online resources such as Wikipedia, but is also increasingly visible at the local level. Community time banks and co-ops, where expertise and skills are pooled, shared and exchanged, are quickly increasing in popularity. Shared places are on the rise, too—from communal gardens and urban farming to "people's supermarkets" and local public spaces that are collectively designed and run. There are many telling examples in shared services, too. Take the success of Couchsurfing—a worldwide community of over five million members in 100,000 cities that connects travellers to locals who meet offline to share cultures, hospitality and adventures. Airbnb—a community market place for the rental of unique spaces—is another good example. Both are causing a revolution in the tourism business.

COLLABORATIVE LIFESTYLES

What lies behind these examples is a surge in initiatives that are explicitly designed to bring sharing, lending, trading, and swapping into our daily lives. We are beginning to create a lifestyle around sharing. Sharing reflects a shift in society towards collaborative practices and lifestyles. We see many sharing schemes that are part of the rise in "collaborative lifestyles." It is not just physical goods that can be shared, swapped, and bartered. People with similar interests are banding together to share and exchange less tangible assets such as time, space, skills, and money (collaborativeconsumption.com). As Kim Gaskins (content director at Latitude Research) observes: "Sharing represents a fundamental paradigm shift in how people consume: from hyper-consumption to collaborative consumption—a perfect storm driven by connective technologies, economic recession, and raised environmental consciousness" (shareable.net).

SHARING AS QUALITY

Sharing is becoming a valued quality of life. It combines a number of sustainist features, such as collaboration, connectedness, responsible consumption, "commons," open exchange of information, and sustainability concerns. We value sharing, not just for its economic benefits or positive impacts to the environment, but also for what it brings us socially. A change from "Generation Me" to "Generation We" is becoming visible in many walks of life—from car sharing to swapping products, from open source software to social currencies. Sharing implies building communities. Its social and communal qualities are key to the success of sharing. As American entrepreneur Lisa Gansky (author of *The Mesh*) concludes: "Sharing-based businesses generally offer a greater feeling of connection and community." What we are witnessing is a shift in focus from the individual to the collectivity and the corresponding emergence of a culture of collaboration and exchange.

SHAREABLE DESIGN

Shareability depends as much on open exchange and social networks as on the specific feature of what is being shared. That's why shareable design often starts with the design of social connections. As design thinker Ezio Manzini says: "the act of designing for sharing makes otherwise invisible connections visible." Design for sharing implies a different mode of social exchange and how we do things. As collaborative consumption pioneer Rachel Botsman has formulated the design-for-sharing challenge: "designers must re-imagine not just what we consume, but how we consume."

There are no blueprints to design for sharing and the leads to shareable design will be diverse. The impetus comes from different considerations and opportunities. In some cases, limited resources or environmental concerns are leading. In others, the communal and collaborative aspects of it will drive shareable design. Collaborative practices, open exchange, common resources and community are all features that can be built into our designs.

Shareable.net is an online magazine and community about the culture and economy of sharing. Shareable is a non-profit online platform that focuses on "sharing by design." The shareable.net website explores "how to design life, work and community, so that people can better share resources." It is a hub for information and exchange to accommodate "people and projects bringing a shareable world to life." Shareable.net is an inspiring resource for all kinds of sharing-based initiatives—sharing of products, services, information, and places. The website maps new social developments based on sharing. It tracks what is happening in the emerging sharing economy and "collaborative consumption" and collaborative lifestyles. It invites people to share news about sharing, so that all of us can "learn about how [we] can lead a more shareable life."

**VIEWPOINT
GUIDE TO SHARING: EXCHANGING STUFF, TIME, SKILLS AND SPACE**

"Sharing implies a different approach to ownership of the goods, services, skills, and talents that abound in a community. Through sharing systems, we can get the utility out of goods and services without the burden of ownership—in ways that help build community, clear clutter, and allow for more equitable access to resources. The "access-over-ownership" model frees us from having to make, buy, and consume ever more stuff, saving our pocketbooks and reducing our environmental impact."

→ *Guide to Sharing: Exchanging Stuff, Time, Skills and Space*, The Center for a New American Dream, 2013
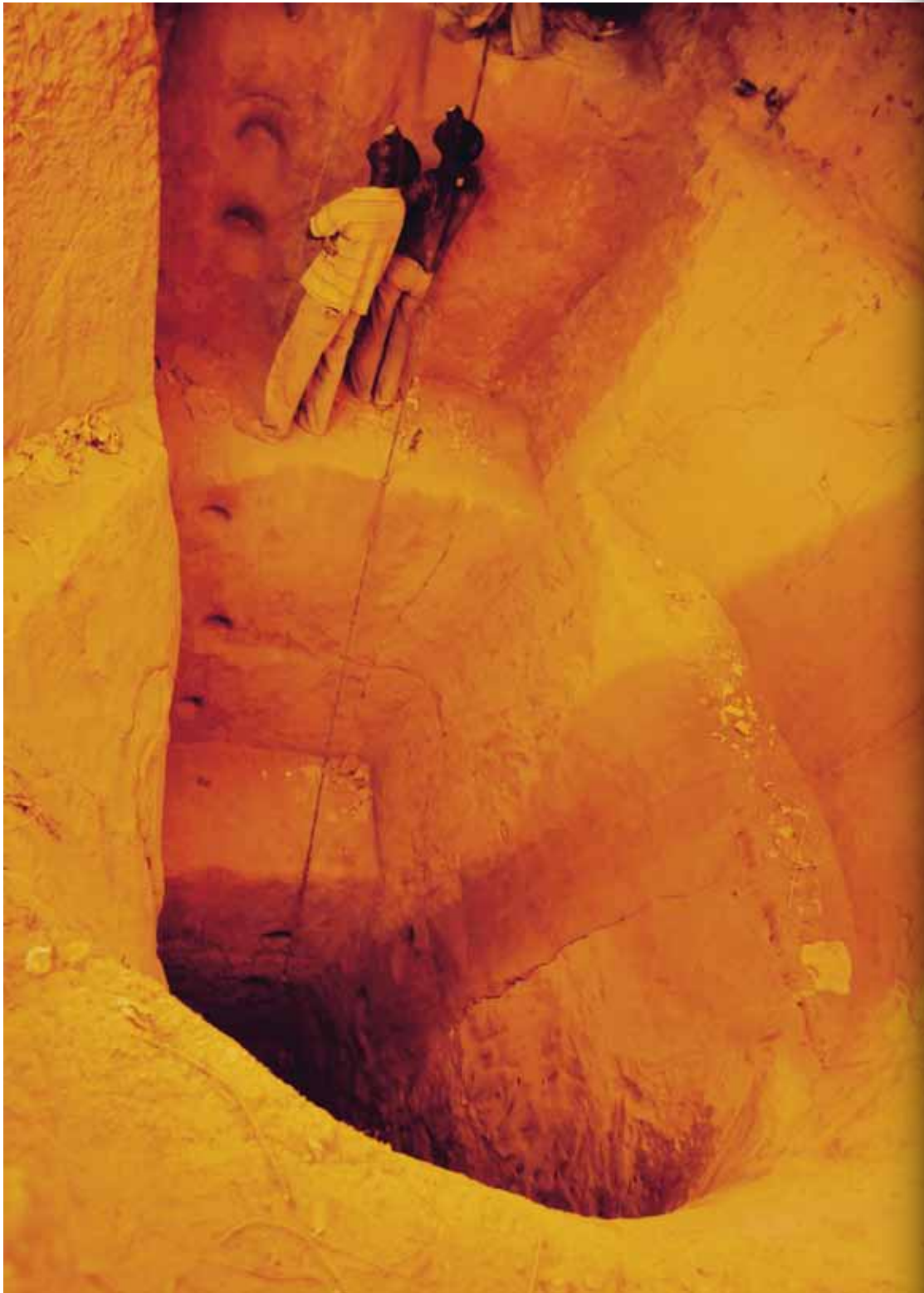
The mobile phone as change agent

Design activism at the heart of the production process

FairPhone is an initiative with an ambitious agenda. It aims to produce the world's first fair mobile phone: a mobile device that is being designed and produced while doing minimal harm to human beings or the environment. While on its journey, FairPhone is being confronted with all of the intricate complexities that the mobile phone production process and supply chain entail—many of which are anything but transparent and fair. FairPhone has the mission to once and for all open up the mobile phone industry's "ecosystem," from the extraction of raw materials to production, sales, and beyond.

"Companies tend to say that they have no way to backtrack more than three steps in their production chain," FairPhone founder Bas Van Abel says. "Therefore, it is a matter of disentangling the way in which the production process is built up. The phone itself is in fact the oracle that gives us access to understanding the system. That's why, at FairPhone, we take the actual mobile phone as our starting point. That's where we start contemplating about and designing our actions. Our original starting

↖ Miners in Katanga Province, Democratic Republic of the Congo. The hole goes 30 meters down into the ground where the cobalt ore can be found. From there, the creuseurs dig small tunnels to collect the ore. It takes approximately two months for a team of diggers to manually dig a hole like this. *Photo: FairPhone*

↑ This is the first prototype of FairPhone's fair mobile phone. It is designed according to Van Abel's design credo: "If you can't open it, you don't own it." *Photo: FairPhone*

↑↘ The 2012 edition of Dutch musical festival Lowlands hosted FairPhone as part of their festival programme. FairPhone invited festivalgoers to bring in their old mobile phones. By way of a recycling workshop, they gained insight into the amount of wasted precious materials that could have had a second life if extracted properly. No easy task: most of the devices proved to be tough nuts to crack. *Photo: FairPhone*

point for the design of a fair phone was an exercise in open design. Soon, we became aware of the fact that the system that makes mobile phone production possible is of a political nature. Which means that our design approach towards changing the system is in fact a form of design activism, aimed at opening up the system. Only if and when we take into account all aspects of the system—in a veritable holistic approach—we will be able to make progress."

Van Abel says he is fascinated by the complexity of the production system for mobile phones. "Alienation used to be an inherent characteristic of the way in which we designed our products, based on the ideal of efficiency in both production and distribution. That system was focused on the production of goods of a certain quality for a competitive price. In the information age, the virtues of the old system are decreasing in value quickly. Today, production is increasingly about generating and sharing knowledge and data together. As a designer, this puts you in charge of the system: designing is no longer about accepting alienation and complexity as a given, but about bringing different worlds together."

All-round fairness

When it comes to the production of the actual fair phone, the ultimate goal revolves around "fairness." Everything about the phone should qualify as fair: from the extraction of raw materials to the redevelopment of African mining sites and the safeguarding of labour conditions for manufacturers. This is required in order to be able to create a truly fair phone.

That's why FairPhone focuses on many things at once: it seeks alternative ways of acquiring the necessary raw materials by encouraging fair mining systems, it focuses on improving production and labour conditions, it emphasises "smart design" that is intended to last, it advocates for transparency in business deals, and promotes reuse and recycling.

Needless to say, this is easier said than done. Which is why FairPhone seeks collaboration with a variety of partners that are working on a diversity of issues. For example, FairPhone is part of the Conflict-Free Tin Initiative (CFTI) and the Solutions for Hope Project. Both initiatives aim to source conflict-free minerals in Congo. CFTI introduces a tightly controlled conflict-free supply chain outside the control

↑ Solutions for Hope miners at work in Katanga Province, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Miners here are being exploited, almost without exception. FairPhone is connecting with civil society organisations in the hopes of changing this. *Photo: FairPhone*

An end to land mines

Let's get it rolling

The **Mine Kafon**—kafon means explosion in Dari—is a landmine clearance solution that is designed by Massoud Hassani, an Afghan design student at Design Academy Eindhoven. As a child, he used to play in the Afghan desert where land mines claim many victims. As a designer, he combines this reality with the insights that he gained in his childhood. His Mine Kafon draws much attention from museums to design critics, and from engineers to NGOs that are interested in supporting the further development of Hassani's fresh approach to resolving life-threatening situations.

↓ *Photo: Hassani Design BV*

↑ The Mine Kafon is designed as a low-cost, wind-powered mine detonator that looks like a giant Dandelion-shaped ball. It is inspired by the handmade toys that designer Hassani and his friends made when they were kids growing up in Afghanistan. As a design student, Hassani began remaking the paper orbs of his youth in the hopes of being able to use them to detonate some of the ten million undetected mines that still cover his home country.

"On paper, Afghanistan is said to have ten million land mines. In reality, there are far, far more. Every destroyed land mine means a saved life and every life counts," Hassani explains. For the past sixty years, mine removal techniques have stayed largely the same. Often, it is local people that end up removing the mines. "A lot of people end up getting hurt."

A giant Dandelion-shaped ball

The Mine Kafon is a giant Dandelion-shaped ball that is made from bamboo and biodegradable plastics. When it rolls over a mine, it destroys itself as well as the landmine. Real-life testing with landmines has been done and has been documented in spectacular video reports. The current prototype is wind powered, but other forms of locomotion control of the Mine Kafon are currently being examined. The Mine Kafon's overall objective is two-fold: it should be safe and affordable. These are the core conditions for bringing the Mine Kafon to market.

Back in the day

"I grew up in Qasaba, Kabul. My family moved there when I was five years old, and at the time there were several wars going on. My brother Mahmud and I, we played every day on the fields that surrounded our neighbourhood," Hassani says. "When we were young we used to make our own toys. One of my favourites was a small rolling object that was wind powered. We used to race against the other kids in the fields around our neighbourhood. There was always a strong wind blowing towards the mountains. While we were racing against each other, our toys would roll too fast and too far. Mostly, they landed in areas where we couldn't go rescue them because of landmines. I still remember those toys I'd made that we lost and watching them just beyond where we could go."

Nearly twenty years later, Hassani used the memories of his childhood in Kabul and took to making the same toy once more. "I remade one, making it twenty times bigger, as well as heavier and stronger," he states. "Powered by the wind, it's meant for the same areas which were, and still are, full of mines."

Architectural activism

Making the city of Rotterdam together

Luchtsingel is a crowd funded urban design project that aims to reconnect the currently isolated and run-down Rotterdam neighbourhood of Hofbogen by building a 350-meter pedestrian bridge that will reconnect it to the central district of the city. Luchtsingel literally translates into "canal of air." It is used as a metaphor to refer to the comparable structure of the traditional Dutch city canals—except that Luchtsingel will be lifted up into the air, and will not be filled with water but with pedestrians instead.

Luchtsingel was initiated by the architects of Zones Urbaines Sensibles (ZUS). ZUS is of the opinion that architecture has become marginalised in the last two decades by responding primarily to market demands rather than public needs. That's why it wants to reemphasise architecture's important public function. Starting from the belief that everything and every place has the inherent potential to be unique and exciting, ZUS investigates the urban landscape in an attempt to expose contemporary social challenges. Ranging from urban plans and architecture to installations and fashion, it offers solicited and unsolicited advice and design that is inspired by the specific qualities of the context and that is meant to encourage intervention in the current state of things.

Luchtsingel is set within the broader context of I Make Rotterdam, an initiative by the International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam (IABR) and ZUS, that focuses on new ways of creating urban quality of life in a post-crisis economy. I Make Rotterdam (2012-2014) is meant to offer a contemporary alternative to the traditional practice of large-scale city planning. Within the context of the I make Rotterdam initiative, different projects were initiated by different parties. Luchtsingel is one of them and forms the backbone of the initiative as it ties the different projects together.

A successful formula: building Luchtsingel together

In less than a year, Luchtsingel went from initiation to realisation. It is a fully crowd funded project that anyone can contribute to. This alternative way of fund raising has proven to be a successful formula for Luchtsingel. More than 1,300 people have contributed to

← The city centre of Rotterdam by night showing the Luchtsingel, a pedestrian bridge over a busy traffic junction. *Photo: Ossip van Duivenbode*