



DESIGNCOMMUNICATION – A FACILITATOR OF CREATIVITY FOR ALL

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Abstract. Our goal is to introduce the term designcommunication written in one word, a creative, academically based design approach combining theory and practical experience as good as possible in various application settings, be it education, scientific research, concept, product or system development. Designcommunication provides a highly flexible framework and a sound methodological base beyond the familiar. Designcommunication, in other words, creating a connection as designing, is an approach that uses a holistic triple relation framework of opposing dimensions: material–immaterial, permanent–variable and survival–subsistence–development relations. This framework of relations is available and possibly applicable to anyone regardless of level and area of education. Introducing such a design approach to education opens new horizons of creative cooperation, as designcommunication facilitates the development of creativity, collaboration and communication as increasingly valued soft skills.

Keywords: cooperation, creativity, design approach, designcommunication, education for creativity, infographics, soft skills, visual expression.

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1. Introduction

Design is for all. All of us are designers (Papanek, 1973).

It is becoming increasingly important for non-designers to be familiar with and able to apply design approaches, in other words, to act as designers. By providing open frames and perspectives, the application of a design method may facilitate better problem-solving and decision-making, intuitive communication, connecting and combining different notions, and better coping with ambiguity and uncertainty. To put it another way, acting as a designer can encourage creativity.

The designcommunication approach, which seeks to combine theory and practical experience as much as possible, could be considered a creative, academically based methodology that is open to new ideas and approaches. The designcommunication approach to design, which enables and supports the development of soft skills, provides a highly flexible framework and a methodological background that goes beyond the familiar or habitual toolkit of the past. It offers a new vision to its users in the form of non-trivial solutions. Involvement in a design approach fosters intuition and resilience. Designcommunication encourages an action-based approach to creativity.

Design is also a communication act. Every stage of the design process is inherently communicative. It is up to us to recognise and use this connection in a conscious manner.

2. Creating a connection as designing

2.1. Importance of visual codes – communicating as designing

Images can describe and tell several things simultaneously and nonsequentially. We can see important information and connections so quickly on an image that we cannot even begin to put it into words. An image can carry information that is much more difficult to express in other forms. Images and text together effectively express information quickly and accurately (Bergström, 2008; Gregory, 1978; Kepes, 1995).

Visual communication and infographics sublimate and reduce. They condense information to an optimum and may become language independent. As a result, the essence of the whole content is brought to the fore through visual codes that can guide us even without knowledge of a particular written or spoken language. The transfer of information is complete when complemented with written communication.

Recall the stop sign. Text and form together make the whole picture. Text reduced to a pictogram, an icon, or just a word, whose visual extension is almost code-like, is like the essence or distillation of something. In order to get there, we need to create a connection with the narrative, as George Braque put that music gives shape to silence and a pot to emptiness (Zurcher, 1988). A word, a letter, is nothing but a visual. If we zoom in on any letter, we lose its literalness and only see an image with almost no content. The reverse is also true. Looking at a longer text from a big-picture perspective, we can connect with its essence, reducing the whole content to a word and/or sign. That is the basic principle of visual communication.

Introducing the concept of designcommunication, we combine these two modes of communication: images and text with equal emphasis. This combination of information would create a new genre of academic writing that emerged in the journal of *Creativity Studies*.

2.2. Communication integrated into development

The approach of creating a connection as designing, designcommunication is a creative, academically based methodology that combines the theoretical base and practical experience as good as possible.

Designcommunication = communication integrated into development (Cosovan, 2009; Hungarian Intellectual Property Office, 2008). We use the compound noun *design communication* as *designcommunication* written in one word as by designcommunication we want to refer to the phenomenon: creating a connection as designing, in other words, communication integrated into development (Figure 1).

The compound of design and communication, written as *design communication* has been used primarily in the sense of *communication design* that is *design for communication*. Designs for communication “present affordances that provide possibilities for interaction” (Aakhus, 2007, p. 114) which differ according to what institutions, practices, procedures or technologies assume about communication (Aakhus, 2007). Designcommunication, on the other hand is an approach to design. It strives to connect design, everyday economies, strategic communication and their actual status (Horváth et al., 2018b). Communication in this form is not an additional frippery. However, communication is created simultaneously with research and problem solving



Figure 1. Designcommunication written in one word (source: created by authors)

and coded into developing the given product, service or process (Cosovan, 2009). Designcommunication is not simply a function or a form but also content, message, style, and culture.

Designcommunication enables and supports the development of soft skills (Boonpracha, 2022), provides a highly flexible framework and a sound methodological background that goes beyond the familiar, known and habitual toolkit of the past to offer a new vision to its users (Park & Lee, 2021). The methodology is a deliberate combination of design and business communication disciplines.

3. Origins and definition of designcommunication – developing and evolving

Designcommunication is a compound of two inseparable notions: *design* and *communication*. *Design communication as designcommunication* written in one word is the patented expression and phenomenon: “communication integrated into development” (Hungarian Intellectual Property Office, 2008).

3.1. Design + communication < designcommunication

Designcommunication reinterprets and takes a reductive approach to the complex and multifaceted design and communication concepts. This approach describes the notion of design with the terms *doing good*, and communication as *saying good* (Cosovan, 2009).

In the designcommunication process, the act of designing and communication co-occur. Designcommunication creates a real-time connection among classroom learning, research, and entrepreneurship (Cosovan et al., 2018). It is a creative way of connecting at the self-reflection (inner conversation) and the human interaction level. Therefore, designcommunication

represents such an initiative for connection that serves as a bridge between different disciplines and discourses, phenomena of society and economy.

Designcommunication, which captures the fact that a creative message or interaction is not an afterthought but emerges and is encoded into the development of a product, service or process through problem identification, problem exploration and problem-solving, is related to, and therefore the result of, conscious design.

3.2. Holistic triple relation framework

Designcommunication, in other words, creating a connection as designing is an approach that uses a holistic triple relation framework of opposing dimensions: material–immaterial, permanent–variable, and survival–subsistence–development relations. This framework of relations is meaningful and applicable in diverse contexts (Figure 2).

The survival–subsistence–development relationship frame relates to and combines achievements of the past, preferences of the present and a long-term *raison d'être*. This latter also links to the duality of sustainable development and economic competitiveness (Sahlberg & Oldroyd, 2010).

The variable–invariable relationship frame combines timeless value with actual trends and expectations with the requirements of a constantly changing environment.

The material–immaterial relation frame relates to the tangible and symbolic aspects of the task (Figure 3).

These seven words: *material*, *immaterial*, *survival*, *subsistence*, *development*, *variable*, and *invariable*, the seven essential interrogatives (what, who, when, where, why, which, how) establish the analytic and value-creating relationship with the design thinking approach (Brown 2008; Lee & Park, 2022) and its sequence of consecutive steps of empathize, define,

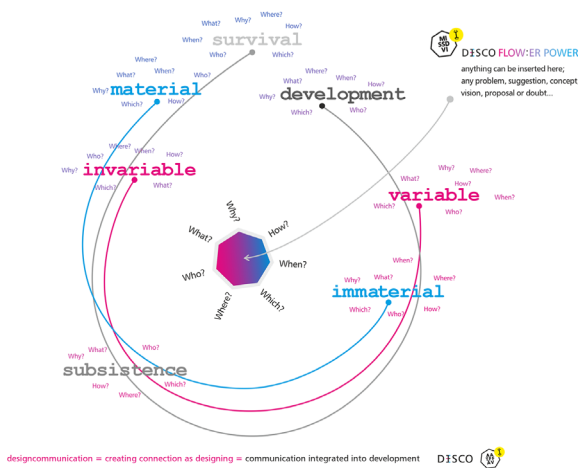


Figure 2. A holistic triple relation framework: seven words and seven interrogatives (source: created by authors)

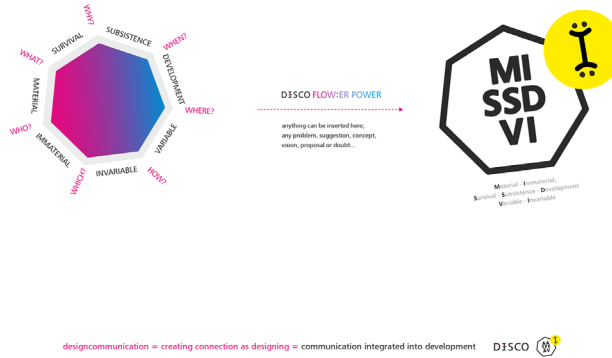
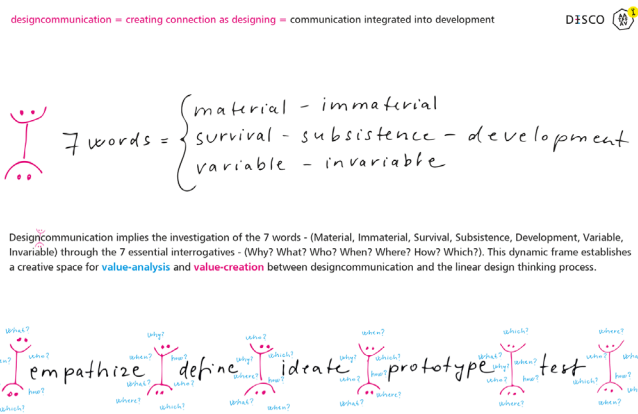


Figure 3. The holistic triple relation framework iconized (source: created by authors)



The process of creating a connection as designing connects and permeates the steps of the routine course of action.

Figure 4. Holistic approach of designcommunication and systematic design thinking process combined (source: created by authors)

ideate, prototype, and test. The process of creating a connection as designing connects and permeates the steps of the routine course of action (Figure 4).

3.3. Therefore, everyone is a designer

Designcommunication is a creative approach. It presumes that without instruction, people do not act as designers but still are capable of creating a connection as designing. We are capable of making creative interactions (Papanek, 1973).

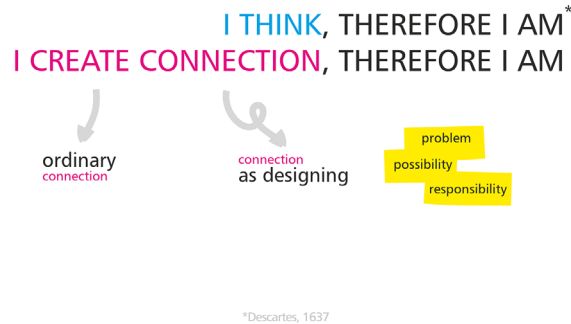


Figure 5. Being human = being a designer (source: created by authors)

The concept of everyone being a designer was first introduced by Papanek (1973), who argued that design is an essential element of all human activity (Figure 5). The design process involves planning all actions towards a desired, foreseeable goal (Papanek, 1973).

The definition of designcommunication as design is basically based on Papanek's (1973, pp. 3–4) approach, that is: "*Design is the conscious effort to impose meaningful order, a discipline of vision, both literally and metaphorically*" (1973, p. 6). As a result, any human act, be it an epic poem, recomposing a living room, making apple pie or envisioning the future, is design.

The acquisition of a designcommunication approach requires intensive and multifaceted involvement, theoretical knowledge, and experience. This knowledge is transformed in the designers' (either professionals or non-professionals) imagination into ideas and images, visions of the world that may be effectively communicated to others (Papanek, 1973, p. 6).

3.4. Divergent and convergent thinking combined

The problems we face may have different characteristics. The solution requires different ways of thinking, *i.e.* the path to solving the problem can be differentiated in diverse ways. The designcommunication approach facilitates task-solving by putting anyone in the designer's role, therefore adopting a design attitude based on the principle of "everyone is a designer".

Convergent thinking (Guilford, 1950) is based on existing knowledge. Given a well-defined and clearly constrained problem, a solution can be solved based on the information accumulated in our memory. On the other hand, divergent thinking (Guilford, 1950) results from a complex task-solving process that requires creativity. The path to the solution is not clear. The divergent nature of solving a task is the non-obvious responses to problem situations (Runco & Acar, 2012).

Design as a problem-solving activity can never, by definition, yield the one right answer: it will always produce an infinite number of answers, some “righter” and some “wronger” (Pye, 2007). Designcommunication is an optimal approach to open task-solving situations, and it does not provide any ready-made steps or benchmarks. Participants are uninformed of the expected results. The result and its path are developed and completed simultaneously, which is communication integrated into development.

3.5. A problem is an opportunity

Designcommunication applies to product design, research, and education situations where divergent thinking and creativity are essential. It is fundamentally (but not exclusively) an open problem-solving (Dorst, 2011) approach to situations. It determines the task not as a problem but as an opportunity. It implies a supportive, value-oriented and process-focused teaching practice, as in many cases, the outcome will be the way forward (Figure 6).

We face a closed problem-solving process when we know the components of the problem. We know the achievable goal, how the components that determine the goal are related and interact, and how their collaborations affect the solution. It is a simple-problem solving situation (Dorst, 2011). If a component is missing, it can be extrapolated from the other two elements, as in the case of an equation with one unknown variable. In an open problem-solving situation, there are many more unknown variables.

Most of the time, only the value to be achieved is known. The form of the solution and the supporting synergies are not available as a guide (Dorst, 2011). In such cases, the solution and its path are simultaneously present. The result and the working method are created at the same time, in other words: “communication integrated into the development”.



...from the right angle, every question is also an answer; and vice versa

what is a problem is also a solution (as) what is a solution is also a problem

Figure 6. Problem or solution: it is a question of perspective
(source: created by authors)

4. Designcommunication – a holistic value approach

4.1. Emphatic and good

Designcommunication is an empathetic approach accessible to all and seeks to achieve an optimal, “good” solution that does not harm anyone. This way, it displays the value category of “good” in two senses. On the one hand, it refers to that *good* means something that fits the needs of the product, space, organisation, and community. It means everything appropriate and valuable, that is, good. On the other hand, it also conveys ethical considerations and the principle of social responsibility through the science of design. Designcommunication integrates actors’/designers’ and external stakeholders’ interests (Figure 7). If leaders and managers similarly approached a problem, the solutions created would not only be functional but also of value to society, whether they are creating products, services or processes (Boland & Collopy, 2004).

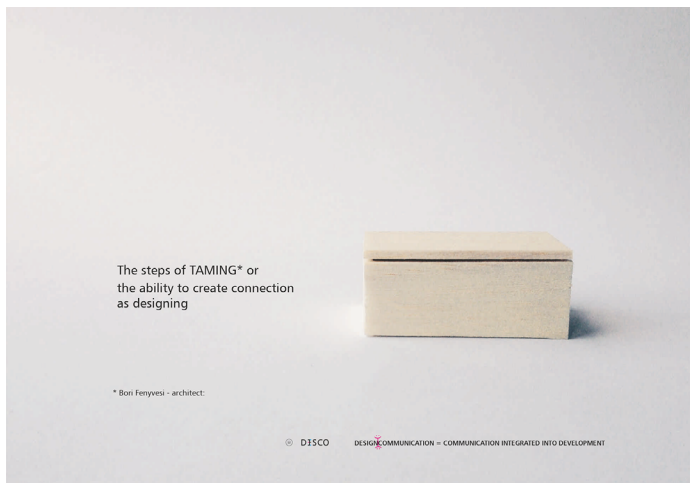


Figure 7. An empathetic approach: getting familiar with an unknown phenomenon (source: created by authors, based on szelidhaz.blogspot.com, 2024)

4.2. Being responsible

The responsible, therefore sustainable nature of designcommunication relates to its triple relation framework. Its use in educational practice is evident. It implies collaboration with the goal to making children aware that it is in our interest to learn about and support the less developed countries as part of the global sustainability effort (of which they are a part) (Huggins & Siraj-Blatchford, 2015). It is how designcommunication relates to the rule of the minimum good. The literature suggests that cognition, recognition, and active behaviour are necessary for creative, problem-solving, and sustainable education (Green & Somerville, 2015). Designcommunication is in line with this innovative approach.

4.3. Discovering new relations

Designcommunication captures knowledge acquisition and problem-solving not exclusively at the level of cognition but rather in recognition, which is the discovery of something that does not necessarily imply a linear, logical sequence. This way, it is possible to recognise not only what we know. According to Angyal (2007, p. 7): “Cognition is the acquisition of knowledge, recognition is the *creation of knowledge*”. While the essence of cognition is experiencing, thinking is the essential act of recognition. Experiencing and thinking are both fundamental acts of knowledge formation. The product of experience is cognition, and the product of thinking is recognition. However, one might know that experience and thinking cannot be opposed, as they build on each other. “Recognition results from thinking and experimenting beyond cognition, wandering into the world not known or not yet known, into the unknown” (Angyal, 2007, pp. 7–8). The designcommunication approach enables participants to consciously experience and better recognize and rely on empathy and intuition.

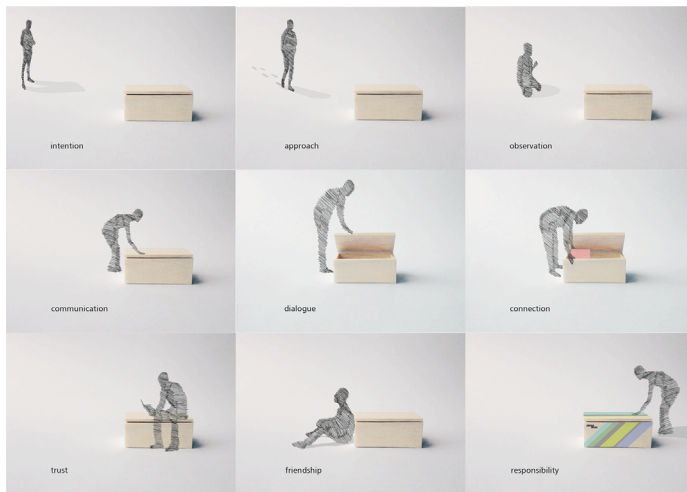


Figure 8. Recognizing multiple relations via experiencing (source: created by authors, based on szelidhaz.blogspot.com, 2024)

By emphasising recognition, designcommunication also highlights that it does not attempt to deliver a ready-made body of knowledge but relies on the users themselves to create a body of knowledge through recognition they experience in the process (Figure 8). Similarly, it does not frame creativity either. It is not systematic but builds on creativity across domains, which, if adequately applied pedagogically, can serve as an educational catalyst for sustainable development.

5. Designcommunication – a collaborative educational perspective

One of the main challenges of contemporary educational practice today is adapting to society's changing social expectations and personalities imposed by the digital world in such a manner that brings lasting value. Applying designcommunication approach in education is

unique as it creates a link among different disciplines and social and economic phenomena. It supports the creation of real-time links between education, research and business (Horváth et al., 2018a).

Using designcommunication as a creative education tool in action builds on participants' awareness that they are capable of creating value. It provides reference points and help in orientation but does not provide a ready-made solution module (cf. design thinking consecutive steps). In the designcommunication approach, the designer (professional or nonprofessional) does not have a predefined sequence of steps. Instead, they can rely on or turn to the holistic triple relationship framework of material–immaterial, permanent–variable, and survival–subsistence–development. This way, problem-solving and the path to the solution co-occur.

The initial chaos becomes more apparent as the solution crystallises, and the result, the experience of success, can lead to a flow experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, pp. 227–238). Designcommunication builds on collaboration, on the principle of everyone being equal in the process (Benkler, 2007). It focuses on real problems, seeks answers to questions, especially open-ended ones, and builds on teamwork, contributing to schools' creative environment (Amabile, 1996).

In a contemporary approach, the student is both a client and collaborator. As a result, students and school staff equally contribute to the "product" of the school (Bury & Masuzawa, 2018). We also build on this assumption when we rely on students' and staff's equal collaboration as a starting point. A growing proportion of the world's most influential companies see mass collaboration as a winning tool to promote innovative power (Rinaldi, 2009). However, the potential of collaborative education also appears in teacher education, which provides an opportunity to effectively develop diverse student populations (Nevin et al., 2009).

Collaboration of peers (Benkler, 2007) in educational practice implies that the students involved in a given project by creative teachers (Suryanto et al., 2021) are open to each other, eager to share knowledge, work together and move the life of the community forward through the achievement of that goal (Žydzūnaitė & Arce, 2021).

Students and teachers, and the trainer conducting a creative workshop, participate as equal partners, which implies an open, friendly and inclusive environment (Davies et al., 2014). This atmosphere gives students a sense of security and support in an uncertain situation. There are also parallels with what happens in business: effective managers build positive relationships with all stakeholders, thus promoting horizontal trust and encouraging professional respect, which has a positive impact on collaboration and creativity (Henriksen et al., 2022). This also happens when the hierarchical relationship between teacher and student is temporarily broken down and gains new meaning in the collaboration process (Raelin, 2016).

6. Conclusions: designcommunication as an action-based approach to creativity

Designcommunication is built on the interaction of different disciplines and the collaboration of different professions, and places business professionals into designer and artist roles, while designers and representatives of the creative disciplines are enforced to become leaders. This approach uses its design toolkit to consider human needs, society,

technological opportunities and even business success criteria (Cosovan, 2015). Designcommunication takes an action-based approach to creativity. The action implies that the creator – the one who takes part in the creative task-solving process – takes responsibility for the result. It is active creativity, which implies that the idea of the creative mind can be interpreted at the level of thought and action, where the action also means responsibility towards the creative product.

Communication per se is inherently less than thinking since any living entity is biologically capable of communicating. So, if the creative process is directly linked to action, it is as if one does not hesitate to profess love. If something is not overthought, intention and action directly become one inherent system. Thus, instead of three steps in this process, there are only two, *i.e.*, thinking appears as an anthropological and socio-cultural control.

Design and creation and the resulting intention to connect are among the most important gifts, opportunities, duties and responsibilities of the human race – taking into account the interaction of social constant(s) and variable(s). Since the existence of our human race, our ability to create and design relationships has determined our integrated and differentiated, *i.e.* complex human thinking, which is formulated in the holistic framework of relations taking into account the minimum and maximum rules. Considering these three opposing dimensions (Figure 2) of material–immaterial, permanent–variable, and survival–subsistence–development relations helps to find an optimum for creative action.

Designcommunication is an initiative for connection that bridges different disciplines and discourses, phenomena of society and economy. Designcommunication creates a real-time connection between classroom learning, research and entrepreneurship (Horváth et al., 2018a): add to your dictionary (Figure 9).

DESIGNCOMMUNICATION
add to dictionary DISCO

designcommunication = creating connection as designing = communication integrated into development

Figure 9. Designcommunication: add to dictionary (source: created by authors)

Note

This article is based on the PhD thesis/doctoral dissertation of Daniella Dominika Galla (2021) *Children. Home. Co-Operation. Creativity: Designcommunication as an Educational Methodological Tool to Support the Development of Soft Skills* prepared at Corvinus University of Budapest. Budapest, Hungary. This research is fully the intellectual product of one of the authors and it has not been published anywhere else.

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