

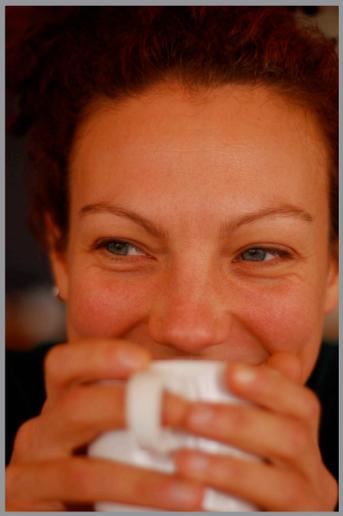
The Status of Sustainable Design in New Zealand Education

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The following statement was recently posted on a PhD design discussion list: “I was wondering if there is now ANY design course that pays no attention to sustainability? I would have thought that the great majority have been quietly teaching these matters to a lesser or greater extent for many years.”

This comment is one of the reasons I chose my thesis topic: Social and Environmental Sustainability in Design within Higher Education. I was confused as to why sustainable design education was not easy to locate in universities around the world. Is this because “the great majority have been quietly teaching these matters to a lesser or greater extent” and therefore it is integrated into everything design educators teach? Does this then mean no title or label is necessary or is it that it is not being taught? I was also curious to determine what it is that people actually teach when they cover ‘sustainable design’. Furthermore I am intrigued to know whether integrating sustainability into all design education is a more effective way of inspiring students to become facilitators for change regarding social and environmental issues in design than it would be as a separate course.

In 2007 I had the opportunity to visit the northern hemisphere and chose to conduct preliminary research and interview individuals who are currently teaching sustainable design. It was a challenging task as many do so, as the above comment suggests, without labeling it as such. These interviews shaped my preliminary research, which questions what is understood by sustainable design, how it is taught and why. The principal research for my thesis considers what is happening here in New Zealand and includes data gathered from design academics and design students from two national institutes and staff members from two national design businesses. One of each was assessed as being involved with sustainability, whilst the other two ‘appear’ to exclude sustainability. This principal study aims to determine barriers, constraints, enablers and facilitators of sustainable design within design education. My thesis looks to further enhance design education’s attention to the importance of developing students’ appreciation for the need to act as facilitators for change for the better.

I hope to complete my thesis towards the end of this year (2009) when the results will be publicly available. If you have any comments or questions please email me: nicola@design.otago.ac.nz