

RAISING AWARENESS IN THE SUSTAINABLE GRAPHIC DESIGN CLASS

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In today's world, rapid population growth and damage done to the planet by human agency have reached a level where action should be taken immediately. It has become clear that some developments aiming to improve the quality of life, or promoting a longer, healthier life, are contributing to water, air and soil pollution, destroying natural resources in urban areas and harming flora and fauna and animal health. It has become a necessity to raise ecological awareness and sensitivity in the minds of the general public, to produce less waste and processing by-products and promote reuse, rejecting technologies which produce harmful waste and embracing environment-friendly technologies.

Like other sectors, graphic design needs to be conscious of environmental sensitivities and should aim to leave a more livable environment to the generations that succeed us. An environmentally conscious designer will design images incorporating elements of 'eco design,' 'sustainable design' and 'environmentally sensible design.' Further, the designer may cooperate with the producer in the efficient and sustainable delivery of the product to the consumer. In addition, in collaboration with the manufacturer, the designer will have a significant role in ensuring that their design meets the needs of the target population, reaching the consumer in a manner consistent with the product's life cycle.

Today, there are many organisations that support this view. Graphic designers advocating for social responsibility in the arts are only too aware of the negative environmental consequences of the consumer society. In the *First Things First Manifesto 2000*, these issues have been moved to the forefront of the design discourse by 33 influential designers. The manifesto – an updated version of the *First Things First Manifesto* published by Kes Garland in 1964 – is still controversial.¹ This document seeks answers to questions like: What is the role of the graphic designer in today's consumer culture? What should it be? Do graphic designers, who play an important role in the creation of the current consumerist madness, have a responsibility to address the more important needs of the community that are still awaiting attention and redress?²

More recently, a further declaration has emerged as a result of the realisation that industrial product designers have to redefine themselves and their profession by recognising that sustainable development is a necessity rather than a choice. In the Kyoto Design Declaration signed by members of the International Association of Universities and Colleges of Art, Design and Media (CUMULUS) (2008), design is described as a medium for creating social, cultural, industrial and economic values by combining the humanities, science, technology and the arts. The declaration confirms the principle that designers have a global responsibility to build sustainable, human-centered and creative societies.³ It recognises that the designer has a major role to play in creating environmentally conscious, sustainable and awareness-creating designs. At the same time, these various groups and declarations have helped promote the "rapid change and rise in environmental management systems and in environmental analysis, following environmental sensitivity in society."⁴

One definition of a graphic designer is someone who transmits a design-based service or product to the public in the most efficient way. Designers with a sense of social responsibility regarding the permanence of our planet should observe the principles of sustainability while they are conveying their message and at the same time raise public consciousness about care of the environment. Thus, the formal design education curriculum should be augmented with teaching materials on the global impact of environmental problems. In addition, sustainable design approaches, if included in design education, will lead to behavioural change in students and raise awareness of sustainability issues. Academics and designers who lecture in graphic design programs should consider adding the concept of environmental responsibility to their courses.

In this study, which focuses on the sustainable graphic design module in the second year graphic design program involving students from Class II, Department of Graphic Arts, in the School for the Handicapped at Anadolu University in Turkey, works designed from discarded materials were created by students in order to raise environmental consciousness as part of the creative process and to gain new perspectives. Some examples are shown here.

Graphic design is a much more effective, direct and rapid way of communicating than other methods of conveying information – in this context, with the aim of developing environmental awareness and motivating desirable behaviours. Thus, the meeting of graphic design with the concept of sustainability can potentially bear fruit in designs that raise environmental awareness and draw attention to environmental problems. In design education, the student should be taught that the designer should have certain responsibilities and competencies in this regard: the choice to use ecological materials, the use of environmentally friendly energy, and familiarity with concepts of recycling, repurposing and reusing.⁵

As a project, the Anadolu University students were asked to design figurines of extinct or endangered animals made of discarded materials, drawing on their knowledge, creativity and imagination.

In the first part of project, the students worked at defining the problem, collecting data, finding solutions



Figures 1-2. Angela Haseltine Pozzi, *Washed Ashore*, <http://washedashore.org/photos/>.



Figures 3. Collection of waste materials by students.



Figures 4-5. Students engaged in the design process.

and putting their creativity to work. In the second part, students designed figurines of already extinct or threatened animals, using waste materials. The project has had a significant effect on students who are being trained to be designers, both as individuals, in terms of consciousness-raising, and as designers in their thinking and research methods. All the waste materials to be used in the project were selected and used with a view to conserving energy during the design and production phase, and to enable the product obtained at the end of the design process to be recyclable. Thus, as well as raising their awareness, the project contributed to the students' creativity while preparing them to cope with changes in technology, the environment, culture and society. Students who are focused on sustainable design methods will be well placed to contribute to the conservation of our planet's natural resources.

In the third and final part of the project, the students held an exhibition of their designs of extinct or endangered animal figures formed from waste materials. The exhibition, which was fundamentally undertaken by the students in order to discover their own creativity, as well as raising their levels of social awareness and responsibility, was also intended to raise awareness in the community of sustainability issues.

In recent years, designers have begun to use design and technology to change negative viewpoints, create environmental awareness, solve current problems and help prevent new ones developing, and also to raise awareness and leave a livable world for future generations. To achieve these goals, designers are struggling to use all the potential of technology in order to build sustainable features into their designs, to recycle materials and to reduce consumption. As consumers have begun moving towards environmentally conscious, environmentally friendly products, many companies are placing non-polluting production methods, the use of renewable resources, recycling and other sustainability strategies on their agendas and taking serious steps in this direction. The role of design and designers is changing, and their sense of responsibility to help achieve a sustainable future has increased.

This move to create environmental awareness in graphic design should also reshape graphic design education. The Anadolu University project has shown us that if they are given a sufficiently powerful vision, the students who will be the expert designers of the future can play an important role in the graphic design sector by using designs which are created with sustainability and repurposing in mind.



Figure 6. The student project group.

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- 1 *Grafik Tasarım Kuramı*, ed. Helen Armstrong (İstanbul: Pasifik Ofset, 2007), 146.
- 2 "First Things First: Tarihçe," *Grafikerler Meslek Kuruluşu/2002-Dedi ki 02*, <http://gmk.org.tr/uploads/news/file-14466674451023275305.pdf>.
- 3 Tuna Özçuhadar and Pınal Öncel, *Eko-Tasarım: Sürdürülebilir Üretim ve Tüketim Yayınları – IV*, 2017, <https://recturkey.files.wordpress.com/2017/02/eko-tasarim.pdf>, 13.
- 4 Pontus Cenn and Staffan Laestadius, "The Efficiency of Becoming Eco-efficient," *Management of Environmental Quality: An International Journal*, 14:2 (2003), 221-41.
- 5 Selamet Sevim, "Sürdürülebilirlik ve Grafik Tasarım," *ZKÜ Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 8:15 (2012), 130-131.



Figure 7. *Dodo Kuşu*, designed by Merve Mert. (above)
 Figure 8. Poster design for student exhibition. (left).



Figure 9. *Mamut*, designed by Burhan Öztürk (above).
 Figure 10. Poster design for exhibition (right).

