

Taxonomy of meaning for Cultural Products: Insights for designers to envision new meanings.

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Abstract (en)

This thesis is focused on the design of cultural products. In particular on the meanings that are attributed to these kinds of products and the methods and processes that designers follow to create them. It builds upon learnings obtained through a literature review on meaning creation and cultural models, later delimited by the context of study (Colombia), and through empirical research motivated on understanding consumer and designer perspectives around the topic. The later research was conducted through study cases, semi-structured interviews to designers and ZMET interviews to consumers of cultural products.

Meaning and culture are part of our lives, but they are not treated in comprehensive ways. Cultural aspects are underestimated in the design field specially because of their complexity. Regardless, there is potential in using culture-inspired design as a way to respond to consumers' need for differentiation in a globalized world while also contributing to cultural sustainability and the transmission of tradition, knowledge and the support of related communities. This opportunity in making products that engage customers in a meaningful way by connecting to culture confirms the need to develop techniques that enable designers to consider cultural meanings in products more explicitly.

The reflections from the research are summarized in three main outcomes. First, through the definition of a process for cultural design, second, through the characterization of meanings assigned to cultural products in the context of study reflected in a consensus map, and lastly an approximation to a tool set for designers to employ in the initial phases of design of cultural products to guide and focus their approach to culture. It is expected that these outcomes assist designers in the organization and construction of the meaning of artifacts across cultures by identifying, understanding, and transforming the cultural relevance, resources, and opportunities of a context and embedding them into products.

Keywords:

Cultural Product Design, Design for Meaning, Material Culture, Cultural Sustainability, Cultural Innovation, Design Ethnography.

Abstract ^(it)

Questa tesi è focalizzata sulla progettazione di prodotti culturali. In particolare sui significati che vengono attribuiti a questo genere di prodotti e i metodi e processi che i designer seguono per crearli. Questo lavoro si basa sulle conoscenze acquisite attraverso una revisione della letteratura sulla creazione di significato e sui modelli culturali, successivamente delimitati dal contesto di studio (la Colombia), e attraverso una ricerca empirica dedicata alla comprensione delle prospettive del consumatore e del designer sull'argomento, condotta attraverso casi di studio, interviste semi-strutturate a designer e interviste ZMET a consumatori di prodotti culturali.

Il significato e la cultura fanno parte della nostra vita, ma non vengono trattati in modo completo. Gli aspetti culturali sono sottovalutati nel campo del design soprattutto a causa della loro complessità. Indipendentemente da ciò, esiste potenziale nell'utilizzo del design ispirato alla cultura come un modo per rispondere al bisogno di differenziazione dei consumatori in un mondo globalizzato, contribuendo anche alla sostenibilità culturale e alla trasmissione di tradizione, conoscenza e supporto delle comunità correlate. Questa opportunità di realizzare prodotti che coinvolgano i clienti in modo significativo collegandosi alla cultura conferma la necessità di sviluppare tecniche che consentano ai designer di considerare i significati culturali nel prodotto in modo più esplicito.

Le riflessioni della ricerca sono riassunte in tre principali risultati. In primo luogo, attraverso la definizione di un processo per la progettazione culturale, in secondo luogo, attraverso la caratterizzazione dei significati assegnati ai prodotti culturali nel contesto di studio riflesso in una mappa di consenso, e infine l'approssimazione a un insieme di strumenti che i progettisti possono utilizzare nelle fasi iniziali di progettazione di prodotti culturali per guidare e focalizzare il loro approccio alla cultura. Ci si aspetta che questi risultati aiutino i designers nell'organizzazione e nella costruzione del significato dei manufatti attraverso le culture, identificando, comprendendo e trasformando la rilevanza culturale, le risorse e le opportunità di un contesto e incorporandole nei prodotti.

Parole chiave:

Design del Prodotto Culturale, Design 'for Meaning', Cultura Materiale, Sostenibilità Culturale, Innovazione Culturale, Etnografia del Design.

Introduction

Nowadays boundaries across cultures are more blurred than ever, notwithstanding, this globalization is also leading to new trends which favor an increased sense of cultural ownership and a need to create more defined cultural identities. This sets a new challenge for producers of artifacts in which on one hand, they need to make sure to reach a global public but on the other, they need to appeal to individual or local sensitivities.

In the search for broader audiences and greater reach, personal meaning and values can get left behind while favoring homogenization and relying more strongly on technological differentiation as the source of value and innovation. Companies and designers must find the balance between these objectives considering that people do not obtain goods only because of a functional purpose alone but because of the added layers of meaning and identity forming characteristics behind them.

Introduction

Therefore, there is an opportunity in making products that engage customers in a meaningful way, beyond their function. For the purpose of this research, we will focus on cultural resources which represent the collective expressions of the stakeholders involved. While meaning is personal, it is also dependent on the cultural system of the individual. This approach will allow us to focus on the collective and long-standing to reach the individual. A specific typology of products that fall under this scope are Cultural products. These are understood as those with a high cultural input but also with a high design input that makes them relevant for the demands of current 'glocal' markets and consumers but that does not risk their potential for transmission of cultural meanings.

Taking into account the subjectivity of meanings, it is important to understand that this are constantly forming and are directly affected by the context, thus it will be useful for the purpose of the research to limit the area of study and application to a certain territory to perform a cultural study to explore how meaning attached to design artefacts changes as a function of the cultural domain. The focus will be set in Colombia using an ethnographic approach to identify the collective construction of meaning.

What we want to explore here is in a given context, what can be considered cultural innovation of meaning? What meaning from existing and new experiences are emerging in the given context? How are national meanings directly connected and influential to meanings in cultural artifacts? What are the semantics used to described the meaning associated to cultural artefacts?

Throughout the research, additional questions related to the process for designing cultural products are brought up. The complexity of culture limits its exploration and the development of cultural products that are coherent and transcend mere copy, cliché or appropriation. This thesis proposes a definition of the process to facilitate the designer's endeavor in the topic born from the exploration of the ways in which designers are currently handling culture in their designs.

Today we speak of sustainability as a guiding principle of design, most of the time we refer to environmental and material sustainability, but why not expand the definition of sustainability to new territories like that of culture? The final goal of this research and the definition of the questions posed above will be to develop a structured method to assist the designer in the organization and construction of the meaning of artefacts across cultures by identifying, understanding and transforming the cultural relevance, resources and opportunities of a context and embedding them into products.

It is intended that the results of this project will enrich the designer's role as a contributor to Cultural Sustainability through the establishment of reciprocal relationships in which the designers benefit from the study of culture and tradition and at the same time fostering cultural development and expanding the horizons of a local culture into a global market to promote heritage and traditional knowledge and values.

Methodology

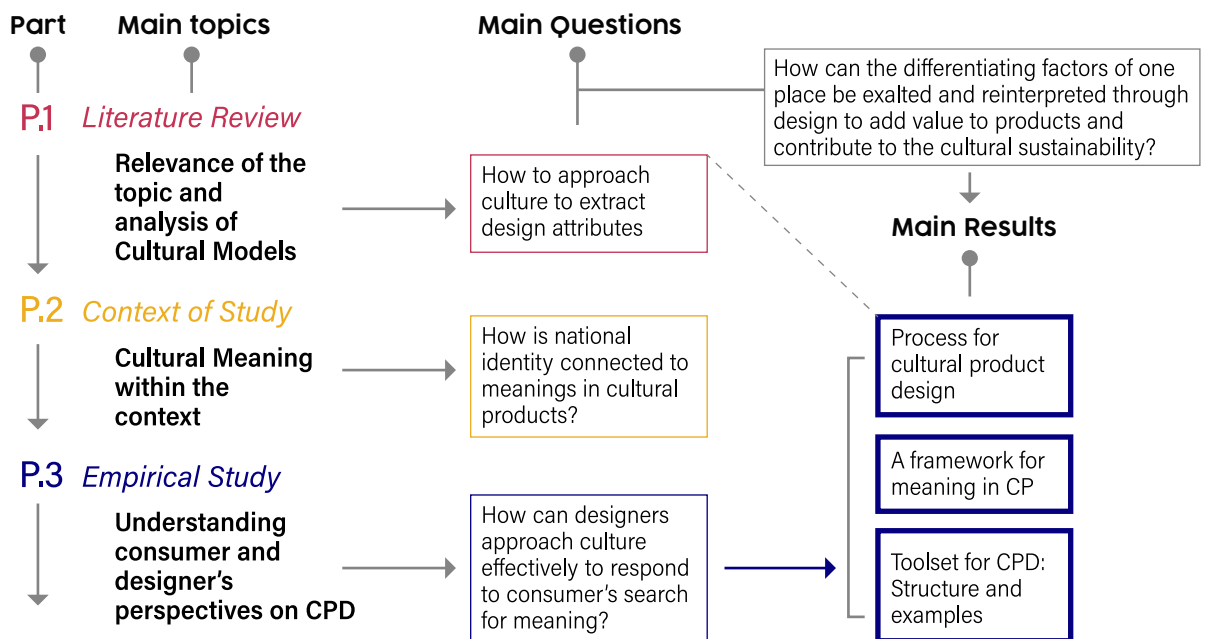


Figure 1: Outline of the Research

This work followed a rigorous research process that is presented through three main parts based on the initial objective of developing a taxonomy of meanings for cultural products. The outline of the study summarizes the research process followed in order to reach the final objectives starting from a solid knowledge base and leading to a consolidated proposal.

Part 1

Part 1 presents a thorough literature review on the domains of meaning in design and in cultural design. A variety of academic texts, conference proceedings, marketing and design journals have been revised and analyzed in order to create a consistent knowledge on the subject at hand and to understand the existing gaps in design research related to cultural products. This first part helps to create a frame of reference for defining the different concepts mentioned throughout the research and provide an understanding in general terms of where meanings come from in artefacts and how culture influences this attribution of meaning.

The different cultural models explored have been employed in the design practice previously. Parts of these models can be directly translated into guiding practices in the cultural product design process and can help give designers a direction by pointing out the relevant issues

that must be explored in a cultural context and that may have the potential to provide design insight or be translated into design features.

Likewise, this part helps to bring to awareness the potential, yet to be exploited, that exists in the field of cultural design and brings to the surface topics such as cultural innovation and cultural sustainability which could become guiding areas of study in the future of design research. In general terms, the literature analysis has been the theoretical support for presenting the results of this research and has served as a way to connect, contrast and validate the empirical findings gathered during the development of the activities comprised in the following parts.

Part 2

The previous part reviews the topic from a general perspective, in contrast, part 2 closed the area of study to focus on a specific culture. This narrows down the scope to focus on the meanings of cultural products within the context of Colombia. Contexts may dictate and alter the meaning of artefacts; therefore, it is appropriate to begin the study by refining the area of research to be able to perceive the commonalities and variation in meaning attribution to cultural products both from the designer and consumer perspective.

Literature regarding the creation of an identity for this specific nation is here reviewed taking as reference both national and international sources. This part includes an emphasis on craft and artisanal products because of their strong relation with the definition of cultural products in the context of study. Taking into account this perspective will influence specially the definition of a cultural design process borrowing characteristics from the processes of co-design with communities.

Part 3

This part presents an empirical study within the practice and consumption of design in current times. The main aim of this part is to translate qualitative and subjective information into tangible approximations to the topic. This section corresponds to the study performed through case studies and qualitative studies to analyze designer perspectives as well as consumer perspectives on cultural product designs.

The presented case studies represent what is intended by cultural product design under the context of this research. The underlying motivation behind the selection of the presented brands and products is their ability to use cultural themes as a guiding principle for the development of their product always under the scope of design in a contemporary setting. This approach is the starting approximation to a taxonomy of meaning by location or country that could be further compared and contrasted against major cultural models and values.

Equally, the designer focused study was performed through semi-structured interviews, while the customer focused ones were conducted using the ZMET (Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique). This technique helped to uncover deeper insight regarding the attribution of meaning and relevance that cultural products may have. The 9 steps of the ZMET were followed with volunteer participants leading to the elaboration of the Consensus Map which contains the main constructs and themes elaborated through the interviews.

Additionally, this part addresses the gap of existing actionable guidance or frameworks that define the cultural product design process. The findings of the studies are presented and taken into consideration both with the previous general concepts and theories from the research, leading to a first-stage definition of a process for cultural design and a framework for the definition of meanings in cultural products. Input from the full research is finally presented through an approximation to a toolset for cultural product design. This closing part reflects on the entirety of the research and analyses the final contributions to design theory, future research and the design practice in general.

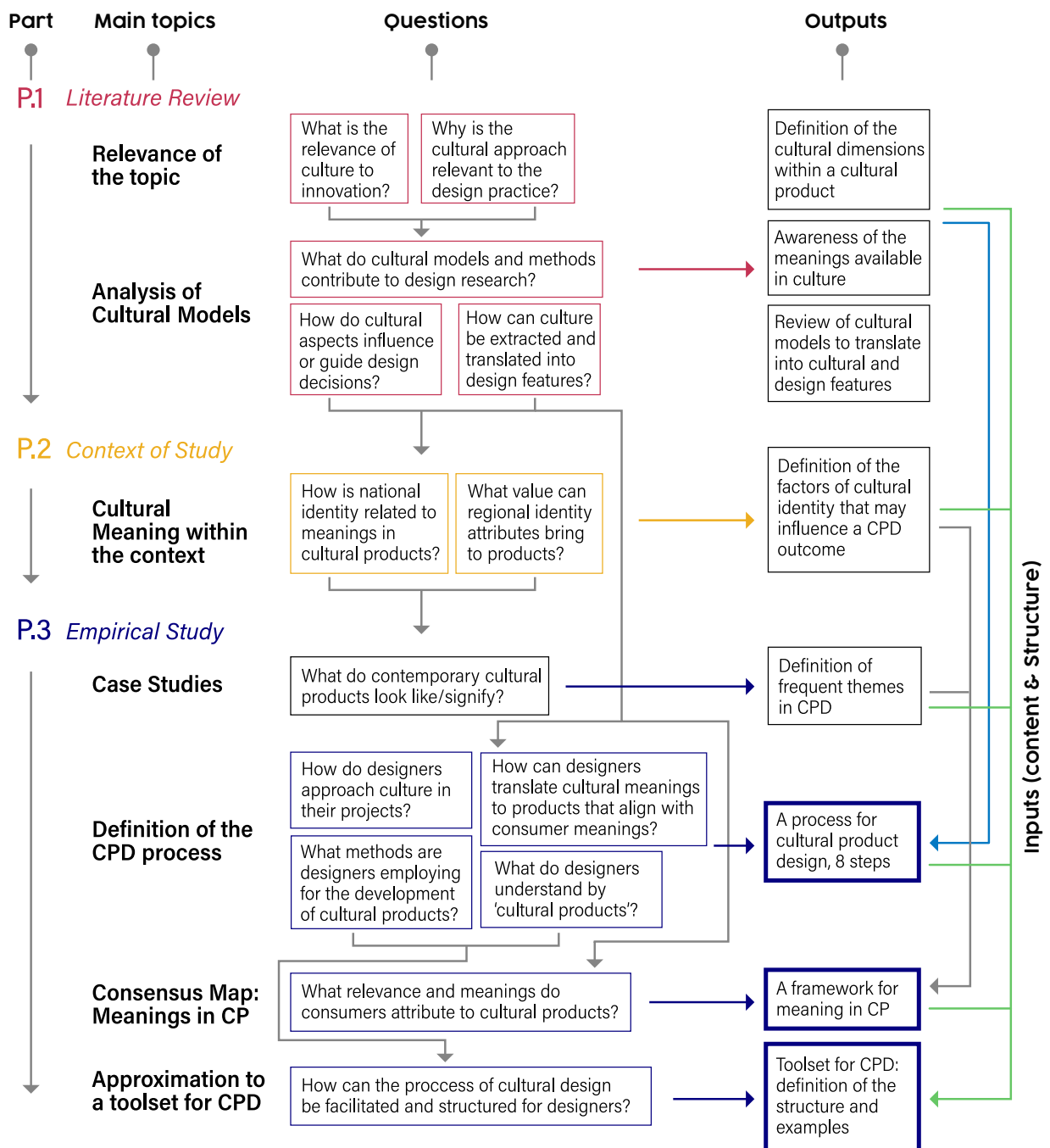


Figure 2: Detailed Structure of the Research

Motivation Behind the Research

Cultural factors are not always considered consciously despite the peculiar effect of globalization on market trends which beyond bringing uniformity has actually increased pride on cultural identities and the need for differentiation. Under the current conditions of globalization, the profile of consumers has evolved to be more favorable towards emotional, experiential and meaningful consumption but so, the cultural gap between designers and consumers has become more noticeable. This makes it increasingly relevant for businesses and designers to invest in cultural research and cross-cultural design specially when entering foreign markets.

This condition sets the initial motivation of exploring the use of culture as a way to add value to product design and at a deeper level to cultures themselves. The initial question in this regard is:

How can the qualities and differentiating factors of one place be exalted and reinterpreted through design and communicated to others to add value to products and contribute to the cultural sustainability of places with rich identities but weak transmission models?

To begin to answer this question, it became necessary to first understand how those qualities and differentiating factors are formed, thus where meaning, and more specifically, cultural meanings emerge and how they are transferred, experienced and interpreted. During this process it became clear that the complexity of a topic such as culture calls for simplicity in the way it is approached. As evidenced in studies like that of Boess (2008) there is no structured way for designers to consider this aspect explicitly during the design process and doing so becomes an intuitive activity and a complex task for designers. Therefore, it is pertinent to consider the development of design methods that facilitate the extraction of valuable cultural elements for designers in efficient ways.

This new understanding reshaped the final aim of the research related to the design practice which is to provide designers with a frame of reference for understanding the relevance assigned to cultural products and providing guidance that may assist in the early ideation phases of culturally relevant product design development. In this respect, the goal is to systematically describe characteristics of the processes and meanings behind cultural product design.

Overall, the work presented seeks to explore an under-researched topic and contribute to the current knowledge on how cultural aspects can be influential to product design while bringing benefits to the different actors involved.

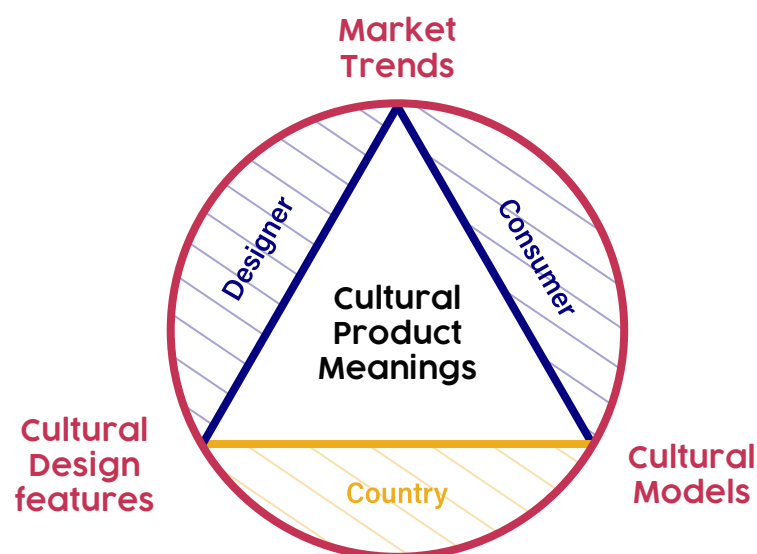


Figure 3: Synthesis of the Research framework

The focus of this research is characterized by the key components evidenced in the synthesis of the research framework (figure 3). Cultural products, understood as those with a high cultural input but also with a high design input that makes them relevant for the demands of current 'glocal' markets and consumers but that does not risk their potential for transmission of cultural meanings, are the central focus of this thesis. Insights, opportunities and frameworks are drawn from the surrounding study of the topics that influence the formation of meaning in cultural products. Respectively the designer, consumer, national context (country) and the encompassing cultural context are evaluated.

The research questions considered for each of these components can be summarized as follows:

Cultural context:

- What is the relevance of culture to innovation?
- Why is the cultural approach relevant to the design practice?
- What do cultural models and methods contribute to design research?
- How do cultural aspects influence or guide design decisions?
- How can culture be extracted and translated into design features?
- What exactly is implied by the design of 'Cultural products'?

Country:

- How is national identity related to meanings in cultural products?
- What value can regional identity attributes bring to products?

Designers:

- How do designers approach culture in their projects?
- What do designers understand by 'cultural products'?
- What methods are designers employing for the development of cultural products?
- How can designers translate cultural meanings to products that align with consumer meanings?

Consumers:

- What relevance and meanings do consumers attribute to cultural products?

Literature Review

Design for Meaning⁽⁰¹⁾

Part

1

The research of meaning on artifacts is varied and presents different approaches. There is not a single consolidation that defines the concept or that can tell us where and how meaning is created. Perhaps the main commonality between the different lines of research lies in the presentation of function as one source of meaning. Through the exploration of research, it can be said that the understanding of meaning has had a constant evolution and continues to be a topic of interest for the understanding of consumer-product relations and for the development of products that are disruptive in the market.

The following lines will be composed of a general evaluation of the literature of meaning and its evolution in the following stages from an objective, functionalist approach, to a subjective, expressive approach and finally, to a more intangible and intrinsic approach based on empathy and purpose. This evolution is not necessarily a chronological one under which the new interpretation replaces the other, instead they all complement the further or even simultaneous study of each other.

1.1 Three Approaches to Design for Meaning

1 | Functional

As mentioned, in design literature meaning has been understood in multiple ways. One such way is the functionalist one with a focus on “product communication” through the use of affordances and semantics. Under a semiotic perspective, an artefacts’ sign content is equivalent to its meaning which is revealed through the interaction with them (Siefkes, 2012). The idea of affordances and semantics as meaning lies in the fact that they provide an interpretation of the intentions of the designer and communicate them to the user in the form of product features like color, shape, form, etc. Since they are generalized, they also help communicate meaning beyond an individual, but across groups of users.

Affordances as defined by Norman (2013) are “perceived and actual properties of a thing, primarily those fundamental properties that determine just how the thing could possibly be used”. The properties referred to by Norman are usually understood as objective physical properties like form and shape that indicate the user how an object should be used. On the other hand, semantics, proposed by Krippendorff and Butter (2007), deal more with symbolic qualities of artefacts notwithstanding focusing on forms, shapes and texture as main sources of semantic study.

Krippendorff and Butter (2007) developed four theories of meaning for the design of artifacts:

1. **Theory of meaning for artifacts in use:** meaning is found in the use and interaction with an artefact. This theory is most connected to concepts like affordances as exposed by Norman (2003) in which the artifact features reveal to the user what or how an interaction should be performed. “The meanings of an artifact are the recognizable actions and articulations it affords a community of its stakeholders” (Krippendorff and Butter, 2007).
2. **Theory for meaning for artifacts in language:** Meaning is obtained from the linguistic narratives, metaphors and communications of users about an artefact. This sort of meaning can be enacted even before the “experience” and created through expectation. “The meanings of an artifact are the narratives in which that artifact can occur, conceivable and realistic to a community of stakeholders” (Krippendorff and Butter, 2007).
3. **A theory of meaning in the life cycle of artifacts:** Meaning is created through the transformations of a product through its life cycle, through various stakeholders’ networks.
4. **A theory of meaning for ecologies of artefacts:** Meaning emerges from the interaction of different artefacts giving them a supporting and cooperative quality.

What is constant in these four theories of meaning is the fact that they see meaning as the attribution of understanding as a result of experiencing artifacts. In this respect, the authors also propose a differentiation of three qualities of experience related to use. The first is recognition in which a user categorizes an object based on what it can afford it (or not) to do. The second is exploration, where the user tests his expectations and discovers how to handle the object. Finally, the third is reliance which is related to user-friendliness and the interaction with the artifact happens smoothly.

Regardless of the generalization of the main terms discussed above, as evidenced in studies like that of Boess (2008) there is no structured way for designers to consider them explicitly during the design process and doing so becomes an intuitive activity. Boess (2008) studied meaning in product use and the interpretation of the concept by designers in the industry through a series of interviews regarding the design of actual products and thoughts behind the making of them. Her study seeks to understand whether designers communicate and validate the understanding of functionalities of products by the user. To talk about meaning Boess (2008) does so through the functional approach, referring to terms from the literature of design such as semantics and affordances and to related terms from design lingo such as communication, conventions (based on prior user knowledge or guidelines), discovery and physicality.

To provide a more fixed approach to managing meaning in product design Parmentier, D., Van Acker, B., Saldien, J. et al. (2020) propose a design-based learning modality with a framework to characterize affordances and alter them for the correct communication to the user through the use of semantics, constraints, perceptual cues or conventions known by the user group, and ultimately improve the usability of their products. The idea is that they can focus on the type of affordances to, for example, afford and discourage meaning by adding or removing perceptual cues or constraints making interactions feasible and visible or the opposite as desired. One benefit of doing so, is that it can possibly reduce the amount of usability testing iterations during the design process making it more efficient, although since affordances are user dependent, testing cannot be fully replaced.

In this study Parmentier, D., Van Acker, B., Saldien, J. et al. (2020) present a typology table (see figure 4) that serves as a product concept evaluation sheet where designers clearly define each of the types of characterization and division of affordances helping them to think of potential problems that may arise in the usability and interaction with their objects and discover missed opportunities. Some of the affordances classification or division proposed are, first to consider if they are positively or negatively perceived by different actors, then classify based on perceptual information if they are perceptible (most desired one) or hidden, false or correct. The next way to classify them is based on whether they are nested or sequential (ex. Door and handle) which determines fluid action relationship between a set of objects. Another way is by considering interacting systems for example in modular products, more exactly artefact-artefact affordances (AAA's) and artefact-user affordances. Another aspect present in the chart is the description of the affordance based on their level of manipulation.

After putting the chart to use, the main design changes focused on semantics related to making desired affordances more perceptible or less hidden. This method makes the functional approach to meaning more literal and makes it possible for the designer to calibrate it according to his needs in the design process. The main takeaway here lies in the evidence of how actual tools and methods make the "meaning" transfer, as understood in functional terms, more effective and concrete.

Regardless, referring back to the study of Boess (2008) according to the interpretation of the interviewed designers, definitions such as affordances and semantics assign a "rigidly fixed" meaning to products which seems antiquated for the demands of today's designs. Instead, other interpretations such as brand experience, storytelling and user friendliness seem more inline. Metaphor is also a term brought about connecting it to an expressive-based approach.

A framework to design for meaning: insights on use, practicality...

Table 1 Overview of the Typology table, affordance analysis and constructing pathways (on the left) and an example of this table in use (on the right)

Typology table		Example of how to use the Typology Table
Affordance No.?	Give the affordance a number	No. 1
Description	Give a description of the affordance	Carrying the bag as a shoulder bag (i.e., an affordance provided by the strap)
Level (manipulation/effect/use)	Manipulation/effect/use	Use This relates here again to the affordance provided by the strap (i.e., to carry the bag as a shoulder bag) which is described on the level of use of the strap
Type [AUA or AAA, see Maier and Fadel (2009)]	AUA or AAA?	AUA
Nested (Yes/No)	Yes/No	Yes
If nested, depending on affordance(s) No.?:	Affordance number(s)?	No. 2: The affordance of carrying the bag as a shoulder bag becomes perceptible by perceiving the affordance of putting the strap on the shoulder
Sequential (Yes/No)	Yes/No	Yes
If sequential, following on?	Affordance number(s)?	Affordance No. 3: Attaching the strap correctly (this needs to be done in order to provide the affordance of carrying the bag as a shoulder bag)
Polarity of affordance?	+/-	+ : carrying it as a shoulder bag is desired
Current type [categorization according to Gaver (1991)]	(FA, PA, HA)	Initially it was considered to be a PA (first use of the Table) but after user testing it appeared to be a HA (second use of the Table, i.e., after user testing). It is feasible but not clear to the user that the bag can be carried as a shoulder bag
Desired type [categorization according to Gaver (1991)]	(FA/PA/HA or CR)?	PA : Make it not only feasible but also perceptible for the user that it can be carried as a shoulder bag
Pathway to change between the types	Physically (constraining) or Semantically?	Semantically
How?	Which constraints, product semantics?	Product semantics: adapt the length of the straps and add 1 shoulder rest so that it looks more like a shoulder bag
Picture, product semantics	Picture No.?	

Figure 4: Overview of the typology table for affordances analysis (Parmentier, D., Van Acker, B., Saldien, J. et al. (2020))

These new interpretations of meaning show a different, more dynamic understanding of the term that takes into account the participation of the user in the meaning forming and attribution activity and also of the contexts in which a product will be set or experienced

In general terms, there is a dominant functionalist approach to the definition of meaning in product design. Notwithstanding, there is another branch of design research that proposes to stand apart from this functionalist approach to consider a more emotional one that can offer a broader range to studying the meaning according to different categories of "functionalities" not only in the strict/tangible sense, for instance, there is the research advanced by Fournier (1991) that will be discussed later. Of course, designers must take into account affordances and product semantics as a first layer of meaning but they may not disregard more profound meaning that derives from the non-physical.

2 | Expressive Meaning

The study of consumer behavior and research has evolved to consider not just the objective and functional but also the emotional and subjective roles played by objects. The latter being more recent has also given consumers more relevance in the consumer-object relation. This "expressive" approach goes in line with what literature suggests as the three main roles that products play in consumer's lives: a functional one, related to the fulfilment of needs, an experiential one related to sensory and aesthetic enjoyment, entertainment and emotional arousal, and finally an identity role where objects serve as expressions of the self as an individual and in a society (ex. Role or position) (Fournier, 1991).

Complementing the functional categorization of product meaning, in her study, Fournier (1991) considers the psychological role of objects as functions as well. Based on object attachment and semiotic motive theories, Fournier (1991) proposes a typology for the categorization of consumption objects. The categorization is based on the three dimensions of psychological meaning that determine the roles objects play in a user's life. The first is objective vs subjective center of meaning, then shared versus personalized sources of meaning and lastly high versus low emotional response.

These three dimensions that characterize the meaning of an artefact are more specifically classified as follows (Fournier, 1991):

- **Tangibility:** refers to whether meaning resides in the object tangibly and objectively or if it is subjective and based on interpretation, experience and associations.
- **Emotionality:** regard the emotional response to an artefact graded from low to high intensity.
- **Commonality:** refers to whether the meaning has a shared or an individualized character. Those with a shared character can become products of culture. For personalized objects meaning transfer is more ongoing and dynamic than for cultural objects which also represents more involvement and stronger motivations towards the object.

Based on the previous three dimensions of meaning, Fournier (1991) proposed eight categories of consumption objects with a broader coverage of consumer-object relations:

1. **Objects of utility:** Focused on the resolution of problems or needs.
2. **Objects of action:** their value relies on the experiences they allow while providing stimulation, excitement, arousal or moods.
3. **Objects of appreciation:** their goal is to provide enjoyment of pleasure through emotional experience. (ex. Decorative home objects, fine wines). The object of emotion and experience is the object itself.
4. **Objects of Transition:** Provide feelings of comfort and security especially in moments of transition.
5. **Objects of childhood:** Background objects that reminisce of childhood times and provide feelings of familiarity.
6. **Ritual enhancers:** objects related to "habituated behaviors and valued experiences. They are context dependent to obtain their meaning. They are also subjective based on the symbolism of the ritual.
7. **Objects of personal identity:** make statements about the values and self-identity of the user. These objects rely on emotion and feelings for meaning.
8. **Objects of position and Role:** Inform about the self at a cultural level, related to society/status.

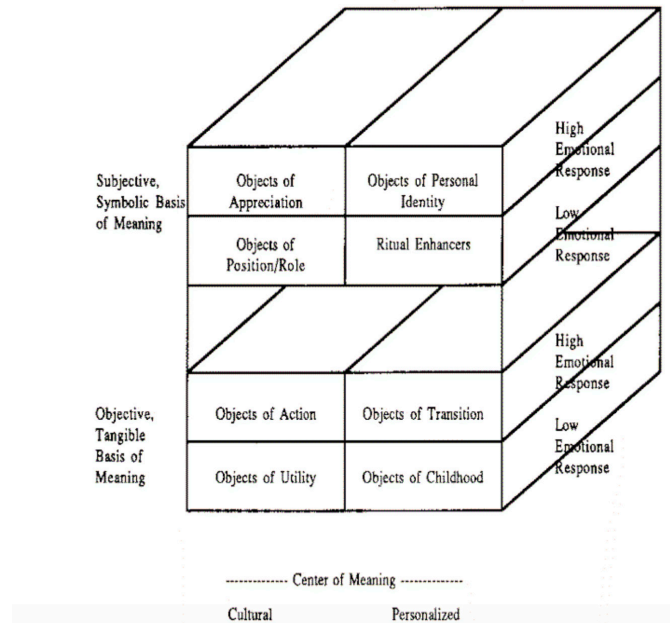


Figure 5: A Meaning Based Framework on Consumer Object Relationship (Fournier, 1991)

These proposed categories based on expressions and values make it possible to establish a more generalized understanding of meaning in objects and its different sources. The meaning assigned to objects may vary according to individuals but the emotions to which these meanings are connected can be more stable.

Another expanded view of the functional approach is presented by Siefkes (2012) who states that there are two types of interactions: function-based interactions and meaning-based interactions. The first type again can be traced back to the ability to portray and understand affordances, the second can come in the form of memories, emotional attachment and habituation, emotional adaptation and comfort, social connotations or worth (Siefkes, 2012). This broad spectrum allows us to see that function is not the only way through which objects become meaningful in daily life and expands the definition beyond for example what is proposed by Krippendorff and Butter (2007).

In order to understand how artefacts, get their meaning, Siefkes (2012) proposes seven principles of semantization (principles of culturally shared meaning):

1. **Frame connection:** Frames organize information and knowledge of certain situations such as roles, actions, personality characteristics, artefacts, conditions, feelings.
2. **Style:** create information that is turned into signs, these stylistic meanings get connected with artefacts transferring certain properties and values (ex. Art deco style).
3. **Iconicity:** transfers meaning by bringing other things to mind through association, for example the form of an object can denote a plant giving it an association of being natural or eco, these associations are also interpreted as metaphors.
4. **Individual experiences:** present meaning as the result of personal memories and feelings connected to artefacts.
5. **Cultural allusions:** when meaning is assigned through description/narration or when the artefact itself cites other cultural works through allusion. This principle is connected to principle 2 since style can also express cultural allusions.

6. **Connection to social groups:** Connection to social groups: an artifact becomes related and takes the identity or opinion of a group
7. **Specific contexts:** the artefact takes the meaning defined by the rules of the context. For example, a collection of artefacts in a museum.

For Siefkes (2012), the process of semantization is expressed as a causative relation under which the fulfillment of a condition causes the sign relation representation. So, an artefact X when conditioned by the principle of semantization, takes some qualities, attributes, similarities, etc., exposed by the principle leading to the cause where X is reinterpreted in a new meaning. These principles already start to evidence a broader spectrum for the understanding of meaning. Especially the last three principles may be connected to the next approach to meaning in design that will be discussed.

3 | Empathic Meaning

In recent time design ideologies or frameworks are evolving from the originally introduced models that focus on the how of things passing to question the why of things. Previously, a relevant emphasis has been placed on form and aesthetics, the guiding principle for design was that of form follows function. Regardless, through consumer and consumption research it has become clear that the objects that surround us are more than just plain shapes and forms and that objects of design actually have a deeper influence in people's life. The profile of consumers has evolved to be more knowledgeable and involved in purchasing activities which has led them to favor purchases that are more emotional, experiential and meaningful.

One transitional view is the one presented by Kazmierczak (2003) who "redefines designs from finite, fixed objects of aesthetic and practical consideration to semiotic interfaces enabling the reconstruction of meaning by receivers". From this definition it is understood that the receiver has an essential participation in the construction of meaning but so does the designer who has the agency to not just design things but design thoughts. The designer's role in this process is to encode intended meaning into the design itself by choosing the correct sensory-cognitive cues to use as mechanisms to transfer it from the physical to the mental and create the desired response in the receiver.

According to Boradkar (2010) the purpose of design is to give meaning to the interactions we have with the world. In that sense, we can say that design and objects are not just functional but relational. They influence the interaction of the self with the environment, with others, and with the self on its own through a self-identity forming activity. This relational role of artefacts has also been proposed by Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) who say that objects "appear to be signs on a blueprint that represent the relation of man to himself, to his fellows, and to the universe". This interactive quality in the end tells us about the values, beliefs and even the culture of people and their environments. Meaning as understood under this third approach, is defined as the underlying sense, purpose or motivation of something.

According to Verganti (2016), one of the pioneers of Innovation of Meaning, this "is the next step in the innovation path of organizations". This type of innovation becomes relevant in today's

scenario where thanks to technological development and the increased spread of knowledge, there is no scarcity of ideas, instead there's an overabundance of them but a scarcity of meaningful directions. Giacomini (2017) has also pointed out the increase of Meaningfication in business. As implied by Verganti (2016), meaningfication implies the invitation to people to think in new ways about the value propositions that are available to them or that they would like to have available.

Verganti (2016) proposes a shift in how designers approach the discipline distancing from the idea of Human Centered Design (or Creative Problem Solving) since the emphasis is no longer to focus on people or users as carriers of problems that need solving, but instead to focus on proposing or creating new meaningful directions that people will love. "Innovation of meaning instead assumes that people have no clear need but an area of inquiry, of exploration, of clarification" (Verganti, 2016). Under this concept the idea is "not to improve how things are, but to change why we need them" (Verganti, 2016). Designing for meaning then becomes a reflective and reframing activity in which we question what are the things that are worth addressing, what problems need redefining, and how can that be done in ways that actually move people?

The main principles of innovation of meaning as opposed to those of innovation of solutions are that the first is related to the why of things, the second is related to the how. Another difference is that it goes from the inside-out vs outside-in as in innovation of solutions. The process starts from the designer or organization who have a general sense of malaise or a desire to change directions, from their values and visions of the world; the user is also a part of the process but not as a co-creator/ideator in the strict sense, but as an evaluator and a critic. This makes up for another important difference, innovation of meaning focuses on criticism and not ideation. The idea is to "clash and fuse" (Verganti, 2016), not ideas, but visions in order to get beneath the surface and get novel interpretations. It is through this critical process that the reframing activity becomes enriched.

By Meaning Verganti (2016) refers to "the purpose people try to achieve: why they do things". There are three types of purposes that meaning can have: Functional, symbolic and emotional. In that order, the first is about practicality and utilitarianism, the second about the communication of messages to others, and the third about the value that it represents to the self. These three purposes can be tied to the three primary categories in which meaning exists: function, ritual and myth (Ajovalasit and Giacomini, 2019).

Innovation of meaning can also be connected to other concepts such as the Blue Ocean introduced by (Chan Kin and Mauborgne, 2005). In this case what is similar is that what changes is the parameters of value for users and not merely some product features that compete on a Red Ocean level, innovation does not just offer something better but something more meaningful: interpretations instead of optimizations.

Other terms have become closely related to meaning, concepts like those studied and defined by Giacomini (2017) in the development of the Design for Meaning Framework: value, ideology, meaning, function, ritual, myth and metaphor, have been frequently used interchangeably to define meaning or talk about design for meaning. These concepts are not actual definitions of meaning but parts of it. In the framework they are organized so that they can help identify and answer the question about the main issues that affect the meaning of an artifact.

The Framework of Design for Meaning proposed by Giacomini (2017) presents an inverted pyramid that starts with the brand ideology and finishes with the specification of the final product, system or service. Within these two areas, the diagram is subdivided in two sides, one corresponding to artifacts that relate to existing technological or societal stereotypes and include the pre-existing categories of meaning and the other to the ones that need to define new meanings because of changing contexts (see figure 6). Artifacts can move from the first side to the second in a process that Giacomini (2017) describes as “meaningfication”. He defines the term as:

The use of data, design ethnography, real fictions and co-creation for the purpose of designing artefacts based on new meanings which emerge from the interconnection of evolving patterns of technology, experience, personal identity, societal identity, value assignation and consumption. (Giacomini, 2017)

In this framework, the categories of pre-existing meaning can bridge global meaning to the new one. The functional category deals more with physical and usability matters, the ritual with symbolic actions and behaviors, and the myth category with artefacts that are mainly symbolic in meaning and require reduced activity from the consumer.

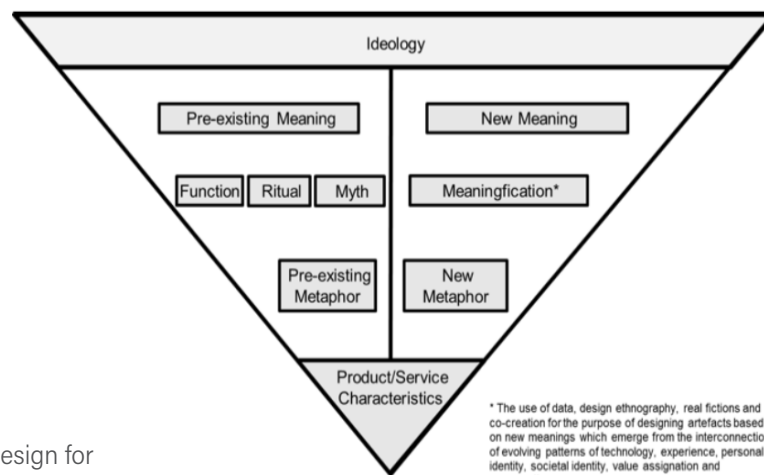


Figure 6: Framework of Design for Meaning (Giacomini, 2017).

To investigate the application of the Design for Meaning framework for categorizing the meaning of artefacts, Ajovalasit and Giacomini (2019) designed a test in which they exposed different commercial everyday artefacts to both designer and non-designer consumers so that they could classify them in either or several of the three categories of meaning while also using adjectives to describe how the meaning was manifested. The results showed that users can clearly attribute at least one of the 3 categories of meaning to each product and that there can be a disconnect or variation between the meaning that a designer attributes to a product and the meaning that a consumer or user attributes. In the studies performed by Ajovalasit

and Giacomini (2019), it is possible to evidence that consumers tend to attribute even more meanings than designers do since they also assign semiotic and symbol content to products based on their experiences and personal interpretations. What this tells us is that meaning can be fluid and variable and it can change according to demographic descriptors, the context of the user and the cultural context from which the object is born. It also supports the idea of making a shift from designing with a focus on how things should work to what they should mean and for involving users in the design process through user testing or methods such as Human Centered Design.

Figure 7 presents a summary of the three approaches presented above obtained from the study of the literature of design for meaning. As stated, these three approaches are complementary and do not exclude each other. It is important to keep each of them into account when approaching the design of meaning in products since they all influence design decisions and perceptions of products on the side of the consumer.

Focusing on meaning can help designers create more commercially successful products and can also make them more sustainable in the sense that they may create longer lasting relationships with their owners. Despite the potential of Meaning as one of the major drivers of innovation currently, one big challenge remains: even though meaning can be more sociological in nature thus making it easier for designers to have more control over it (Giacomini, 2017), they are also in constant change. Boradkar (2010) says that "meanings emerge and change continuously as people and things travel through their lives, constantly bumping into each other". This transformational / fluidity of meaning makes it harder to decant actual meaning in a rapidly changing society. Hence this makes us question whether we need to go back in time to evaluate the sources of meaning that have been built overtime, for example: culture.

Ultimately, meaning helps to create empathy with users and to connect with them at a deeper level making brands and companies more successful in establishing longer lasting bonds with consumers. The success of meaningful products or companies lies in the fact that they align with people's purposes more clearly and become a part of the definition of their identity and their visions.

Three Perspectives to Understand Design for Meaning


	Functional	Expressive	Empathic
Expressed in terms of	Product forms and perceptual cues: Color, shape, form, texture	Habits, symbolic actions (Rituals) and behaviors	New meaningful directions
Facilitated by	Affordances and semantics	Communication and Narratives	The underlying sense, purpose or motivation of things. Thoughts, Myth, beliefs and emotional attachments
Comes from	Interaction with artefacts,	Memories, emotional attachments, habituation	Values, beliefs and cultures of people and their environment
Assumptions	People need things	People want things	Why do people need or want things
Results in	Optimization	Connection	Interpretations
Role in	Utilitarian: Congruence between functionality of an object and user's practical needs	Experiential: Congruence between symbolic actions surrounding an object and user's expressive behaviour	Symbolic: Congruence between the symbolic capacity of an object and a user's self-concept
Understanding of meaning	Rigid	 Dynamic and fluid	

Figure 7: Summary of the Three Approaches to Understand Design for Meaning

From Meaning to Culture

In the previous chapter, the way in which products obtain meaning in general was discussed. In the following, the focus will be set particularly on cultural meaning.

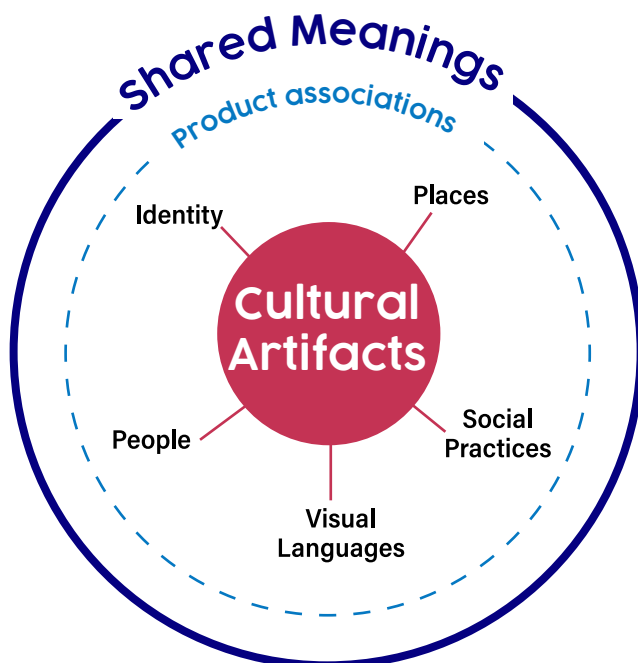
Exploring culture is relevant to understanding the attribution of meaning to products because they are tightly connected concepts. According to Ravasi and Rindova (2008), the symbolic value of a product is "determined by the social and cultural meanings associated with it that enable consumers to express individual and social identity through the product's purchase and use. Likewise, it is said that the construction of symbolic value is a cultural production process (Hatch, 1993). People give symbolic value to objects based on how the attributed meaning of them matches their self-concept. In this sense, meanings are in part rooted in personal experience and in part rooted in the meanings assigned to a product within a cultural context (Ravasi and Rindova, 2008).

According to Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, and Negus, (1997) two main significances for the word culture are usually found: the first in

terms of ways of life and the second in terms of the “production and circulation of meaning”. A definition that builds on the connection between culture and meaning and seconds the idea that meaning is intrinsic to the definition of culture, is the one presented by Williams (1961), he states that culture is *“a description of a particular way of life which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behavior”*.

The authors (Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, and Negus, 1997) speak of a ‘chain of meaning’ to refer to the fact that meanings are always the extension of another meaning which will, too, lead to another meaning. Even old meaning when interpreted in new ways can substantially create new ones; that is precisely the role of culture, to provide a reference for the creation of new meaning. “Belonging to a culture provides access to shared frameworks or “maps” of meaning which we use to place and understand things, to make sense of the world...” (Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, and Negus, 1997).

Giving shared meaning to objects is what makes them cultural artifacts. For example, the Sony Walkman is cultural because it is meaningful, and connects to social practices specific to a culture or lifestyle (listening to music on the way to work), it is also associated with certain people, identity, and places, becoming part of our visual languages. Additionally, it is related to the idea of ‘Japanese’ products with advanced electronics of precision and high quality and portrays other Japanese characteristics such as the use of ‘diminutive’ or miniaturization. Even if a stereotype, it helps to build the image of the product (Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, and Negus, 1997).



Cultural meaning consists of cultural categories which are created through cultural principles. Cultural Categories are “fundamental coordinates of meaning representing the basic distinctions that a culture uses to divide up the phe-nomenal world” (McCracken, 1986) for example class, status, gender, age, and occupation, occasion, flora, fauna, time, space. These categories organize the “culturally constituted world” (McCracken, 1986) in which people live. The interesting thing about cultural categories is that they both influence people and are influenced by them. While they are not visible in the strict sense, society conforms to these in practice while adding to their construction.

Cultural categories are created through cultural principles which are also representations of cultural meaning. They are “the organizing ideas by which the segmentation [into categories] is performed” (McCracken, 1986).

Figure 8: Cultural Artifacts and its Associations Based on the Description of Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, and Negus (1997).

2.1 Understanding Culture

Because of its ethereal and movable properties, defining culture has proven to be a challenge throughout time. Even today there is not a single agreed definition for the concept. Traditionally, the definition of culture has been linked to human development and progress, be it physically or intellectually. Later with the surge of nationalism, culture became associated with the ways of life of particular nations and people. The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity defines it as:

“the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs” (UNESCO, 2001).

Another broad definition can be taken from David Throsby (2004) who provides two directions to understand culture, the first is an anthropological way “to describe a set of attitudes, beliefs, modes, customs, values and practices which are common to or shared by any group”; and in functional terms “denoting certain activities that are undertaken by people, and the products of those activities, which have to do with the intellectual, moral and artistic aspects of human life” (Throsby, 2004).

Culture may also refer to:

“the sum of related knowledge or experiences that are formed and accumulated over the course of human and societal development [including the collection of] words, languages, architectures, foods, tools, skills, knowledges, customs, pieces of art and so on” (Yu, 2018).

2.2 The Object- Meaning- Context Relationship

An important part of culture theory is that of material culture. The latter is composed of artefacts which by definition are the objects produced by man. In history, artefacts have been studied as sources of knowledge and evidence of cultures that can no longer be seen or experienced. They are proof of development, social structures and identity, ways of living and rituals. Hence the awareness of understanding this process of cultural meaning transfer into objects.

Culture is experienced through behaviors, beliefs and symbols that include artifacts, clothing, tools and the like and make up what we call material culture. As established by McCracken (1986), material objects, goods, are one of the most important ways in which both cultural categories and principles are made visible. Their value rests in the fact that they make tangible cultural meaning. Consumer goods are particularly the most revealing form of categorization by encoding the principles that create that distinction. As put by McCracken (1986), “goods are both the creations and the creators of the culturally constituted world”. The components of the physical environments in which we inhabit are a vivid expression of cultural meanings that make up the world. This physical world helps to make evident the categories and principles that characterize culture (McCracken, 1986).

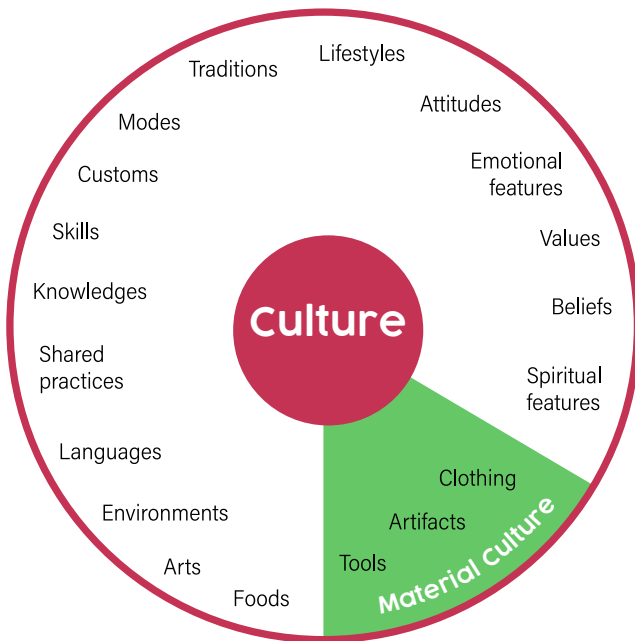


Figure 9: Understanding Culture: A Quick View of the Definitions of Culture

Artefacts have a complex cultural role, Siefkes (2012) states that as long as we don't understand the way in which artefacts gain meaning, we will never fully understand culture as a whole. To gain this understanding it would then be necessary to comprehend the process through which artefacts obtain meaning, that is the semantization process, also described as "culturally shared principles of meaning attribution" (Siefkes, 2012).

In order to find culturally shared meanings, one can look at cultural works and representations. This can provide insight of conventional meanings and also of more specific cultural representations of a given context. An artifact's sign content can be created from spontaneous association or context-dependent factors, then conventionalized to different degrees starting by a few people and afterwards culturally semantized, which is when the meaning spreads to a whole culture (Siefkes, 2012).

To illustrate this concept Siefkes (2012) proposes the example of an umbrella with the conventional meaning of protection and love. In this case the product category has been semantized by adopting a given meaning in a given culture. Such is the case of umbrellas in Japan representing the practice of *amigasa*. Materials, forms and color can also serve as modes to semantize an artifact for example black has the association of elegant or somber.

Human-Centered Design prompts to view meaning from the perspective of the user. Designers may not impose their own conception but should try to step on the user's side to understand their views of the world from their own context. This approach is what Krippendorff and Butter (2007) call second-order understanding, or the understanding of the understanding of the other. According to Krippendorff and Butter (2007) the meaning of artefacts derives from the contexts in which they exist, the affordances that they give users and the narratives and expectations they propose. It is not to be confused with experience, since it is actually the result of experience and the externalization of it, of how people see, feel, describe and interact with artefacts in different ways. To understand meaning then, one must not see products in terms of physicality or just forms but in terms of experiential interfaces that propose a sequence of use and sensory stimulation to create a desired experience. One example given by the author is the design of eating utensils; in order to create them one must understand how they "support cultural practices of their users", for instance chopsticks, forks, or eating with the hands are all different but meaningful interfaces (Krippendorff and Butter, 2007).

In the meaning attribution process Siefkes (2012) also makes a distinction between intended sign content and the received sign content. This connects back to the study of Kazmierczak (2003) that speaks about the designer-object-person relationship and the separation between the meaning that a designer may want to transmit and the way it is actually perceived by the receiver. Keeping in mind the dynamic character of meaning and the variability of its

interpretations make even more relevant for the designer to choose the correct properties and features that make intended meaning plausible.

Design objects are cognitive interfaces that coexist with cultural codes from the collective and individual environment and allow for the transfer of concepts by spatial means. How the receiver/user perceives the content or message of an artifact can also be influenced by schemas or mental structures that organize individual thought, regardless it is not just dependent on preconceptions but also on experience, the environment and cultural models. According to Kazmierczak (2003) meaning is "a derivative of our connection with the environment". The setting serves as a frame of reference that will ultimately influence how an object is interpreted by the receiver, or in other words, their reconstructed meaning.

Context is also a determinant factor of meaning which helps to provide or alter it as well as to explain it. "The meanings of an artifact are manifest in the set of contexts into which a community of its stakeholders places them – deliberately, i.e. to a degree better than chance" (Krippendorff and Butter, 2007). The choice of placing an object in a certain context can speak about the meaning given to it by the stakeholders. For example, the cultural differences of users can vary the possible acceptable contexts in which an object can exist. Likewise, when taken out of contexts, some artifacts may change or lose their meaning completely and at the same time a context can impose meanings over an artefact. The degree of influence of context can be somewhat controlled through the amount of detail included in a design, "as the artifact exhibits more details about its identity, it becomes increasingly resistant to contextual determinations" (Krippendorff and Butter, 2007).

Contexts can also become backgrounds that go unnoticed especially when they are "successful" or pervasive. "Within any one culture, how artifacts relate to a culture's grand narratives is typically backgrounded, unnoticed from within" (Krippendorff and Butter, 2007). A way to make this background visible is through comparison. For example, Scandinavian design and Japanese design as national identities may not be distinguished from within but when looked at one through the other's eye the richness of narrative becomes clearer (Krippendorff and Butter, 2007).

Another way in which contexts can affect the meaning of artifacts is through metaphors, in this case contextual and visual metaphors instead of linguistic ones. In such cases familiarity (the vehicle of the metaphor) "enables experiences from the context of the source of a non-linguistic metaphor to inform the perception of what can be done in the context of its target" (Krippendorff and Butter, 2007). In the end, the existence of metaphors renders artefacts easier to understand.

Since the environment influences how receivers view objects, it is important for designers to understand this lens as well so that they can strategically use it to modify or implement changes on their designs and set the right contextual frame for the interpretation of their designs. Through this semiotic process, interpreting symbols and creating new relationships through the proper organization of data and sensory cues, objects become products of communication and stimuli for cognition.

Designers need to be aware of context variability and be able to guide their choices accordingly to the design intention. Surrounding conditions, generally those of the user, must always be

considered when designing meaning into objects. About this, Krippendorff and Butter (2007) say that to know what things mean to others, "much needs to be known about the stakeholders involved, the culture in which that something is contextualized, the rules governing its context of use, and, most importantly, what the people who are part of that context tell each other about what its use means to them". In summary specific attention should be given to contexts, stakeholders and narratives in order to understand meaning in artefacts.

In sum, the process of meaning creation is a dynamic that results from the link of 3 agents: a designer, a design and a receiver or user/consumer. This is what Kazmierczak (2003) proposes as the definition of meaning: "a thought induced in the receiver, which is originated by the contact with a design". The three agents must all exist inside the shared circle of a context that we will call culture. This relationship is visualized in the figure below.

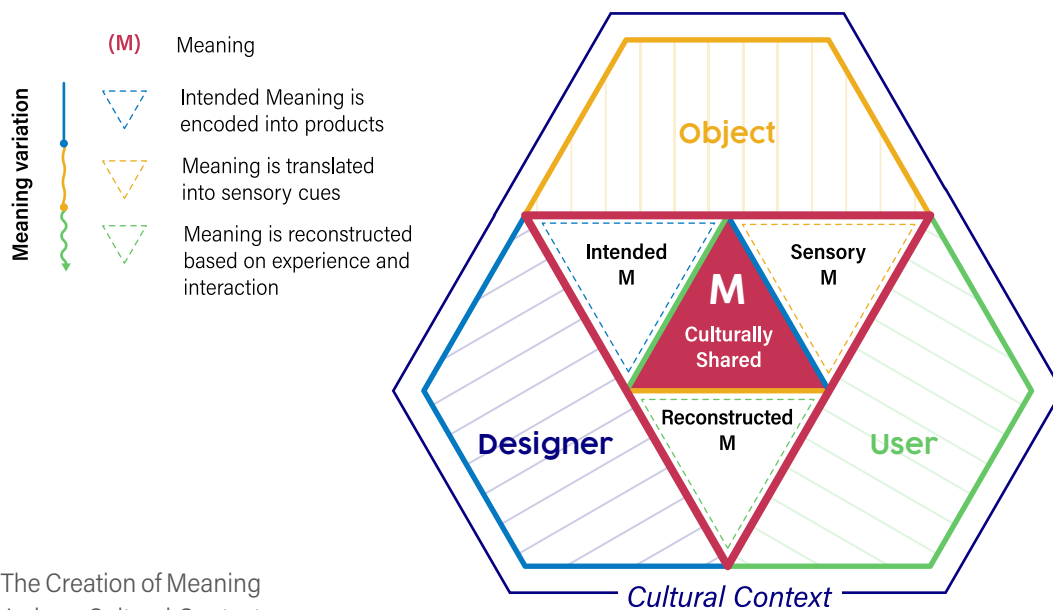


Figure 10: The Creation of Meaning Under a Cultural Context

2.3 The Creation And Transfer Of Cultural Meaning

Meaning rests in the culturally constituted world but to make it evident it has to be transferred into the tangible world. Research has explored how this process of creation of cultural meaning happens and its transmission to people across a culture. Ravasi and Rindova (2008) and McCracken (1986) provide a similar vision into this process.

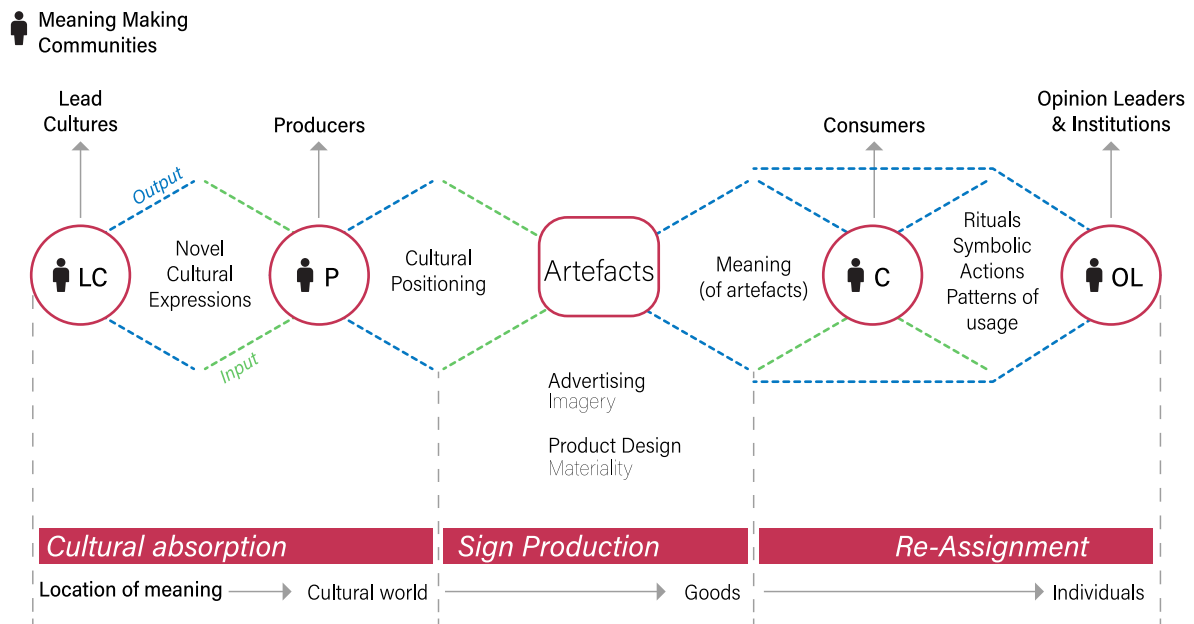


Figure 11: Symbolic Value Creation: A Process of Cultural Production (Adapted from Ravasi and Rindova, 2008 and Mckracken, 1986).

Ravasi and Rindova (2008) studied the creation of meaning or “symbolic value creation” as a process of cultural production. This process is made up of three processes itself, cultural absorption, production of signs, and re-assignment, that link together five communities: lead cultures, producers, symbol creation experts (designers and advertisers), institutional intermediaries (media and critics), and consumers.

1 | Cultural Absorption

The first step, Absorption, consists of a deep learning activity to detect novel cultural expressions from lead cultures. In order to really recognize cultural changes, it is expected that the producers immerse and interact within the lead cultures. The outcome of this first stage is the establishment of cultural positioning, that is the “stance an organization takes towards the web of meanings that define what products are and how they are used both functionally and symbolically” (Ravasi and Rindova, 2008).

In this step, Lead cultures are the first communities involved in the creation of meaning; they are usually sub-cultures with opinions that vary from those of the established structure. They serve as potential sources of new symbols and expressions. In a similar fashion, McCracken (1986), refers to this community as radical groups that stand outside of the limits of society's cultural norms to reform cultural meaning. He catalogues them as one of the instruments of meaning transfer in product design.

2 | Production of Signs

The second stage, Sign Production, deals with the transfer of meaning through its encoding into artifacts with symbolic significance and sensory effects. The term ‘significance’ in design is used to describe the process through which forms obtain meaning from how they are used or the roles they play, becoming parts of rituals until they become icons (Ravasi and Rindova, 2008).

The community of sign producers, Producers and experts, have the resources to gather and transfer meanings to create value for artifacts (Ravasi and Rindova, 2008). It includes both advertising, which offers imagery that allows users to make associations, and product design that represents these associations materially. The latter are both instruments of Meaning transfer from the cultural world to goods (McCracken, 1986).

Through advertising, the culturally constituted world can be evoked by choosing the categories and principles to be represented thus connecting symbolic properties to artifacts. This choosing process is done by the advertiser/director who must consider the meanings that are closer to what the user seeks. By setting the good into the constructed world of the advertising, the object no longer stands alone but obtains the cultural meaning attributed to its surroundings by the consumer, they become equivalent in meaning. The visual aspects guide this process of equivalence while the verbal ones make explicit the meaning properties expected for transfer. One could say that both the sum of the product plus the advertising (including the agents involved) are the main components from which consumers can draft a picture of a brand and its meaning.

After meaning is transferred from the culturally constituted world to goods, the process of transfer from the good to the individual consumer begins. The meaning in goods is transferred to consumers through a different instrument: Rituals or symbolic action. In rituals, meaning is taken from the good by the individual and given as McCracken (1986) calls it "experiential reality". There are four different types of rituals or stages that make this transfer possible (McCracken, 1986). First, exchange, in which symbolic properties are insinuated to the recipient by the giver; second, possession, by which the owner claims some of the properties given to an object, and the object becomes a marker of an occasion, third, grooming, in which the properties of an object are heightened or renewed and fourth, divestment rituals, where the meaning of a "used" good are erased and redrawn by the new owner.

Consumers are co-creators of symbolic value (Ravasi and Rindova, 2008), because in the end, it is them who finalize the process of meaning transfer through their interpretations.

In the process of transmission of meaning from the good to the individual, the person appropriates the meaningful properties of objects thus contributing to the construction of their personal world of goods that portray their experience and their self-definition.

3 | Re-assignment

Lastly, the reassignment stage refers to the "collective manipulation of the meaning of objects" (Ravasi and Rindova, 2008) in the hands of consumers and a particular subset of them, opinion leaders. The latter, influence the acceptance of denial of products therefore influencing their symbolic value. McCracken (1986) also refers to Opinion Leaders or Influencers, as they can be called today, as an instrument of transfer of meaning from the cultural world to goods in product design. These kinds of consumers "help shape and refine existing cultural meaning, encouraging the reform of cultural categories and principles" (McCracken, 1986). They absorb cultural innovations, values and lifestyles and pass them along to those who imitate them. The final community of Institutional intermediaries can be set within this stage. They affect the interpretation of products for producers and therefore also for consumers.

Even though the symbolic value creation process cannot be limited to a single one of these

processes or communities, the part that involves creation experts and sign production can play an important role in shaping the process. These actors so should rethink how they approach the concept of value, resources, capabilities, and innovation by looking beyond economical and technical sources of value and investing in strategies for decoding cultural codes and boosting the symbolic value of their products.

2.4 Cultural Innovation: New Sources of Value and Strategy

Evidently, performance and technology have accounted as one of the main ways to generate value historically. Regardless, this perspective has clouded the exploration of other sources of differentiation such as cultural significance. In truth, the application of culturally informed strategies can also lead to the creation of value reflected on their effect on consumption practices. Consumers actually care for cultural meanings and for what products signify and not just for what they do.

Ravasi, Rindova, and Dalpiaz (2012) propose a cultural perspective on value creation based on cultural meaning systems. According to them, there are **three core aspects of culturally informed value creation: the search for cultural innovation, the development of cultural capital and the development of cultural intent**. We will review these aspects in detail in parallel with Holt and Cameron's (2010, 2012) related work on Cultural Brand Strategy.

1 | Cultural Innovation

Products acquire cultural significance when the focus shifts from technological innovation to cultural innovation providing users with new experiences, practices and opportunities for identity forming. Focusing on cultural innovation changes the strategic implications for companies since, in the first place, it makes product form design key for the development of associations through sensory cues, second, it changes the approach to product development by relying more heavily on the expertise of designers and third it leads to the development of new roles that protect the cultural qualities and integrity of artistic choices in products (Ravasi, Rindova, and Dalpiaz, 2012). One example shared by the authors (Ravasi, Rindova, and Dalpiaz, 2012) that reflect these implications is the Italian brand Alessi. Through the collaboration with designers, they transformed conventional products for the kitchen into a designer market giving new cultural meanings to objects such as kettles, coffee makers, wine openers.

"A cultural innovation is a brand that delivers an innovative cultural expression" (Holt, 2012).

Cultural Innovation (Holt and Cameron 2010) is the starting point for a Cultural Brand Strategy. This concept is defined as a "distinctive approach to strategy, informed by theories of culture, society, and politics" (Holt, 2012). This approach can lead to the development and boost of new businesses. To get a clearer idea of what Holt and Cameron (2010) refer to, think of companies like Coca-Cola, Virgin, Dove, or Starbucks. These companies have advocated better ideologies changing the meaning of what their products stand for and thus getting ahead in their respective categories. Unlike disruptive innovation that focuses on adding

value within existing categories specially through the introduction of over-the-top features, Cultural Innovation, doesn't necessarily require vast altering to products or tangible features but instead, to its ideological point of view (Holt, 2012).

Holt and Cameron provide a strategic framework model (see Figure 12) with the process brands follow when practicing cultural innovation. To pursue Cultural Innovation, brands must be on the lookout for Ideological Opportunities (Holt and Cameron, 2010) that will help the brand stand beyond competitors. These situations emerge at specific moments of history and society when new conditions surge and the established market no longer matches the cultural conventions of consumers, opening the space to introduce new cultural expressions. Social disruptions generate the space for new ideological opportunities that break with the homogeneity of the dominant cultural expressions or as termed in the framework "Cultural Orthodoxy" (Holt and Cameron, 2010).

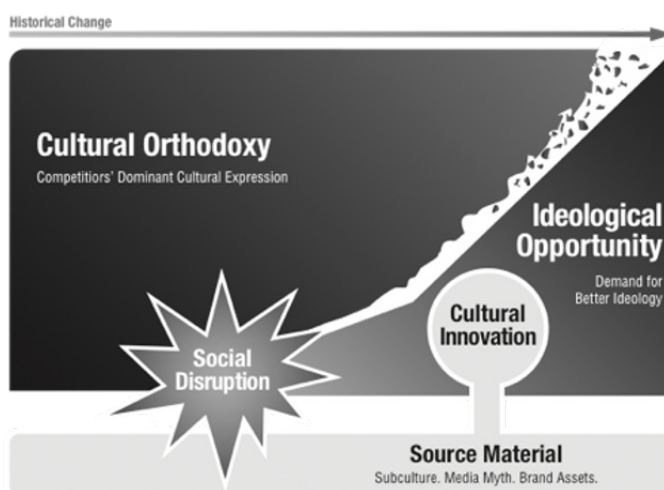


Figure 12: Conceptual framework of cultural brand strategy (Holt and Cameron, 2010)

Cultural innovations generate three kinds of value (Holt, 2012): Symbolic value, related to identity, purpose, and aspiration. Social value, related to status and ideals. Lastly, Functional Halo, Functional benefits can also be social constructs influenced by the prior two types of value creating a perception of increased functionality, quality, and trustworthiness.

2 | Cultural Capital

Developing a cultural perspective on value creation calls for the gathering of new types of knowledge stocks or as termed by Ravasi, Rindova, and Dalpiaz (2012), cultural capital. Only through the development of cultural knowledge, cultural resources can be identified and exploited properly to create the right meaning associations to products. Cultural resources, concepts, artefacts, symbols, practices and forms of expressions, are openly available to anyone for interpretation, hence the key to cultural innovation is not just the direct application of this resources but the distinct organizational capacity to identify, develop and integrate them with other resources.

Cultural resources can be taken from the study of values and lifestyles. Since cultural change is often cyclical, old cultural resources can regain value and become relevant again within present lifestyles. This cyclical pattern of culture allows us to look back into tradition to get informed on the present.

Cultural expressions exist across society and help to define and guide different existential constructs such as identity, belonging, recognition, and status. According to Holt (2012) consumers value product offerings as cultural expressions but only few companies manage their offers in the same terms. In fact, it is only when brands deliver innovative cultural expressions that they become iconic and powerful and established as shared cultural symbols.

Cultural Expressions become ideologies that enter culture when presented through myth and cultural codes. These three components can be defined as follows (Holt, 2012):

- **Ideology:** Is a perspective on cultural constructs that becomes normalized by society or segments of it and guide people's actions. Brands with an ideology make those points of view essential to their products.
- **Myth:** They make ideology comprehensible, visceral and relatable by communicating it through instructive stories.
- **Cultural Codes:** They are cultural content with established meanings in culture that help people to resonate, experience and understand intended meanings.

This new knowledge stocks are similarly defined by Holt (2012) as Source Material which cultural innovations adapt and repurpose to leverage on ideological opportunity. It comes in the following forms: subcultures, media myths, and brand assets. Subcultures are groups that foster an opposing and alternative ideology to that of the cultural orthodoxy. Media Myths are usually in the form of popular culture products like news, movies, books, music, magazines, sports. Brand Assets refer to company assets with a cultural potential, including business practices and historic cultural expression. The transformation of these Source Material into design corresponds to the creative side of cultural innovation and the final stage of cultural brand strategy. Some traditional sources of cultural expression according to Holt (2012) are religion, the state, arts, education, and institutions, more modern sources are the mass media and the market.

One example of the successful extraction of cultural resources presented by Ravasi, Rindova, and Dalpiaz (2012), is Starbucks. The brand borrowed resources from the Italian coffee bar and the concept of espresso. Later it introduced new coffee-related cultural resources such as the imagery of exotic coffee plantations and the development of a unique coffee drinks language. These resources also lead to the transformation of organizational practices such as the training of baristas on the history of coffee.

3 | Cultural Intent

Cultural intent is the definition of "explicit strategy about how to develop cultural knowledge and how to organize to integrate cultural resources within the existing organizational practices and processes" (Ravasi, Rindova, and Dalpiaz, 2012) to achieve the cultural positioning of products. Cultural intent should also consider the expansion of cultural strategies beyond the cultural context in which they are created.

Cultural Innovation in Comparisson

The study of culture as a source of innovation and its characteristics as compared to more traditional sources of innovation can be briefly summarized in the chart below:

Cultural Innovation vs. Technological Innovation	
Strategy informed by theories of culture	Strategy informed by technological advancements
Output focuses on sensory cues	Output focuses on internal performance
Higher dependance on Designer expertise	Higher dependance on technology engineers
Promotes new roles to protect cultural qualities of products	Maintains traditional roles structures focused on performance quality control
Focuses on changing ideological points of view	Focuses on the introduction of over-the-top features and tanngible product alters

Figure 13: A Parallel Between Cultural Innovation and Technological Innovation.

Literature Review

The Link ⁽⁰³⁾ between Culture and Design

Design and culture are interlaced and complimentary to one another.

As a cultural industry, design plays an important role in the dissemination of culture. Throughout the development of society, culture has served as the basis for the elaboration of product design in its different shapes.

Cultural traits can help communicate and preserve traditional aesthetic values of a culture, help products stand out amongst competitors and also provide new layers of meaning to products that help engage consumers (Ajovalasit and Wang, 2020).

This is important because, nowadays, it has become more common for consumers to purchase goods because of symbolic and emotional meaning and not just practicality (Ajovalasit and Wang, 2020). As mentioned earlier, this trend has resulted in the shift from technological or functional innovation to cultural innovation-based products. Culture provides borderless inspiration and brings diversity to design. Likewise, designs grounded on culture-based

research tend to be more successful. Brands now do not only compete at a technological level but also need to consider emotional and symbolic characteristics that will allow them to permeate the life of consumers in order to be truly successful.

Likewise, culture brings diversity and perspective to design and allows it to connect at a human level to people that goes beyond the practical. Integrating culture into design provides space for the development of narratives around them. Culture can be a factor of competitiveness that when matched with the right level of understanding of user needs, values and behavior, and the proper technological development, may lead to novel ideas. For designers, culture represents the basis of design which informs a product's concept, form, function and interactions, since it borrows from the patterns of values, ideals, trends, lifestyles, environments and human relationships that it portrays (Rubin, 2012). Designers as intermediaries of culture should take it as a resource for innovation and strive to make their creations more appropriate for their cultural contexts or that of their audiences.

Diehl and Christiaans, (2006) have distinguished seven areas that regard cultural diversity and product design. The first 3 are user related while the last 4 are designer related. Aesthetics (preference for designs), semantics (interpretation of products) and human-product interaction (use of products) correspond to the user related side. Design process (methodology, procedures), design education (transfer of design knowledge), Strategy (marketing products in other cultures) and designers (cultural influence on the designer) form the designer related side.

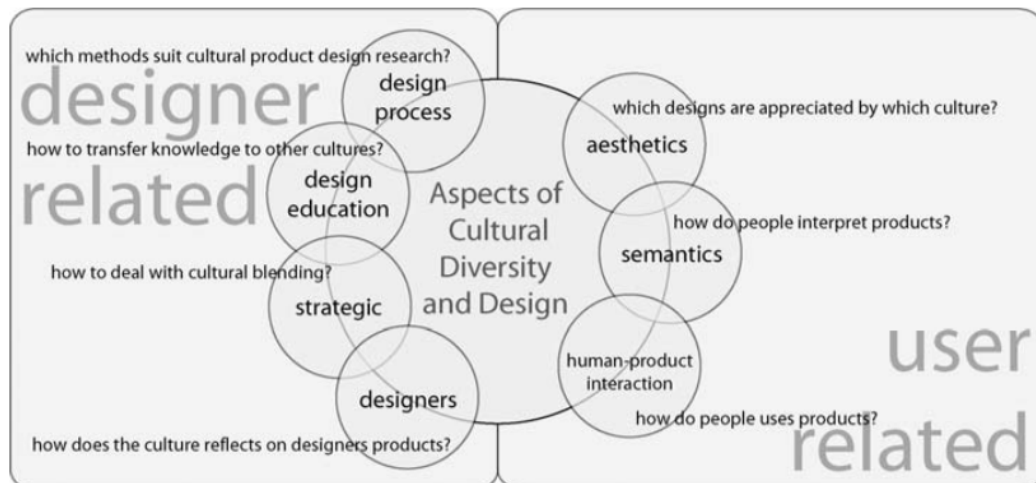


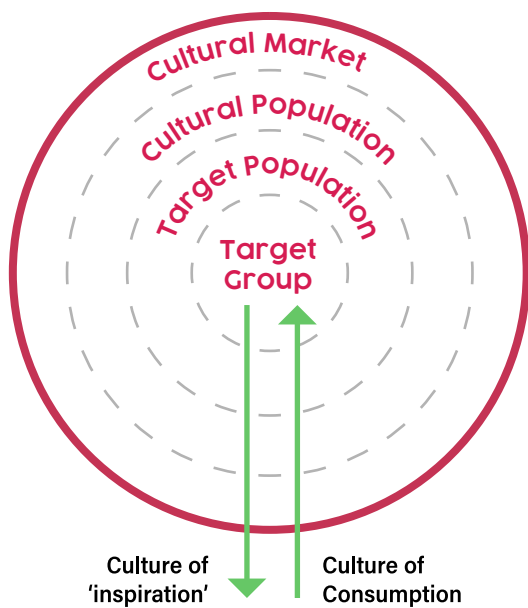
Figure 14: Mapping of Areas on Cultural Diversity and Design (Diehl and Christiaans, 2006)

3.1 Cultural And Cross-Cultural Design

Cultural Design refers to *“the consideration and implementation of a target market’s cultural elements into a product design for greater aesthetic, functional and emotional acceptance (Rubin, 2012).* Culturally relevant designs are embedded with cultural significance which gives products a unique character.

Cultural Design should be based on cross-cultural market research that bridges the knowledge gap between the maker and the user by focusing on the understanding of people and their perceptions to then translate these values into design inspiration.

Doing cultural design implies a flexibility in the focus of target populations going from the general to the specific. When creating cultural products, this target becomes twofold. It should consider both the culture of ‘inspiration’ as well as the culture of consumption. To avoid falling into repetition or copy, stereotypes, or general cultural appropriation, the culture of inspiration should be studied from within, starting from specifics related to the cultural target group. An opposite approach applies to the culture of consumption or users if the purpose is the expansion of the market for this kind of products and their alignment with market trends, beyond niche consumption groups.



Rubin (2012) summarizes four market segments with a varying degree of specification:

- **Cultural Market:** broader market including population, competition, economic, political, environmental and geographic contexts.
- **Cultural Population:** the demographics within the target cultural market.
- **Target Population:** the group/s of the cultural population that are potential users of a product.
- **Target Group:** Specific group from the target population classified by similar characteristics beyond the demographics such as tastes, lifestyles or even stereotypes.

Figure 15: Target Shifts in Cultural Product Design (Adapted from Rubin, 2012).

A more specific branch of cultural design is that of cross-cultural design. *“Cross-cultural design speaks to the ability of design, products, designers, or design-producing entities to traverse cultural boundaries (Tai, 2008).”* Design can carry diverse cultural values across specific contexts and also communicate common contemporary values shared by different cultures. In this perspective, design constitutes a universal language of communication based on aesthetics and function and a medium of cultural exchange.

3.2 The Cultural Economy: Cultural Products and Industries

1 | The Cultural Economy

In Scott's (2004) terms, the cultural economy is *"represented by sectors (equivalently, cultural-products industries) that produce goods and services whose subjective meaning, or, more narrowly, sign-value to the consumer, is high in comparison with their utilitarian purpose"*.

Place marketing and the exploitation of heritage are means to extract symbolic assets and resources from local traditions and cultural idiosyncrasies to generate local economic growth (Scott, 2004). The final goal of these activities is to leverage on the prestige and image of a particular place to attract both investment and skilled labor which can also generate benefits in terms of jobs creation and regeneration of communities. For some countries, the cultural economy is now one of the greatest drivers of economic growth and employment (Scott, 2004). This is specially the case in larger cities with a higher presence of cultural product industries but can also apply to other geographical contexts in which local resources are available and effectively managed. Scott (2004) also suggests that "although most development based on cultural-products industries will in all likelihood continue to occur in the world's richest countries, a number of low and middle-income countries are finding that they too are able to participate in various ways in the new cultural economy".

Culturally oriented goods can be a means to attract consumers, in fact, the transformation of cultural elements has become more common in recent product development. The cultural features present in cultural products contribute to the definition of a differentiated product identity in a global market. This effect on brand image is directly linked with consumer's perception of value and consumption choices. Additionally, cultural production is now more widely available to consumers who also show an amplified appreciation for cultural products, local or imported. This process is influenced by the notion that "the more individuals consume cultural products the more they accumulate knowledge" (Aiello and Cacia, 2014).

2 | Cultural Products

Cultural product design is a *"process of rethinking or reviewing cultural features and then redefining the process in order to design a new product to fit into society and satisfy consumers via culture and esthetic"* (Lin et al., 2007). Cultural products have a strong connection to cultural values and can be defined as *"a society's creative expression and artistic forms, as well as its traditional knowledge and practices, which reflect a living culture and express the distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group"* (Aiello and Cacia, 2014).

Cultural products may sometimes not have a clear utilitarian function since they mainly have an expressive and aesthetic purpose (Hirsch, 1972) and even a social objective. "For these kinds of products, the creation, preservation, enhancement and transmission of a specific culture play a vital role of embedding a particular aesthetic and symbolic content in the cultural and consumption experience they offer" (Artico and Tamma, 2015). Cultural products carry along heavy symbolic features and meanings which gives them an additional level of value, differentiation and signification, beyond their economic and commercial value. The immaterial quality of these values also makes their attribution highly subjective.

According to Broude (2005) a product can be cultural first, by means of the culture of its production, second through the culture of its consumption and lastly, as a part of the cultural identity of the place of origin. In other words, cultural value in a product may derive from the product itself or from considering the producer, the process of production, or its consumption and its impacts on regional identity.

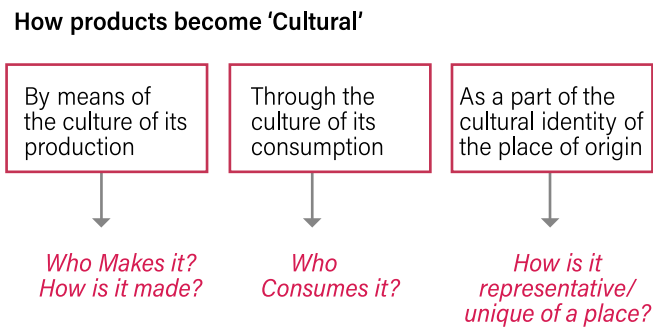


Figure 16: The Means by Which Products Become Cultural (Adapted from Broude 2005)

This cultural value may come from their history, symbols, aesthetics, function, origin and authenticity or spirituality, to mention a few characteristics. According to Artico and Tamma (2015), the substance of a place of origin including its artistic and historical content can be transferred conceptually (the meaning of the product), intrinsically (sensory and physical aspects) and extrinsically (verbally communicated).

3 | Cultural Product-Based Companies

On the other hand, *Cultural product-based companies are those that "put culture at the core of their offering"* (Artico and Tamma, 2015). The output of a cultural enterprise can be either a service or manufactured product, always with strong artistic and cultural content. In some cases, this type of companies can go beyond the use of cultural elements in their product development and also become active participants of cultural initiatives and activities at a marketing or philanthropic level with the aim of preserving and making more visible their cultural association. Generally speaking, cultural enterprises should make efforts to attain cultural growth within their community.

Cultural-product industries have three main features that tie them together (Scott, 2004). First, they emphasize on the conception of semiotic and aesthetic content. Second, a higher rate of the consumption of its output is related to the expansion of disposable income (Engels' Law). Third, they tend to cluster in specialized hubs to resist competitive pressure and facilitate their presence in global markets.

Cultural-product industries are usually composed by small producers with flexible specializations or neo-artisanal forms of production and complementary activities. These industries have a tendency to cluster into hubs that allow for the creation of wider production networks, composed by smaller firms but with increased innovative energies (Scott, 2004). These agglomerations also facilitate the distinction of local cultural symbologies that give

authenticity to their design production and at the same time facilitate their connection to larger global hubs of production, making it an important feature of the cultural economy.

3.3 Cultural Sustainability

Culture and business are generally understood as seemingly separate worlds. In reality they are highly interconnected and can generate opportunities for growth and innovation (Artico and Tamma, 2015). A better understanding of this relationship and the investment of companies in culture can lead to the generation of valuable resources. "With their contribution to conservation, regeneration and exploitation of culture and cultural heritage, companies can create both economic and social value" (Artico and Tamma, 2015). This is the approach of the Shared Value Theory presented by Porter (2011) that suggests for businesses to go beyond profit only, to focus on the attainment of benefits at a social level within their context of action. "The concept of shared value can be defined as policies and operating practices that enhance the competitiveness of a company while simultaneously advancing the economic and social conditions in the communities in which it operates" (Porter and Kramer, 2011).

Cultural sustainability seeks the preservation of heritage and culture for future generations as well as the communities and knowledge involved in cultural production. The concept of cultural sustainability was proposed initially by David Throsby (1995) and refers to the consistent preservation of local cultural forms through generations. According to this author, the movement of cultural capital maintains diversity and vitality. Cultural and economic sustainable development can be pursued through Traditional Culture Properties (TCPs) which are rooted in historical beliefs, customs and practices and help to maintain the cultural identity of a community. In its original definition proposed by Parker and King (1995) the term applies to properties as in sites, in the frame of the present research it will be also applied to properties as goods. The products that present these properties can communicate underlying traditional culture by representing its geographies, ways of life and other ethic characteristics. Applying TCPs into abstract, modern and innovative product traits can lead to cultural design that is more aligned with the needs of younger generations, thus improving the flow of cultural capital (Qin, Song and Tian, 2019).

Cultural products have the capacity to influence a consumer's perception and interest towards their place of origin. This is especially true when they are well designed and carry along unique local identities in novel ways beyond a superficial level. Likewise, "novel traits of product design can encourage the consumption of cultural products on a large scale" (Qin, Song and Tian, 2019).

One way to reach novel portrayals of culture in products is through the exploitation of inner intangible levels of cultural capital. The inner level mentioned is part of the cultural model map presented by Siu (2005). This model is used to describe how people interpret cultural meaning in product design through three levels, an inner one based on intangible concepts and meanings, an intermediate one related to behaviors and activities, and an outer, superficial one based on visual symbols. Regions can use their intangible differentiators as a way to preserve their distinctiveness in a globalized world (Clifton, 2011). These immaterial qualities, when expressed in products, have the potential to guide their success in the marketplace by connecting to consumers in terms of what they stand for.

Connecting ⁽⁰⁴⁾ Cultural And Design Features

4.1 Cultural Models and Classification of values

One way to approach the understanding of cultural meaning is through the understanding of cultural values. The latter refer to the shared ideas, modes of conduct, and desirable goals that distinguish a culture.

There are some classifications of values based on how each different nation prioritizes universal values like the **Schwartz's (1994) cultural-level value system that emphasizes 7 value types**: Conservatism, Intellectual Autonomy, Affective Autonomy, Hierarchy, Egalitarian Commitment, Mastery, Harmony.

Accordingly, in their research of Cultural Values and Important Possessions, Watson, Lysonski, Gillan and Raymore, (2002) applied Schwartz's (1994) Value Theory to evaluate the cross-cultural variation in the meaning of favorite possessions among

New Zealanders and Americans. According to them, “the private meanings associated with important possessions should reflect dominant cultural values” (Watson, Lysonski, Gillan and Raymore, 2002). Using Schwartz’s theory, they evaluated how consumers prioritized certain values making hypothesis’ like for example, Americans, that value individuating more, could prefer art objects that are rarer in order to express their own individuality, or New Zealanders who have a higher level of affective autonomy and harmony might value possessions more based on enjoyment and connection with nature and environment.

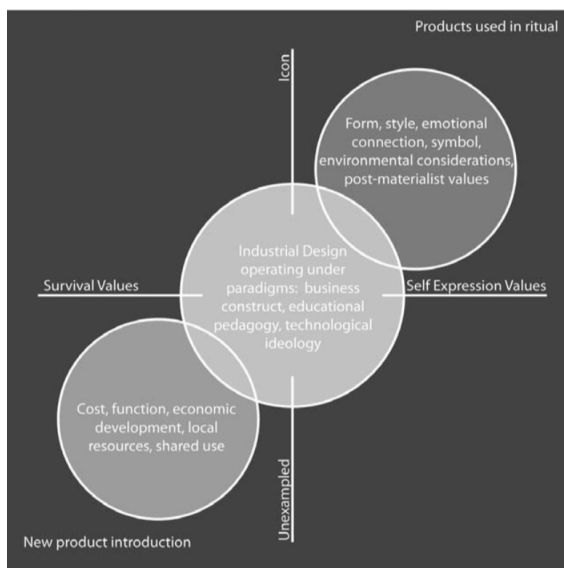


Figure 17: The Effect of Worldview on Industrial Design (Kiefer, 2008)

Kiefer (2008) also suggests a relation between ‘worldview’ and product design reflected on a 2-axis matrix.

The horizontal matrix refers to whether a country is more heavily influenced by survival or by their values of self-expressions (taken from the the Inglehart-Welzel Cultural Map of the World) and a vertical axis that opposes unexampled (new products and concepts) vs icon (culturally integrated) products.

This matrix provides a broad systemic approach to setting a product concept in relation to the context of a country and what it values at a general level. For example, if a product is placed in the bottom left corner, cost and function are more valued, whereas in the top-right corner, symbolism, form and style are more important. This quadrant is related to user experience and storytelling.

Hofstede’s Dimensions of Culture

One of the most relevant cultural models on national culture studied in the field of cultural research is the one presented by Hofstede. It consists of six dimensions that distinguish countries based on their preferences towards each of the spectrums of the dimensions. The six dimensions are described as follows (Hofstede, 2001):

1. **Power Distance:** Extent of acceptance and expectation of the unequal distribution of power in the culture. Societies with high power distance accept hierarchical organization more easily while those with low power distance try to find justification for the distribution of power and equalize its distribution. Power distance is high in Latin, Asian and African cultures.
2. **Individualism vs. collectivism:** The extent to which individuals are integrated into groups or not and how tightly or loosely knit their sense of community is. Individualism prevails in Western cultures; Collectivism is strong in Eastern cultures and Latin cultures.
3. **Masculinity vs. Femininity:** Masculinity represents an emphasis in a culture on success,

achievement and assertiveness while femininity an emphasis on caring, modesty, and cooperation. Masculinity is high in Anglo Saxon cultures while Femininity is high in Latin and Asian cultures.

4. **Uncertainty Avoidance:** Has to do with how cultures deal with the unknown, with uncertainty and ambiguity. Societies with high uncertainty avoidance have more rigid beliefs and rules while the opposite type of societies are more relaxed and focus more on practice than rules. Uncertainty avoidance is high in Latin, Germanic and Japanese cultures.
5. **Long term vs. short term orientation:** Short term-oriented cultures are more likely to stick to tradition and be averse to change while long term cultures are more pragmatic and forward thinking.
6. **Indulgence vs. Restraint:** Indulgent societies favor instant gratification and enjoyment while the opposite are more restrictive of gratification and more likely to set stricter social norms.

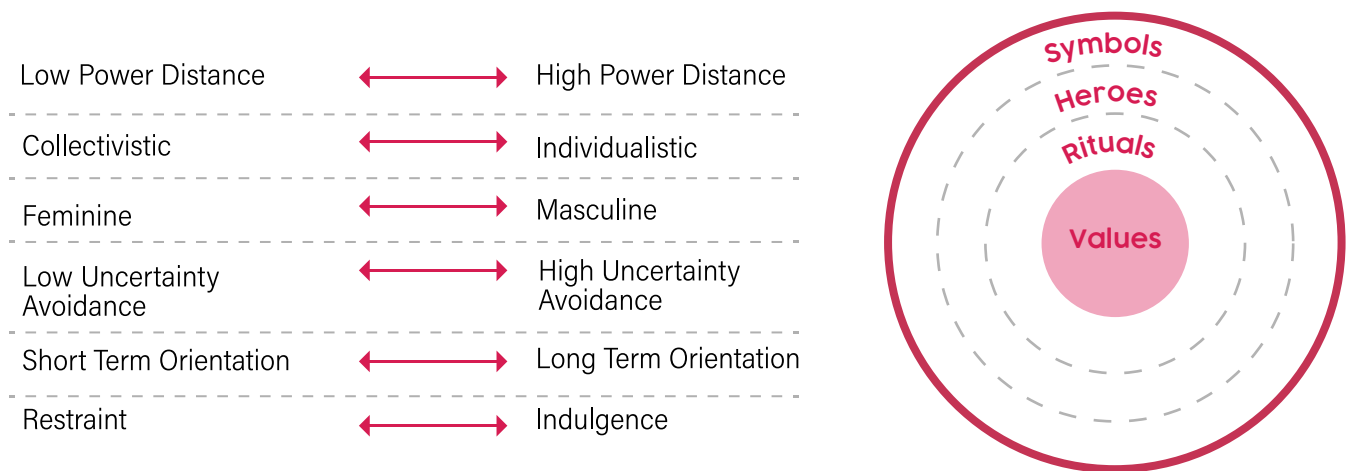


Figure 18: Hofstede's Dimensions of Culture (Left) and Onion Model (right)

Hofstede also proposed the Onion Model to study the different levels of culture in terms of values, rituals, heroes, symbols (Insights, 2020). According to Hofstede these are the main areas in which cultural differences are manifested. The core of the whole system would be the values while the outer layer is symbols like logos, colours or monuments. This model has been directly applied as a design tool to generate cultural insight among participants of design workshops as exposed by Van Boeijen (2015). "The assumption being that the onion model was an effective means to identify cultural values and related practices" (Van Boeijen, 2015). In that case, the model was also used to evidence the differences or similarities between the culture of study and the culture of the designer or in general the difference between different cultures.

Hall's Cultural Factors

Hall's cultural factors are mostly based on people's attitudes in intercultural communications. They are described in terms of context, time and space (Hall and Hall, 1990). For the first

part, context, Hall makes a distinction between High-Context cultures versus Low-Context Cultures. High context cultures like Latin America, Africa and Asia place great importance to the contexts of a message. People are more indirect and expect that the receiver deduces the implicit meanings from context and body language. In low context cultures like in North America and most of Europe, communication tends to be more explicit and direct, going straight to the point and minimizing misunderstanding.

The second aspect, Space is concerned with the proximity or distance people are comfortable with when communicating. This property also speaks of the way people delineate their boundaries and can be related to previous models for example by relating it to their openness or aversion to collectiveness or individuality. Cultures can either be of high territoriality or of low territoriality.

The last attitude explored in Hall's cultural factors is time. Cultures can be either polychronic like Latin American, Middle east or Mediterranean countries or monochronic like Northern Europe or North America. For the latter, time is a way to impose order and is more rigidly perceived. For polychronic cultures timetables are more relaxed.

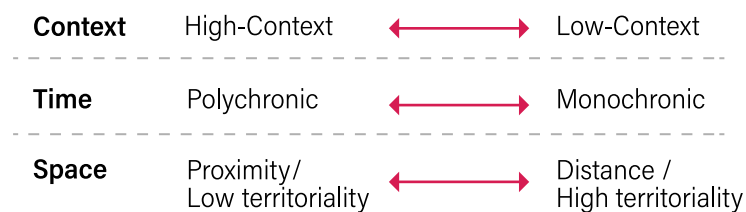


Figure 19: A visualization of Hall's Cultural Factors (Hall and Hall, 1990)



The necessity to explain and understand cultural differences is what has led to the research and classification of cultural variations among countries. Comparison between countries helps to make visible the prevailing characteristics of a nation that would otherwise not be. In general terms, when we exalt the qualities of a country, we do it by means of comparison to the qualities of another. Taking this into account brings us to understand the need of performing cross cultural studies on artifacts to really be able to determine their cultural meanings and how their interpretation varies from one territoriality to another. It is important to keep in mind though, that these are not predictions of cultural behavior but a means to bring awareness to the possible culture specific practices and behaviors that can be facilitated in products.



An Overview of the Studied Cultural Models

The figure below is a synthesis of the cultural models studied in this research. Placing them side to side facilitates their visualization and provides a greater picture look into the different ways in which cultures and their values may vary.

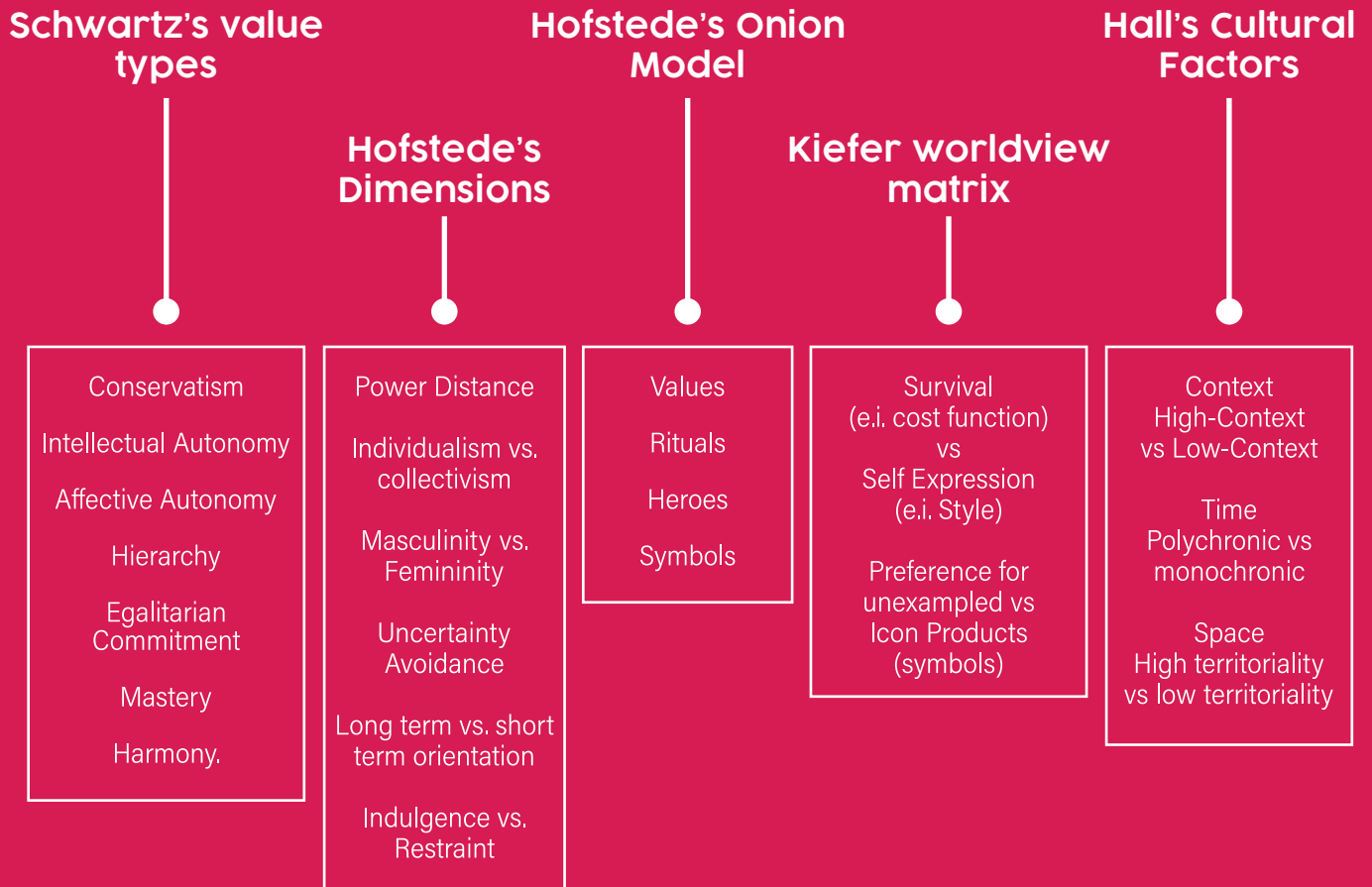


Figure 20: Overview of Cultural Models

4.2 Understanding Cultural Features

Globalization has brought along a homogenization of design with a dominance of western influence. Regardless, the underlying wealth that exists in traditional practices and cultures from around the world is yet to be explored and applied to international contexts. In fact, Wang, Qin and Harrison (2013) point out a research gap in the study of cultural design rules for creating culture-inspired products. The bigger question then is how to address this topic of cultural design using a logic and organized process that can make more manageable and approachable all the intangibles of the matter.

It is evident to say that culture has both a visible and invisible side. The visible side represented mostly in artifacts and styles, the invisible one mostly in philosophies, values, beliefs and behaviors. The first side can be more directly transferred for use in design applications. From the material side, it is fairly easier to extract cultural aspects that can be linked to general design rules taking as a starting point the visual elements. As stated earlier in the research visual elements such as color, form, line, texture can transmit along meanings and symbols. Nonetheless, in order to design a cultural product, the first approach to the design process should be to understand the cultural context and then to reinterpret, both the material qualities but especially those intangible qualities derived from cultural values into design input. However, there is not a single and straightforward way to do this.

Diverse, although not plenty of approaches can be studied in the literature and research in design that try to categorize cultural features that serve as a basis for extraction of design traits for cultural design.

1 | A general characterization based on cultural models

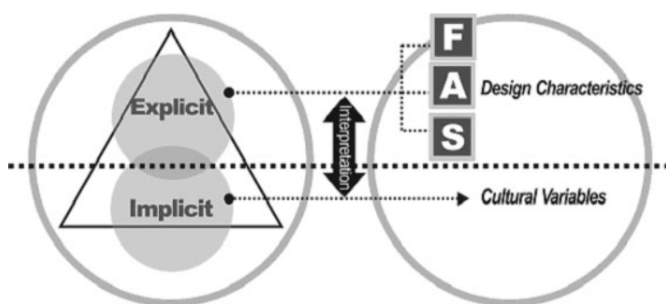


Figure 21: Methodological Framework for Cross-cultural Design Study (Lee, 2004)

Lee (2004) proposes a methodological framework for cross-cultural study to bridge design and culture and identify the source of cultural difference or similarity in design. His framework proposes the use of cultural variables to connect implicit and explicit layers of culture with design characteristics. Cultural variables, which belong to the implicit layer, are cultural characteristics that can be set for comparison with other cultures. After the study of existing cultural models, Lee (2004) presented 8 different categories of cultural variables: Conception of nature, Temporal perception, Relationship with human, Authority conception, Expression of emotion, Message contexting, Nonverbal communication, and Adherence to Rules.

Similarly, regarding the design characteristics that are placed in the explicit layer, he (Lee, 2004) refers to three main attributes: function, aesthetics and symbols. These can be abstract attributes like emotion and symbols or concrete attributes like colour, shape and texture.

2| China Case: Categorization of cultural elements into design elements

China can be taken as a reference for the attempts of categorizing cultural elements into design elements. Generally speaking, this exploration has usually been limited to the visual symbol effect, using representations such as The Beijing Opera, Kung Fu, Shaolin Temple to mention a few (Yu, 2018). Some of these approaches tend to result only in the superimposition of some elements without essence at a surface level. Regardless, these symbols do not completely represent the country, so a further exploration of the philosophies and ideologies is required. This presents one of the greatest challenges that is translating immaterial qualities into design input.

Yu (2018) explores the idea of "Chineseness" in modern product design. In this field, China has primarily a western influence hence the call for finding ways to capture the Chinese culture into new products that represent its origin and reconstruct the national essence. Yu's (2018) research starts with the recognition and understanding of local cultural values that can be competitive within the global market.

As a result of his research Yu (2018) proposes two paths to understand 'Chineseness': the material and immaterial form. Additionally, he presents a cognitive structure of 'Chineseness' in design that is made up of 3 layers. The surface layer corresponds to appearance, physical visual elements easily experienced through the senses. The middle layer corresponds to form and function, how the product is used and the experience of use. The deeper layer captures the meaning or cultural perspective.

The material form presented prior is based on the approach of Liu and Nie (2010) who present a model of abstraction and extraction of cultural elements to apply in product design to represent culture:

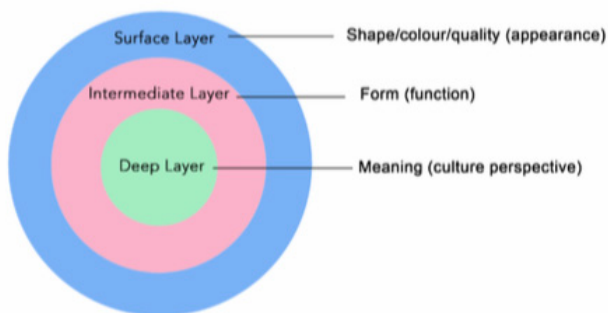


Figure 22: Cognitive Structure of 'Chineseness' in design (Yu, 2008)

1. **Traditional Color:** Traditional color is applied to express cultural meaning in design. For example, the use of red in china.
2. **Traditional materials:** They influence not only the features of design, but also produce different visual, tactile and emotional effects and highlight the cultural value of products.
3. **Traditional Form:** Can represent the aesthetic pursuit and national psychology of a region. In the Chinese case the idea of perfection and completeness is evidenced for example in the use of curved lines instead of straight ones.
4. **Traditional decoration and handicraft:** the application and combination of traditional craft in product design reflects on the aesthetic style, nature, human-orientation, local culture and spirit of a place.

The immaterial form on the other hand, presents in the form of cultural thinking, and morale. One approach used to extract some of the immaterial cultural elements is to look at folk-art, traditional art symbols, visual elements and their emotional connotations and symbols, ways of thinking, means of artistic expression and symbolic elements (for example cultural landscape, folk custom, costume style, natural landscape and humanity in China's case).

3 | The Cultural Integration Design Method

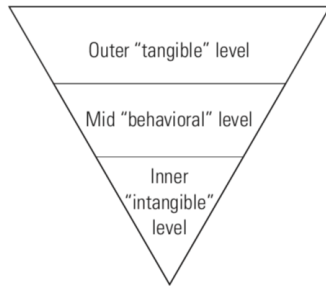


Figure 23: Spatial Perspective of Culture (Siu, 2005)

Another approach is the one presented by Leong and Clark (2003) who study the potential of cultural research for the development of new theories of design. He proposes **The Cultural Integration Design Method starting from the model proposed by Siu (2005) on the The “Spatial Perspective” of culture.**

This model consists of an inverted pyramid with three levels; the top largest level is the Outer “tangible” level, the Mid is the “behavioral” level and the last is the Inner “intangible” level. These levels can also be directly related to the three layers of cognitive structure of ‘Chineseness’ in design mentioned previously from Yu (2018).

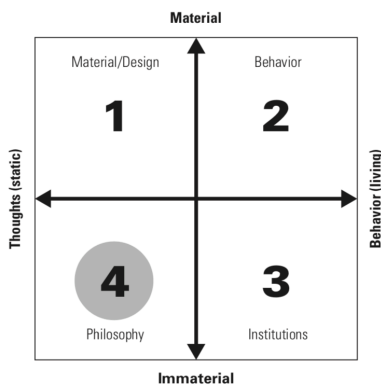


Figure 24: The Matrix Spatial Structure of Culture (Leong & Clark, 2003)

The inner level presented by this method is what led Leong and Clark (2003) to focus on the development of the concept of “value integration.” Leong discusses about a visual and philosophical access to culture through design, the latter being on the same line of the “cognitive traits.” These are the focus of the model since the “core of any culture is constructed on traditional concepts, specifically its value system” (Leong & Clark, 2003). Likewise focusing on deeper traits helps the model to go beyond the visual or material level.

This model tackles on the concept of acculturation which refers to the cultural exchange and adaptation that occurs when two different cultures come in continuous contact (Berry, 2004). This interaction can at times imply the loss of original concepts and ways of thinking. Through his research Leong proposes to trace back the origins and give new life to ideas forgotten or unseen overtime (Leong & Clark, 2003). For doing so, he refers to Cultural Integration instead, which “concerns the hybridization of a particular culture with the contemporary Western or ‘global’ culture” (Leong & Clark, 2003).

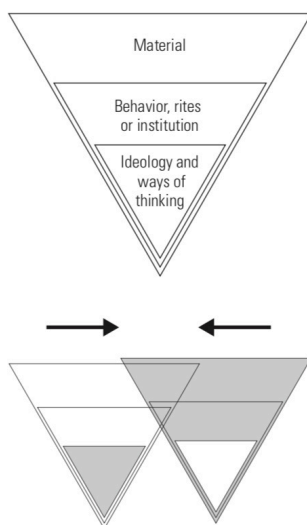


Figure 25: Cultural Integration Model (Leong & Clark, 2003)

The matrix model of the Spatial Structure of Culture is composed of a vertical axis going from material to immaterial, and a horizontal one from behavior to thought. Their intersection creates 4 areas of research of the cultural product space:

- Material/design: deals with physical forms and styles,
- Behavioral: with interactions
- Institutions, or customs and traditions
- Philosophy or ideology

These 4 quadrants are set in parallel with Siu's (2005) model replacing the three levels. In doing so, the process of **Cultural integration is graphically described as the merge or superposition of the pyramid of traits of one culture with that of another.** For example, he fuses the material level of Chinese paper-cutting with the Behavioral level of Western food culture to create a tableware product.

4| The Lens Analogy framework

The recurrence of the three-layer model is based on human processes of perception through which we first take in information from the stimuli of the senses then, through cognition and experience we decipher products, and lastly this experience is connected to an emotional perception based on cultural contexts.

Rubin (2012) also presents a three-level analogy to understand culture and design. It consists of three 3 spectrums, visible, dynamic and intrinsic. The visible spectrum is the superficial, tangible one and comprises color, shapes, music, language, materials, artifacts and physical environment. The dynamic spectrum comprises interactions, behaviors, relationships, functions, etc and considers population stereotypes and expectations about product usage. The final spectrum, intrinsic, includes stories, traditions, emotions, morals, and values.

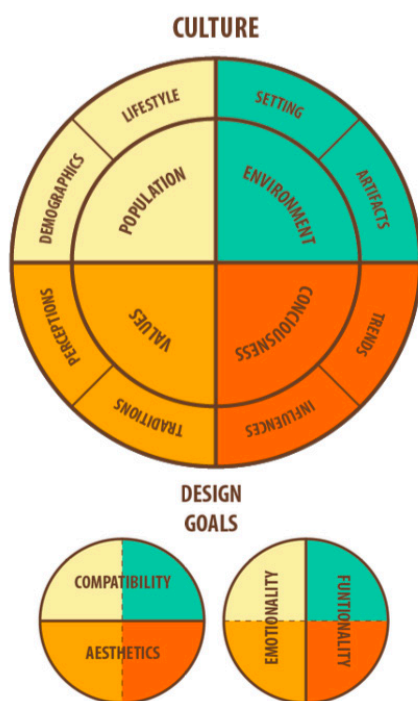


Figure 26: Four-part System of Cultural Lens (Rubin, 2012)

The three lenses definition serves as an initial reference to approaching culture in design regardless a more specific definition of culture elements is necessary to simplify the design process. Rubin (2012) presents an additional framework, applicable to any cross-cultural situation, that visualizes culture as a four-part system guided by the definition of four cultural design goals. These goals help the designer to establish their design priority and thus follow the most appropriate research path or methods to attain the level of cultural relevance they need. The model includes proposals of existing cultural research methods for studying each of the elements.

The four lenses to study culture proposed include Population, Environment, Consciousness, and Values. Similarly, the four existing goals correspond to the different pairing of these lenses. Population and environment represent the goal of compatibility, consciousness plus values represent aesthetic goals, Environment plus consciousness represent functional goals and lastly, population plus values represent emotional goals.

Each lens contains two cultural elements, which are terms to facilitate cultural visualization. They represent areas of culture related to product design. The elements under Population are demographics and lifestyle, the ones under Environment are settings and artefacts, under Consciousness there are trends and influences, and finally under values, traditions and perceptions.

5| Folktales: Searching traditional values

In order to understand how to design culturally sensitive products in Botswana, Moalosi, Popovic and Hudson (2004), did an extraction of traditional socio-cultural variables from Botswana's folktales. They proposed this socio-cultural design model to help designers to "integrate culture by 'conscious design effort' rather than by 'accident or incidently' in product design" (Moalosi, Popovic, Hudson, and Kumar, 2005). Focusing on traditional cultural values may present a reliable way to extract cultural characteristics since they are typically longstanding and acknowledged by most members of a particular society and can speak about the past, present and future (Moalosi, Popovic, Hudson, and Kumar, 2005).

The various traditions and beliefs taken from the folktales were then divided between material (objects, artefacts, elements, spaces) and non-material variables (actions, values, feelings) which would then have to be translated into product features. From the analysis of the frequency of terms belonging to each category they suggest that the people in Botswana place greater significance in non-material variables; values such as family or activities like farming were frequent.

Aside from the content of the folktales they also use the style and structure of it as inspiration for transferring into design elements. For example, repetition, a common device used in writing, could also be used in design as a tool to convey some of the cultural variables related to joy and satisfaction.

6 | Other sources

Likewise, by studying the historical and academic evolution of the general definition of culture **Ajovalasit and Wang (2020) propose the following seven categories of cultural features based on their sources:**

1. Art and artistic activities (Throsby, 2001; Williams, 1988),
2. Artefacts (Hatch, 1993; Freeman, Evans and Lipton, 1990; Schein, 1985; Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952),
3. Customs (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952; Throsby, 2001),
4. Food habits (Lowie, 1937),
5. Architecture (Voon, 2007),
6. Religion (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005; Throsby, 2001),
7. Nature (Eagleton, 2000; Mete, 2006).

These categories are general and apply to all cultures, but they are also flexible, meaning that they can be customized or broken into subcategories according to the salient and specific characteristics of the culture of application (Ajovalasit and Wang, 2020).

Similarly, through their research, Wang, Qin and Harrison (2013), review the connection between design guidelines and principles and culture-based design. Wang, Qin and Harrison, (2013) classified cultural elements into three categories: artefacts, nature, and spirit. Artefacts include Artistic creation, utensils, social life, architecture, technology, pastimes, sports and music. Nature is composed of landscape, seascape, local flora and local fauna. Spirit lastly are composed of philosophy symbols and colour meanings.

Relatedly, in their research Tsao & Liao (2008) seek to extract cultural characteristics as design elements that can add value to graphic and product design. They focus especially on the "invisible symbolical dimension" in order to get the real meanings of culture. Their study is focused on the culture of Jhishanyen for which they defined four dimensions: history, humanity, geographical landscape and natural ecology. History" is divided into "Archaeology" and "historical events," "Humanity" into "legendary tales" and "folk belief". "Geological landscape" into "natural scene" and "artificial scene", and "Natural ecology" into "flora" and "fauna". These characteristics are general enough that they can likely be extended to other cultures.

An Overview of Cultural Characterization from a Design Point of View.

The Figure below provides a parallel/summary of the different cultural characterizations proposed as sources for the extraction of cultural features in design that may be translated into design input. Recurring themes can be visualized in the comparison and contrast between the studied characterizations. This will help to create a more synthetic cluster of cultural features to contrast against product meanings further in the development of this research.

Cultural Variables	Lee (2004)	Implicit Layer: Conception of nature Temporal perception Relationship with human Authority conception Expression of emotion Message contexting Nonverbal communication Adherence to Rules	Explicit layer: Function, Aesthetics Symbols. May be abstract (emotion and symbols) or concrete (colour, shape and texture.)
Chineseness Structure	Yu (2008)	Material vs Immaterial form Cultural thinking, and morale, folk-art, traditional art symbols, visual elements and their emotional connotations and symbols, ways of thinking, and symbolic elements (cultural landscape, folk custom, costume style, natural landscape and humanity).	Cognitive structure of 'Chineseness' in design: - Surface layer: Appearance, physical visual elements easily experienced through the senses. - Middle layer: form and function, product use experience - Deeper layer captures the meaning or cultural perspective.
Abstraction and extraction Model	Liu and Nie (2010)	Material form 1. Traditional Color 2. Traditional materials	3. Traditional Form: represent the aesthetic pursuit and national psychology of a region. 4. Traditional decoration and handicraft
Spatial perspective	Siu (2005)	Inverted pyramid with three levels: - Outer "tangible" - Mid "behavioral" - Inner "intangible"	
Cultural Integration Method.	Leong and Clark (2003)	The merge or superposition of the pyramid of traits of one culture with that of another based on The "Spatial Perspective" of culture from Siu (2005).	- Material/design: deals with physical forms and styles, - Behavioral: with interactions - Institutions, or customs and traditions - Philosophy or ideology
The lens analogy framework	Rubin (2012)	Three spectrums - Visible: color, shapes, music, language, materials, artifacts and physical environment. - Dynamic: interactions, behaviors, relationships, functions, etc. Considers population stereotypes and expectations about product usage. - Intrinsic: stories, traditions, emotions, morals, values.	Four lenses to study culture Population: demographics and lifestyle. Environment: settings and artefacts Consciousness: trends and influences Values: traditions and perceptions.
Folktales Values/ Botswana	Moalosi, Popovic and Hudson (2004)	The various traditions and beliefs taken from the folktales were divided between:	- Material: objects, artefacts, elements, spaces - Non-material: actions, values, feelings
Categories of cultural features	Ajovalasit and Wang (2020)	1. Art and artistic activities 2. Artifacts	3. Customs 4. Food habits 5. Architecture 6. Religion 7. Nature
Cultural elements for design	Wang, Qin and Harrison (2013)	Three categories: - Artefacts: Artistic creation, utensils, social life, architecture, technology, pastimes, sports and music.	- Nature: landscape, seascape, local flora and local fauna. - Spirit: philosophy symbols and colour meanings.
Invisible symbolical dimension	Tsao & Liao (2008)	Four dimensions: -History: Archaeology and historical events -Humanity: legendary tales and folk belief"	-Geographical landscape: natural scene and artificial scene - Natural ecology.: flora and fauna

Figure 27: An Overview of Cultural Characterization from a Design Point of View.

4.3 A Culture Approach To Design Methods And Tools

1 | The need for culture-based design tools

Despite the perception that it brings only uniformity, globalization also has the peculiar effect of increasing pride on cultural identities and the need for differentiation. This makes it increasingly relevant for businesses and designers to invest in cultural research and cross-cultural design specially when entering foreign markets. Even though cross-cultural needs arise more often today, cultural immersion is very limited due to issues such as budgets and time, therefore it is pertinent to consider the development of design methods that facilitate the extraction of valuable cultural elements for designers in efficient ways.

For designers, designing for cultures in which they have not had first-hand experience can present a challenge. "When designing for (and trying to understand) customers from very different cultures, design teams can fail to recognize the importance of the empathic triggers [design] techniques bring (Hao, Boeijen and Jan Stappers, 2017). To a certain degree, all Human Centered Design methods are "culturally bounded" (Lee, 2012) and so the relevance of making awareness of cultural diversity in design focusing not just on individuals but in collectivities.

The complexity of a topic such as culture calls for simplicity in the way it is approached. Such is the finding of Boeijen (2015) whose research focuses on the development of a culture-conscious approach to design. She suggests that in order to provide useful tools to apply cultural theory in design, the language should be translated to one that designers can recognize.

2 | Developing a process for creating culture-based products

Previously it was mentioned that to design cross-cultural products one should first understand the cultural context and then reinterpret those cultural resources into design input. Lin et al (2007) propose a more detailed approach to a cultural product design process model to guide designers in the development of cross-cultural products. Through the review of cultural features, culture is translated into design elements.

The paper (Lin et al, 2007) uses Taiwan's aboriginal culture as reference to increase the value of product design and its recognition in a global market taking into account the contemporary consumer. The model proposed consists of 3 parts: the conceptual model, research method and design process. In general, the first step is the identification of cultural features and their extraction from original cultural objects. Then, the transfer of them into design elements and finally their implementation into new cultural products.

These stages happen through a scenario/ storytelling approach. The stages in this Cultural Product Design process are: Investigation (Set a scenario), Interaction (tell a story), Development (write a script), and Implementation (design a product) (Lin et al, 2007). The first is focused on overall contextual issues such as social, cultural, and economical ones. The second is focused on the understanding of user needs through user observation and interaction. The third or development stage is the creation of a modified scenario with the initial idea/concept that is coherent with the needs and context of the user. The final stage

checks the correct implementation of cultural features, meanings and appropriateness.

The main takeaway of this proposed model is that it provides an example on how to carry along a cultural design process that is focused on the extraction of cultural features from visual elements, functional elements related to usage or rituals, symbolic elements and unmet needs. In this instance, those are the sources of cultural meaning. Thus, connecting both the culture and the final user in the process.

The approximation to a process for cultural design but the lack of a systemic outline of the same leads to question what an actual detailed process would look like. This issue is tackled in this research and later complemented with the insight obtained from qualitative research from interviews with designers that have a connection and experience with the field of cultural product design. The goal is to create a detailed description of the steps for designing cultural products which, based on the literature review, is not so clearly defined yet.

3 | A look into existing tools

Some examples of cultural design toolkits have been found and will be presented in the following paragraphs. These tools are mostly in accordance with the previously described method of analyzing first cultural features to then transcribe this as design features. These tools seek to assist designers in the exploration and ideation phases of the overall design process by providing new considerations to take into account. Three different approaches are here presented:

A design toolkit for cultural products. Card deck by Ajovalasit and Wang (2020)

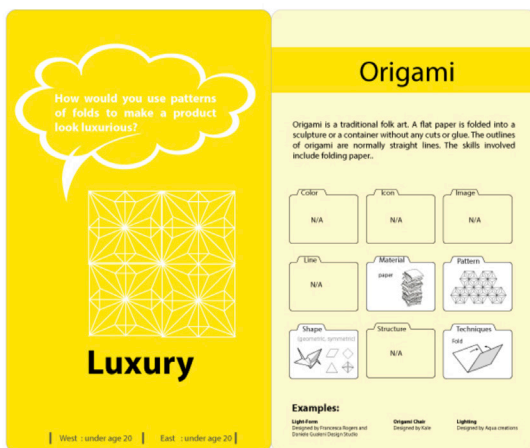


Figure 28: Example of the Origami Card from the Toolkit for Cultural Products (Ajovalasit and Wang, 2020)

In their study Ajovalasit and Wang (2020) explored the connection between cultural features and the emotional experiences they may arouse. Their study sought to evaluate the emotional responses of the users to cultural features through a subjective approach (not physiological) in which they used adjectives to express emotions. Emotional descriptors were also used to give examples of both positive and negative emotions to users. For the study, both eastern and western participants were called to share their emotions about 40 different sample cultural products. Through these questionnaires some general emotions were linked to specific categories of cultural features.

Based on the results of the study described prior, Ajovalasit and Wang (2020) developed a toolkit that suggests a "category of visible cultural features that represent Eastern culture (Chinese)" (parenthesis added by me) to assist designers during the idea generation phase of design, especially when they belong to cultures that are different to that of the design application.

The toolkit facilitates the engagement of designers into the cultural context of the targeted user in order to enhance emotional connection between the latter and the products designed.

The toolkit consists of a set of cards with information about cultural features (e.g. origami), design features (color, icons, line, material, pattern, shape, structure, techniques, image), emotional descriptors (e.g. luxurious), and examples of current applications.

For testing the cards design workshops were run first without the cards and then with. The designers had to create Chinese cultural products with these criteria in mind: emotional connection, cultural representation, and function. The emotional experience was the guiding criteria for the elaboration of the design. After the completion of the two workshops the 3 main criteria of the designs were rated by "dotmocracy". After using the cards, the designs of eastern participants improved in their emotional connection while those of the western participants improved in their functionality. The toolkit aided both groups being more inspirational for the westerners and more exploratory for the easterners.

Overall, this tool brings awareness about the cultural influences on product design and sensitizes designers by giving them an initial exposure (if external) to other cultures and contexts that will ultimately help them create more meaningful products driven by emotional connection.

Cultura: A communication toolkit for designers to gain empathic insights across cultural boundaries (Hao, Boeijen and Jan Stappers, 2017)

Cultura, the toolkit designed by Hao, Boeijen and Jan Stappers (2017) presents "nine cultural aspects based on cultural models, informing designers about user insights in a broader cultural context". The toolkit proposed an expanded social-cultural background to complement that of user exploration mixing empathetic design methods and culture theories. The nine cultural aspects are mapped in a Cultural Wheel and complemented with 72 insight cards that match the different components by presenting user experience data like user quotes and field images.

The 9 cultural aspects presented are (Hao, Boeijen and Jan Stappers, 2017):

1. **Socio-cultural values:** Standards concerning what is acceptable and what is unacceptable.
2. **The Material World:** Artefacts (designed products or things) carrying utilitarian functions and symbolic meanings.
3. **Community:** Groups with shared concerns and goals that interact regularly to do so.
4. **Division of Roles:** How duties are distributed among community members.
5. **Rituals in everyday lives:** Sequences of collective activities to reach desired ends, which are considered as socially essential.
6. **Knowing the rules:** re, consist of written and unwritten (social) agreements created by people during shared practices in order to achieve a goal.
7. **Angels vs. Devils:** Esteemed community role models or the opposite (devil, enemy, anti-hero).
8. **Goals of end users:** Personal intentions that are meaningful to them or their community
9. **Macro development:** Contextual factors, trends and developments that influence people's everyday lives, such as developments in demography, economy, and politics, composition of the population, geographical characteristics, development of infrastructure, and so on.

The goal of this toolkit is to give designers an overview of the aspects to consider when facing



Figure 29: Overview of the Tools in the Cultural Toolkit (Hao, Boeijen and Jan Stappers, 2017)

a new cultural context and approach the users more empathetically to create more effective designs. More than being an 'idea generator' it works as a check to see if the ideas proposed actually match the correct values of a given culture. Ultimately, Cultura brings designers to think beyond stereotypes.

As a downside of the toolkit the following factors were pointed out. One, behaviors and expressions relevant for cultural study were not encompassed in the toolkit, and two, it could fall into the problem of generalization. Although, the tool shouldn't be seen as a determinative source of information but an invitation to reflect and engage with different cultures.

Crossing Cultural Chasms: Towards a culture conscious approach to Design (Van Boeijen, 2015)

Cultural Chasms is a tool presented by Van Boeijen, (2015) in the form of a set of cards made for designers developing projects for cultures different to their own. "The goal of the design tool is to help these designers develop a culture-conscious approach, and to examine the culture in a meaningful way" Van Boeijen, 2015).

The tool should lead designers to reflect on the real motivation or need of designing with a cultural focus, to understand what culture is and perform cultural design studies.

The cards borrow information from the study of diverse cultural models and theories, particularly those presented by Hofstede (2001) like the 6 dimensions of culture and the Onion Model for cultural analysis. The cards are structured in three categories: Why?, What?, How? Each of these are given a distinct name: Eye-openers, Insights and Activities respectively. An additional set of instruction cards is included, and they are all complimented with a website for references and additional reading about the context and background of each card. This initiative helped to keep the cards lighter in content making it easier to grasp in a quick design session. The cards are designed with the information for the designer in the front, which is illustrated through an example in the back, to make its application easier to understand for the designer.

The whole set is composed of 16 Activity cards, 16 Insight cards, 16 Eye-opener cards and 2 Instruction cards.



Figure 30: Cards of the three categories of Crossing Cultural Chasms Tool (Van Boeijen, 2015)

The 'Eye-openers' are intended to make designers aware of the reasons for studying the culture of their users, the 'Insights' give designers a lens to observe culture based on cultural frameworks, and the 'Activities' provides applicable actions and tools to perform cultural studies. Overall, the cards help designers to create culture specific questions and work also as a boundary object to connect designer teams and users in one same conversation.



 Designer's intentions	 Designer's considerations
1. Affirm a culture	How can existing values be affirmed by design?
2. Tune with a culture	How can mismatches between the design and the cultural group be avoided?
3. Change a culture	How can existing cultural values be changed by design?
4. Bridge cultures	How can different cultural values be bridged by design?
5. Bypass cultural aspects	Other focus.

Figure 31: Five Design Intentions Regarding a Culture
 Conscious Approach to Design (Van Boeijen, 2015)

From this tool, emphasis will be made in the eye-opener cards because they reveal a part of the process of doing cultural design, which is determining or bringing to awareness the reasons for including cultural characteristics and meanings in products. Having this in mind can influence the directions to take in a design project. In the research for the development of the card set Van Boeijen, (2015) identifies five different intentions regarding a culture-conscious approach to design. Two of these affirm a culture to agree or adapt to it, the end is to avoid cultural mismatches. Other two consider bridging two or more cultures or changing them, they relate to creating behavioral change. The final intention is related to the conscious bypassing of cultural values. This is a valid approach when searching to create universal solutions or when there is a more prevalent technical focus.

Conclusion and Design Implications

This part tackled a variety of topics focused on meaning, culture and design and the intersection of them. The related literature review helped to establish common definitions regarding the complex topic of culture and to understand the current state of research surrounding the connection between design and culture, the creation of cultural meaning, cultural innovation, among others.

The initial framing of the literature on meaning helps to understand the categories of meaning to which artefacts made by designers belong to. These categories are synthesized and summarized in three approaches based on the study of meaning in design. These give an initial picture of the categories under which cultural products may fall and the qualities they may possess related in particular to the expressive and empathic understanding of meaning which are related to the ritual and myth categories as proposed by Ajovalasit and Giacomini (2019).

Focusing on meaning can help designers create more commercially successful products to which consumers relate to more closely. The success of meaningful products or companies lies in the fact that they align with people's purposes more clearly and become a part of the definition of their identity and their visions. Understanding that meanings assigned to products are rooted in personal experience and in the meanings within a cultural context (Ravasi and Rindova, 2008), this revision poses culture as a source for evaluating shared meanings that are tied to society and built over time, hence more stabilized. For designers, it could be useful to search for meanings in cultural features which represent the common values to which people or possible users relate.

Regarding the study of cultural innovations, comprehending the symbolic, social and functional value (Holt, 2012) they generate brings designers to articulate more clearly their design intentions and create the means to make them viable. Likewise, it brings to awareness the role design plays in the dissemination of culture and more importantly, the relationship between design and culture. This relationship is encompassed by the concept of Shared Value Theory (Porter, 2011) because on one side, the cultural features present in cultural products contribute to its competitiveness and differentiation, and on the other, they help preserve cultural values and narratives and the conditions of the communities it relies on.

To define cultural features, anthropological models of culture were reviewed in order to align them with a designer mindset and position them in the context of design. These cultural models can be used by designers to typify culture and analyze both the culture of inspiration and the culture of consumption (user groups) and understand together the value a culture has to offer and what it gives value to. Cultural models direct the focus of the designer towards specific cultural evidence which provides insight into behaviors and values.

As reviewed in the literature, the study of these models in design also brings into the equation the importance of considering the culture of the designer as an additional influence in the interpretation of the cultural aspects that become part of a design, especially when they vary from that of the user. Subsequently, it highlights the existence of different cultural dimensions within one cultural product, these being the culture of the designer, the culture of inspiration, the culture of the consumer and the culture of the market guided by current trends.

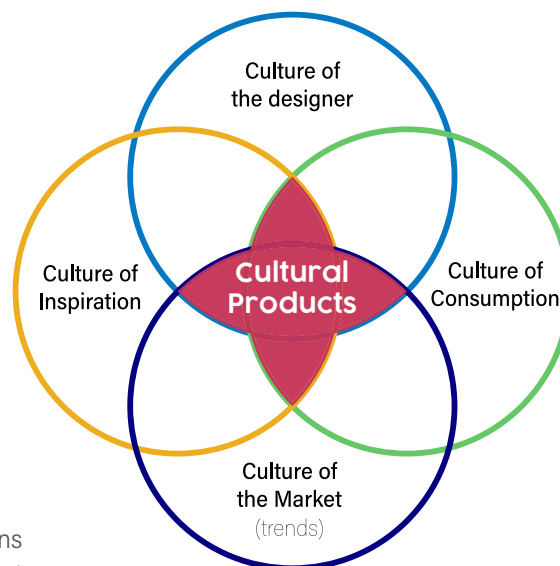


Figure 32: Different Cultural Dimensions within a Cultural Product

Additional to cultural models, the culture approach to design was considered based on the study of design proposals that try to categorize cultural features to use as a basis for extraction of design traits for cultural design. In general, the existing tools and proposals translate culture into a combination of material, visible aspects and intangible, symbolic qualities and present a blend of cultural theory with user experience research as the basis. The approximation to

process and methods for culture-oriented design but the lack of a systemic outline of the same leads to question what an actual detailed process would look like and what methods may be employed to facilitate the development of cultural products.

Insight from the main points presented in these conclusions will influence the way the cultural product design process is advanced as well as the approximation to an organized method for facing culture-inspired design. Moreover, this section serves as a frame of reference for evaluating the validity and coherence of the empirical study and the resulting consensus map of the meanings attached to cultural products.

In brief, the main contributions of this part for the subsequent stages of the research development can be distinguished as follows:

- Awareness of the meaning creation and attribution process
- Awareness of the meanings available in culture
- Simplified understanding of cultural models to translate them into cultural features and design features
- Understanding of the value in cultural innovation: shaping design intentions
- Perception of the steps needed for a cultural product design process
- Framing of relevant design and culture related questions for further inquiry in the empirical research

Closing the Focus

(05)

What Countries Tell

Part

2

5.1 The Challenge of Globalization

Globalization, localization, cultural influence, and product design are all intricately connected. The global vs. the localized consumer cultures have pushed companies to become more receptive, and also vulnerable, to diversity in cultural terms. Local consumer cultures bring to the surface variations in lifestyle, tradition, history, etc., and also give companies a chance to differentiate their products (Yu, 2018). In the opposite case when companies fail to adapt to consumer local habits, they risk their chances of success in external markets.

Lin et al (2007) refer to these existent current and simultaneous forces in the paper *Designing "Culture" into Modern Product: A Case Study of Cultural Product Design*. That is "globalization" of the market and "localization" of design. Globalization in product design can pose a risk to the identity of products because it tends

towards the homogenization of form and function in order to appeal a broader public; on the other hand, localization tries to make up for this identity flaws through the embedding of cultural features that can give character to products while making them more relatable or symbolic to consumers. Cultural features can reinforce design value and at the same time, and maybe even more importantly, design can promote cultural development and expand the horizons of a local culture into a global market and promote heritage and traditional values.

Globalization refers to the worldwide mobilization of goods, people, ideas, etc. An all-encompassing definition is the one provided by Steger (2003) who says globalization is a :

"multidimensional set of social process that create, multiply, stretch, and intensify worldwide social interdependencies and exchanges while at the same time fostering in people a growing awareness of deepening connections between the local and the distant."

This definition highlights the importance of bringing awareness to the local within a large scale context. In this perspective, the integration of local tradition into contemporary design can be a way to bring in cultural traditions to an existing more standardized product and market modernity. According to Razzaghi and Ramirez (2005) the "localization of products can act as a counterbalancing force for the maintenance and durability of national cultures facing globalization as well as its potential capacity for holding, preserving and presenting cultural values to the respective product users." Yu (2018) also expresses the potentiality of local focuses to design by mentioning that "unique cultural creativities can act as a sustainable driving factor for brands to compete in an increasingly globalised and transparent economy". In this sense, globalization, instead of causing cultural uniformity, is actually leading to more variety of options and diversity of cultural products around the world as well as more diverse modes of consumption.

Variation based on ethnic cultural diversity is reflected not only on the way products are designed but also on the products people use and on how they use them. The principles of mass-production fail to respond to this variation properly and likewise, if companies disregard cultural diversity, they limit their marketability (Diehl and Christiaans, 2006). With globalization, design teams from one culture are creating products to be used in totally different ones, hence the need for localization strategies that drive the product design process closer to the final user, be it in terms of design or production. Confronting cultures enriches design since it results in the integration of new cultural references and styles that may otherwise be disregarded. Even though cultural models have been used to assist cross-cultural design research, they do not provide straightforward applications to product design (Diehl and Christiaans, 2006).

Given the current state of globalization of the world, designing cultural products may pose a great challenge to designers. When the designer is from a different culture than that of the targeted user, it is more complex for him/her to understand real needs, motivations and context because of cultural barriers. When a cultural disconnect exists between the designer and the application context, a product might result in something that fits one culture but might not do so in another showing a variation in positive/negative interpretations.

5.2 Place Marketing

People's worldview is usually delimited by their territoriality and comes to feed what they call their culture, behaviors, values and objects. In this sense, understanding culture and worldviews is crucial for designers. "Primary design considerations such as ease of distribution, economic development and locally available resources as well as form, style and emotional connection are dependent upon the users' worldview and culture" (Kiefer, 2008). Diverging worldviews can have an impact on product outcomes and design even when this may have corresponding functionality.

Clifton (2011) speaks about the relationship between regional branding initiatives and the symbolic properties of products created in that given region. He brings into perspective the relevance of public policy for the development of cultural products that can ultimately become a component for economic success of their region of origin. In fact, "product branding and regional branding are a co-evolutionary process of cultural exchange between private and public institutions and individuals" (Clifton, 2011).

The idea of place marketing should not be confused with the implementation of economic nationalism nor with the legitimization of resistance to change or rejection of innovation. Neither should it be restricted to a tourism attraction without depth or cultural clichés. Instead, it should be an invitation to bring awareness and find the proper highlights to expand the competitive advantage of goods in a global market through a modern reinterpretation of authentic common cultural traits and regional symbols.

"Country image identifiers" (Papadopoulos, 1993) and product "nationalities" (Phau & Prendergast, 2000) are increasing in relevance because "competition and standardization in globalizing markets reduce uniqueness and stimulate the demand for authenticity and provenance" (Clifton, 2011). Understanding cultural meanings and how they vary between nations is important for product positioning specially in foreign markets. Overlooking such differences can represent a weakness point for brands and companies as it may disregard consumer preferences.

5.3 Regional Protections

A number of policies exist to preserve this connection between regions and their products. For example, the geographical indication (GI) gives products the quality of "glocalism" since they partake in the global market while remaining connected and supportive of a certain local economy or culture (Clifton, 2011). Other definitions such as CoO (country of Origin), CoD (Country of Design), and the CoM (Country of Manufacture) are also used and applied to products. They can provide insight to the consumer to make their product evaluations of properties such as quality and other values attributed to the specified location. They influence consumer behavior, purchase intentions and product perceptions and so they become increasingly relevant in the marketing strategy of companies, especially at an international level (Guoqun and Jian, 2006).

The Country of Origin or CoO mark implies that the fabrication and design happen in the same origin country. Defining the concept of Country of Origin has become more challenging due to the globalized dynamics of today's economy; that is where additional denominations come in handy. The CoD, or Country of Design mark refers to where the product is conceived and

engineered. Companies may use this to associate their brand or product to the positive image of a certain country, for example moving the design activity of a company to Italy would cause such an effect. The CoM, or Country of Manufacture, as implied, is the country where the product is manufactured; a variation of this term is CoA, or Country of Assembly which refers to the country where most of the good's final assembly takes place. Country of parts or COP is made to give particular importance to the origin of the raw material used in a product, it refers to the country from which the majority of materials used in a product come from. Country of brand, CoB, is another mark that represents the country in which the brand has originated.

Closing the Focus

Context of Cultural Research: Colombia (06)

In order to evaluate the meanings attributed to Cultural products, this part of the research will focus on a specific location or territoriality. Previously we have seen how contexts may dictate and alter the meaning of artefacts. The relevant meanings of one place will be different to those of another. Performing a broad research on meaning may result in conclusions that are too general and difficult to contrast. Therefore, it is appropriate to begin the study by narrowing down the area of research to be able to perceive the commonalities and variation in meaning attribution to cultural products both from the designer and consumer perspective. This approach could be the starting step of a greater research in which the taxonomy of meaning by location or country is then compared and contrasted against major cultural models and values.

Research is usually performed in countries with long historical traditions, regardless, for the purpose of this research the location of focus will be the Latin American country, Colombia. This exploration will contribute to the study of new thematic areas in the territory and to bring awareness to the latent potential yet to

be exploited in the field of design as a source of development and identity construction and to the role designers play in the construction of the concept of cultural sustainability.

The cultural history of Colombia is a rather interesting one. A lot of its development has been marked by the encounter of two worlds, the prehispanic and the hispanic world, followed by the introduction of a post-colonial modernity. Along this process of colonization and independence, Colombia has resulted in a multiethnic, polychromatic, festive, fragmented country with a high creative energy displayed from generation to generation. Being a relatively new civilization as compared to other western and eastern states, its ancestral culture is mostly derived from indigenous and ethnic populations. The material representations of these communities are the visible result of the interrelation between values, customs, and traditions and of a strong connection to the availability of local resources. All in all, they speak of a journey through the construction of a national identity that still persists today and is constantly transformed by popular culture.

The focus of this thesis lies in the understanding of meanings behind cultural products. To get closer to this understanding it is important to study the values of the cultural context, in this case, the nation, Colombia. In the following lines a brief historical narration of the origin of the identity and values of the nation will be traced. It has been stated that meanings are in constant evolution, regardless the establishment of a cultural identity is the process of transformation of the past and its reinterpretation in the present and future. Studying the historical sources of cultural meaning helps to understand the values and meanings that remain and that still continue to influence and describe what can be considered as a cultural identity dictated by a nation.

6.1 The Development of an Identity

In their book *Genealogías de la Colombianidad*, Castro-Gómez and Restrepo (2008) note that it is not until 1910 that the Colombian identity begins to be molded. In 1810 the political emancipation from Spain had taken place and had left the country in a process of transition from post-colonialism in which the image of the nation, separated from the ideals of the European world, was still to be built. One influential factor in the initial development of a Colombian conscience is the Centenary Festivities of the nation in 1910, specifically the Centenary exhibition focused on Agriculture and Industry, which reflected the industrial practices and capacities of the nation and established Colombia as a modern nation, now emancipated also in economical and spiritual terms. This event, as suggested by Castro-Gómez and Restrepo (2008) starts a process of symbolic staging of the nation.

Even though this exhibition was still focused on displaying a civilized and industrialized country mirrored to those of European culture leaving out manifestations of popular culture, it did contribute to the formation of the concept or value of the modern Colombian worker which still remains today. Work is established as a sign of nationalism and an act of patriotism. To this day Colombians pride themselves on the fact of being hard workers with an illusion and drive towards progress and achievement through effort and perseverance. The differential factor here as compared to the Anglo-world being that work is not the end per-se but a means to

the cultivation of higher values (Castro-Gómez and Restrepo, 2008).

The new century of Colombian history began with the idea of industrialization not with the aim of becoming a technological power, but as a way to improve the labors it already knew how to do. Always tied to its existing agricultural production and the increasing possibility of exports of raw materials and tropical products to more industrialized countries. This richness in terms of resources then also becomes a source of value in the narrative of the country and in its position towards other nations.

The definition of nation is tied to a politically delimited territory and a new relationship between it and the collectivity of its individuals. It is implied by Anderson (1991) that a nation is built through the homogenization of culture and the creation of a community that shares certain characteristics, such as the language, traditions, race, gastronomy, etc. that distinguish them from others (Castro-Gómez and Restrepo, 2008). In this sense they are culturally delimited conglomerates with a symbolic construction sustained by collective identification. Despite this idea of homogenization for the making of a nation, an exceptional characteristic of Colombia is the fact that it is a heterogeneous country, not only in terms of population but also because of its regions full of contrasts rooted in its geography. This diversity of cultures and topography will, in fact, be one of the main contributors to the formation of a national identity.

At the same time, this heterogeneity also classifies Colombia as a fragmented country with frequent episodes of revolution and political unrest. This geopolitical situation makes it difficult to develop a true national industry despite having a wealth of resources from natural and industrial practices. In a more general manner, the structural heterogeneity of the country also makes visible a persistent history of coloniality as a sign of modernity. Coloniality, a process denominated by Aníbal Quijano, is the legacy of colonialism in Latin America; it implies the naturalization of certain hierarchies of powers that facilitate relationships of domination and exploitation all under the umbrella of modernity (Castro-Gómez and Restrepo, 2008).

This sense of coloniality is also influential in the creation of an identity considering the fact that the way to establish an identity is in comparison to another. This starts a series of differentiating practices like for example the idealization of pre-Columbian civilizations and indigenous populations like the Tayronas from the Lost City in Santa Marta. These practices can be interpreted as a search for the real roots of an identity separate from that European influence and separate from the concept of modernity. What results from this is the search for a new national imaginary of nature, harmony and beginnings that becomes an object of pride and desire (Ramirez, 2011).

The settlement of national symbols is also influenced by the consumption practices of the people that will be a reflection of what it means to be Colombian. The nation becomes a discursive construction that narrates itself through different elements of its regions. This tropicalization and regionalization process also helps to reinforce the narrative of the multiethnic and multicultural country (Ramirez, 2011). For example, the Sombrero Vueltiao, an element of identification and regional differentiation from the coast made by the Zenu indigenous community in caña flecha, becomes a National Symbol. Likewise, elements like the mochilas (handbags) or chamba ceramics, become part of everyday life and obtain a place in the life of the Colombian consumer.

The discursive production of an identity is also made through its characters. This goes in line with the sources of cultural meaning mentioned prior in this thesis, referred to as Heroes and included as a layer of the levels of culture of the Onion Model proposed by Hofstede (Insights, 2020). The successful cultural expressions of artists and writers become too identifiers of the nation. Think of the figures of artist and sculptor Fernando Botero, the compositions of Rafael Escalona, or to get a clearer picture, the writings of Gabriel García Márquez who introduced Magical Realism as a major cultural aspect of Colombia. In the contemporary world characters even like Shakira are assigned values that are tied also to 'Colombianness!' In this case one could list her vibrant spirit and energy, her dancing, talent and drive as symbols of a Colombian identity.

Aside from the day-to-day symbols of course there are also the more solemn ones like the flag, the shield and the anthem. These symbols represent a historical legacy and the political trajectory of the country. Here again the richness of its soils and oceans is also highlighted as well as the drive for progress and freedom of its patriots. There are also emblems which are elements chosen from nature from the geographic regions of the nation and represent the natural and cultural richness of the country (Símbolos patrios y otros datos de interés, n.d.). These include for example the orchid, national flower, the wax palm from Quindío, exclusive of the country and the Condor of the Andes.

Many of the manifestations listed in the above paragraphs have also been listed as part of the National cultural heritage. Through this heritage denomination the traditions that define the culture are kept alive. The latter can be both material and immaterial. It can involve aspects such as "traditions, languages and oral expressions; performing arts; social uses, rituals and festive acts; knowledge and uses related to nature; traditional craft techniques; musical, dance and sound expressions; ritual, scenic, ceremonial expressions, traditional games; knowledge, skills and techniques associated with the elaboration of objects, designs; social uses, knowledge and practices about the human being, nature and the universe; knowledge, traditional legal systems; knowledge and techniques associated with traditional cuisine" (Nuestro Patrimonio Cultural al alcance de todos, n.d.). All the components of identity mentioned above, create a structure of sentiments and meanings with which the people manage to connect and help them to identify themselves as Colombians.

6.2 Zoom in on Craft

1 | Craft: A vivid representation of national culture and identity.

"In the respect and appropriation of the origins, lies the true possibility of moving towards a promising and consistent modernity" Cecilia Duque Duque

Cultural products in Colombia are strongly tied to craft, if not inseparable concepts. As it has been mentioned before, the national territory is rich in the availability of raw material that is directly linked to specific regions and communities. The heterogeneity of Colombia is also represented in its crafts which have become a tangible communicator of cultural diversity, history and tradition.

From 1910, at the centenary of the nation after the independence from Spain, the artisanal and folkloric development of the nation began to be promoted as a means to solidify the symbols for national identification (Ramirez, 2011). This point sets the possibility of Colombia becoming an 'Artisanal Country' or a 'Hand-made Country' as it was termed later in the beginnings of the XXI century.

In Colombia, artisanal production is positioned as a reference of identity for the nation. The reactivation of these labors, as well as of the agricultural ones, is the result of the situation of the second postwar period where the separation of the world is established justifying the intervention of the first world on the third world with the expectation that the latter would follow the models of the most economically advanced (Ramirez, 2011). The strategy in Colombia becomes the economic reactivation through attention to unemployment and poverty and therefore the strengthening of the work of the people.

Again, in the decade of the 60s and 70s there was a second resurgence of artisanal production as a result of the promotion of the sector by the state. Supporting the production of craft, its production, circulation and consumption becomes an alternative to economic growth in the nation and a way out of underdevelopment in a fair and equitable way. Craft becomes more widespread in the day-to-day consumption practices of the people. Its consumption is seen as a way of recognition of the people's own 'Colombianness' and a sign of their cultural and economic possibilities. The production of crafts becomes a cultural expression of the nation and the recognition of a prehispanic past actualized by the creative capacity of the people. Hence the importance of preserving them without corrupting their tradition and values which had already been evidenced in the implementation of development strategies like the intervention of the Peace Corps Volunteers. Such intervention resulted in the production of symbols outside of the context of the nation with the imposition of designs that were not always coherent with local culture since they were meant for exportation (Ramirez, 2011).

The prehispanic past and the tradition that is entitled to craft makes it an effective discourse for the construction of a way to understand colombianity. This helps to strengthen artisanal production and shifts its perception from being only utilitarian objects to being objects of aesthetic and symbolic value and eventually of design. The nationalization of craft was only a first step into its advancement, the following step would be their popularization in order to massify the consumption. The strategy to establish craft as an economic sector and a national identifier now shifts towards the consolidation of the consumer. At this point it is possible to place Craft and design in the same plane with the introduction of the concept of

contemporary craft. Craft objects become less literal and more abstract and artistic and enter not just the home but other contexts such as the fashion runways (Ramirez, 2011).

The visual treatment and the presentation of craft in new contexts serves as a way to add value to them. With the massification of its consumption it also becomes important to raise the quality standards through different means, for example, by searching for more refined finishes, a greater allusion to prehispanity and the lowering of production and commercialization prices. In this mission, duties like the one performed by Artesanías de Colombia will become highly relevant for the craft sector also because they establish new markets and scenarios such as artisanal fairs which help to position craft as an aesthetic expression of the people in which the constant tension between traditional and modern is reflected. Creativity and the search of equilibrium between an indigenous past and the exaltation of the qualities of the present world become also a symbol of Colombian identity, one that is from its origin multiethnic and multicultural.

As a concluding statement, Ramirez (2011) says that if handcrafts are goods with identity is it because "they are conditioned by physical environments and historical development". The delimitation of a geographic area contributes to the selection of natural and technological resources in which a community will become specialized.

2| The craft panorama in Colombia

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, defines artisan products as:

"...those produced by artisans, either entirely by hand, or with the help of hand tools or even mechanical means, provided that the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most important component of the finished product. They are produced without limitation in terms of quantity and using raw materials from sustainable resources. The special nature of artisan products is based on their distinctive characteristics, which can be utilitarian, aesthetic, artistic, creative, culturally, decorative, functional, traditional, symbolic and religiously and socially significant".

In Colombia it is possible to speak of three different types of crafts: indigenous craft, traditional popular craft and contemporary craft or neoartesanía. They are defined by Artesanías de Colombia as follows (SIART, La Artesanía y su Clasificación, n.d.):

- **Indigenous crafts:** The material expression of the culture of ethnic communities made to respond to social needs. They are functional, aesthetic and ritual goods and evidence of the community's knowledge, transmitted through generations, of the potential of the resources available in their geographic area. The departments in which there is a greater percentage of the population dedicated to craft and that self recognize as indigenous are Amazonas (97,5%); La Guajira (95,6%); Chocó (76,2%) y Córdoba (62,7%) (SIART, Caracterización, n.d.).
- **Traditional popular craft:** Corresponds to the creation of useful and aesthetic objects in an anonymous way by a certain people applying a high dominance of materials deriving from their habit. "This activity is carried out as a specialized trade, transmitted from generation to generation, and constitutes a fundamental expression of the culture with which they

identify" (SIART, La Artesanía y su Clasificación, n.d.).

- **Contemporary Craft:** Also a functional and aesthetic production, but with more defined technical and formal elements. It may originate from different sociocultural and techno-economic contexts. It focuses on the "transition towards modern technology and/or by the application of aesthetic principles of universal and/or academic trends, and highlights individual creativity expressed by the quality and originality of the style" (SIART, La Artesanía y su Clasificación, n.d.).

The document *Política de turismo y Artesanía del 2009* suggests that all departments of Colombia have or have had at least one emblematic artisanal trade (Cf. Ministerio de Comercio, Industria y Turismo 2009). In fact, artisanal production in Colombia is regionalized which beyond creating a national identity also creates a regional one tied to the folklore of the different regions. For example, the peasant communities in the interior of the country have generally been related to ceramic practices that tie back to indigenous material culture, and the indigenous communities of the Atlantic coast are related to basketry and weaving practices. The main factor these practices have in common throughout the country is their heavy reliance on raw material sources of vegetable origin and the handmade component. According to statistic from Artesanías de Colombia, as of 2019 65% of artisans make their objects mostly by hand, a 22% uses small tools to support their production and only a 19.6% uses motor propelled machines (SIART, Caracterización, n.d.).

The learning of these trades is still mostly transferred within family generations which reinforces their traditional and cultural character (SIART, Caracterización, n.d.). Notwithstanding, according to statistics gathered by Artesanías de Colombia, more that 61% of the artisan population of Colombia is over 40 years old and another 23.1% is over 60 (SIART, Caracterización, n.d.). This information calls for the attention on efforts to protect and transmit artisanal practices and knowledge that risk disappearance. Modernity, the movement to the cities and the search for more economically rewarding activities have influenced the transfer of this knowledge from generation to generation. This is no longer a natural process but one that requires intervention and intention.

The panorama of the population of artisans has evolved from what one might generally assume. In 1994 only 23.28 of artisans were developing their activities in the cities. Today around 60.2% of the people dedicated to artisanal activities reside in urban areas while the remaining percentage in rural areas. From the latter, 16% belongs to indigenous reserves (SIART, Caracterización, n.d.). In the past, many programs towards the strengthening of craft excluded extremely rural and secluded areas. Even though there is an abundance of craft tradition, there has also been an abundance of misrepresentation of the artisans who possess this knowledge. Today the panorama is different since there is more access to them, a greater number of craft actors in the cities and more education which could suggest a greater potential for expansion.

In Colombia there has always been a duality model between enlightened knowledge and non-legitimate knowledge (Castro-Gómez and Restrepo, 2008). Colonialism and the bourgeoisie thought have influenced the way in which indigenous populations are understood and perceived versus the 'literate' population of cities. Nowadays, artisan populations have mobilized to the cities and have entered in contact with modern urban living conditions. One of the dilemmas of working with artisan communities is the 'corruption' of their environment.

As much as this is true for some remote communities, it should not be the only reading, which although romantic, is a reflection of the processes mentioned before of coloniality and the remaining ideals of colonization still so present in today's society. In a design scenario, this leads the designer to generally place himself in a position of dominance, this relationship instead should be of equals contributing to a collective design process. Involving the artisans is making the process fair and ethical and can in the long run provide new economic and sustainable alternatives that allow them to continue pursuing their craft. Craft and design can, in combination, be a source of hope for new sectors in the Colombian economy and for the remainders of secluded parts of the population.

Despite the close relationship between cultural product and handicraft in Colombia, it is worth clarifying that this is not the only representation of cultural product. The result of this research takes into account this existing relationship but does not focus solely on it, as it would result in a specific focus on the designer-craftsman co-creation relation. This specific relationship has been studied in the design field and specific models can be already found for the subject.

3 | Artisan-Designer co-creation models

Craft and culture go hand in hand. Craft can be an expression of cultural features both in the practice and in the application in artefacts. Despite its value, globalization, mass production and the separation of societies have caused a decline in craft itself due to competition in prices and accessibility and have also caused a disconnect between the artisan and his knowledge of the modern consumer (Bissett-Johnson and Moorhead, 2018). The historical connection artisans had with their market to produce goods that would be representative of their needs, likes and culture has blurred today making it harder to achieve innovation in the field. The collaboration between artisans and designers proposes an alternative to address the decline of craft and to provide long term opportunities for the improvement of living conditions of the craft sector.

Co-design processes are based on shared or collective creation acts. In the alliance between designer and artisan, the first can contribute innovation while the second can bring knowledge of tradition. The designer can help translate the cultural values from the consumers to the artisan and vice versa to eventually interpret tradition in new ways. For the development of successful co-creation models it is important to understand the main concerns for artisans in the co-design process, these being the "recognition and respect of their skill, desire for creativity and intrinsic relationship between a sense of self-identity, cultural-identity and craftwork" (Bissett-Johnson and Moorhead, 2018). Having this in mind will lead to better relationships where the right value, respect and attribution is given to the artisan.

The designer-artisan collaboration framework presented by Bissett-Johnson and Moorhead (2018) exposes different types of co-design models based on the different roles each of the parties can take and their interactions. The framework takes inspiration from the approaches of Human Centered Design (HCD) and Socially Responsible Design (SRD) focusing on the long-term creation of opportunities without putting at risk artisan culture and empowerment and on the designer's contribution to sustainable business practices. The framework describes 6 different cocreation settings under which the designer can make greater contribution not only as co-conceptualizer but also mentor, consultant, and business facilitator.

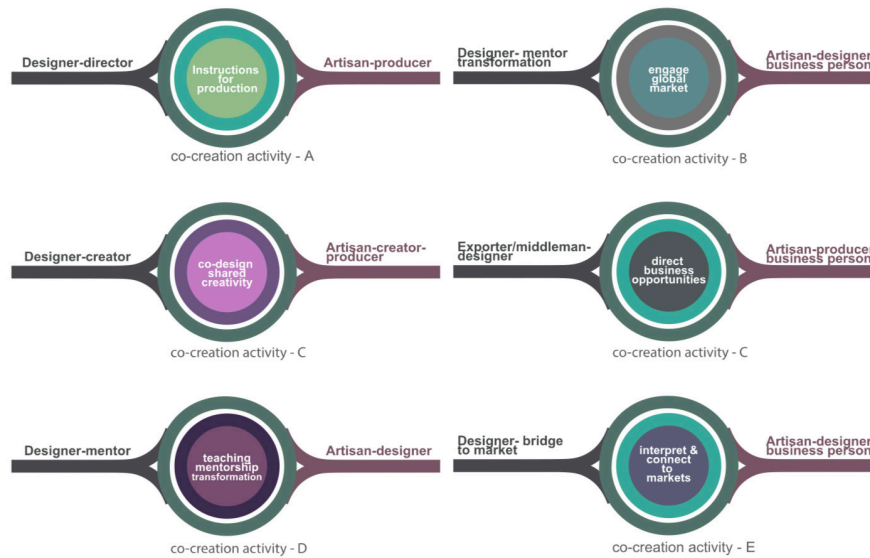


Figure 33: Various Co-creation Settings for Designer-artisan Collaboration (Bissett-Johnson and Moorhead, 2018)

Keeping in mind this relationship is definitely relevant for the proposal of a process for cultural product design as well as the development of tools that can assist the designer in the creation of the same.

6.3 An Economic and Market Perspective

1 | The Orange Wave in Colombia

“Cultural industries determine in a way, the material, intellectual and emotional traits that characterize nations, by contributing not only to the formation of identity, but also to the strengthening of the sense of belonging of the population in the different territories of a country” (Impacto económico de las industrias culturales en Colombia, 2003).

Historically the study of cultural industries in Colombia has been restricted to the traditional understanding of cultural industries like the audiovisual sectors including cinema, radio, tv and print mediums like magazines, journals and editorials. Efforts to understand these areas have focused on tracking the specific economic dynamics of the cultural industries sector and for example, seek to calculate their aggregate value, the production, remunerations, margins of commerce and transportation, exports and taxes (Impacto económico de las industrias culturales en Colombia, 2003).

Also listed as a cultural industry in the report Impacto económico de las industrias culturales en Colombia (2003) because of the representative role in the culture of the country, but less studied because of the lack of sources and resources to study it with precision are the Artisanal and Publicity sectors. In the artisanal sector the main activities were related to weaving (57.5%), wood (13.5%) and ceramics (7.37%). By 2002 the total value of artisanal exports was 31.15 Million USD, ceramics being the main artisanal exported good. This report insinuates the strengthening of foreign trade as a means to propel the local cultural industry, however, as also suggested in Designers Meet Artisans (2005) the local market should not be underestimated. There is a portion of the population with purchasing power that is open to consuming local as long as it finds an adequate supply of it. Here, the industry faces the challenge of balancing

the local with the international experience in order to blend the traditional with the modern and adjust to a globalized perspective, not without the risk of losing its essence.

A more all-encompassing term to cover cultural production in Colombia is that of the Orange Economy. In the last decade cultural policies in Colombia have gained more weight. In 2017 the 'Orange Law' (ley 1834 de 2017) was introduced to develop, promote, encourage and protect creative industries. Later in 2018 the commitment towards boosting the Orange Economy was reaffirmed by the incoming president of Colombia Ivan Duque Marquez in his positioning speech.

Aside from the traditional cultural industries (editorial, phonographic, audiovisual) a larger set of activities is also covered by the Orange umbrella. The activities that make up the Orange Economy are those that are part of the arts and tangible and intangible cultural heritage, cultural industries and creative industries. As listed by the Colombian government, the creative industries, new media and software content and arts and patrimony activities are encompassed. The first group includes digital media, design and advertising while the second one includes visual arts, scenic arts, tourism and cultural patrimony, education (in artistic and cultural areas), gastronomy and craft (ABC Economía Naranja, n.d.).

In exact terms, this concept is defined as follows:

"The Orange Economy is a development model in which cultural diversity and creativity are pillars of social and economic transformation of the country, from the regions. This model has tools for cultural, social and economic development. It is based on the creation, production and distribution of cultural and creative goods and services, which can be protected by intellectual property rights" (ABC Economía Naranja, n.d.).

Contributes

3% World's
GDP

Generates

2,250 Billion
USD/yr

Employs

30 Million
people

The goal of the orange economy is to "Promote the conditions to generate decent employment in the cultural sector, support the materialization of new creative ideas and innovative products, strengthen ancestral knowledge, cultural heritage practices and the transmission of traditional knowledge" (ABC Economía Naranja, n.d.).

The importance of these industries is not only represented in its mission to promote the creative and cultural development of the nation as well as the preservation of its knowledge and skill but also in the generation of wealth and employment. Their mission aligns with the 2030 sustainable development goals laid out by the United Nations. In fact, in 2020 the General Assembly of the United Nations declared 2021 as the international year of the Creative Economy for sustainable development. Focusing on culture, innovation and creativity would be the means to contribute to a more inclusive, equitable and sustainable world. The creative economies are one of the sectors with fastest growth in the world contributing to 3% of the world's GDP. They generate annual revenues of US\$2,250 billion and global exports of over US\$250 million and employ 30 million people around the world. According to recent forecasts, these sectors will represent around 10% of global GDP in the years to come (International Year of Creative Economy for Sustainable Development, n.d.).

Figure 34: Contribution of the Creative Economies to the World's GDP and Annual Revenues

Contributes

3.2% National
GDP

Employs

517.187 People

Figure 35: Contribution of the Creative Economies in Colombia.

In Colombia, in 2020 the population employed in activities of the orange economy accounted to 455.653, in 2019 before the Covid-19 pandemic the amount equaled to 517.187 (DANE, 2020). Likewise, before the 2020 Pandemic the contribution of the Orange Economy to the national GDP was 3.2% (projected 2014-2019 average) (Martinez, 2021).

This research supports the value that is given to cultural, creative and heritage industries and hopes to contribute to their development by providing tools that may apply to either of its classifications but especially to those related to design. Understanding cultural industries is relevant since they are in charge of creating symbolic exchanges that are and determine many other cultural processes. Part of the strengthening of the sector also relies on the increased study of it and the systematization of practices that may facilitate the endeavors of cultural initiatives.

2 | Defining a 'Made in Colombia'

With the success of Italian design in international contexts came the development of the brand Made in Italy in 1980 to be applied to products entirely made in the country. This origin denominator has become a way to highlight the superior quality of Italian products, their attention to detail, creativity, style, elegance and manufacturing tradition. According to studies performed by KPMG (2011), foreigners mostly associate Made in Italy to values such as aesthetics, beauty, luxury, wellbeing and passion. Other highly related values are creativity, quality, and culture. This brand has become crucial for bolstering Italian exports and the production and competitiveness of Italian businesses, especially of small and medium size. The mark enhances the status and appeal of the products as well as their exposure, popularity and distribution. An added value of the mark is that it also increases customer loyalty. In the same study by KPMG (2011) it is exposed that made in Italy is the third most influential brand in the world after Coca Cola and Visa.

In Colombia there have been some approximations to establishing a trademark of similar sorts. As an attempt to foster and communicate the attributes of Colombia and contribute to the positioning of a positive country image, the 'Marca Pais/Colombia' or country brand is created. What initially started as the campaign Colombia es Pasión was transformed in 2012 to the brand Colombia (CO). This campaign "offers a progressive image of Colombia in which mega-diversity, innovation, sustainability and natural, environmental, people and cultural wealth were more than simple attributes of the Country Brand: they became the flag and source of pride for Colombians" (Marca País: ¿Quiénes Somos?, n.d.).

Part of the intention behind the creation of this brand was also to close the gap between what was thought of Colombia outside and the actual present situation. The negative perceptions created from previous years of internal conflict clouded the new reality of the country that went through some advances based on the cultivation of talent, dedication and potential. The Marca Pais sought to change this image to promote investment, tourism and exports and competitiveness as a whole. Additionally it also sought to influence and involve Colombians as generators of this new image by making them proud of their origin.

The brand perse became a seal that accompanies products and companies of Colombian origin and is represented in single logo symbol that uses geometric figures to represent the different regions of Colombia and colors to exalt its diversity in hydric resources, climates, minerals, lands, species, flowers and landscapes and values such as warmth, friendliness, talent and passion. The main objective of the logo is to exalt the greatest strength of Colombia, that is, its megadiversity (Marca País: ¿Quiénes Somos?, n.d.).

More current initiatives include the seal 'Compra lo Nuestro'. This seal is set by the national government through the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism and pretends to identify the products and services made in Colombia. The aim of the initiative, varying from that of Italy, is to differentiate products internally instead of internationally, so that consumers can more easily identify Colombian products and services among imported ones (Compra Lo Nuestro, 2020). As stated in its definition, the seal does not reference the quality or adherence to norms of the product or service. In this sense, it is possible to say that the seal is still lacking a connection to clear values that can enhance the image of the products that carry it. Its value is geared mostly towards the producer of the good or service that is granted access to other support programs and not so much towards creating a consumer conscience.

A related mark proposed under the Orange Economy is the seal 'Colombia Crea' which "identifies the arts, patrimony, culture, talent and creativity of Colombians" (Sello Colombia Crea, n.d.). The goal of the seal, introduced in 2019, is to foster the cultural and creative industries nationally and internationally and promote the diffusion of contents with symbolic value, and creative and cultural goods and services. The values highlighted by this seal to contribute to national identity are culture and creativity.

Through this research for the meaning behind cultural products it would be possible to contribute to the definition of values that may actually shape what a cultural product under a Colombian seal should possess.

Conclusion and design Implications

Part two narrowed down the scope to a culture-specific research. Through the presentation of the concepts of globalization of the market and localization of design, this research provided an understanding of the reasons why it is valuable to focus on local consumer cultures. While globalization in product design may lead to homogenization, localization makes up for identity flaws through the embedding of cultural features that give character and symbolic value to products. Cultural contexts are determinant for the creation and altering of meanings, consequently, designers need to be aware of such context variability so that they can strategically use it to modify or implement changes on their designs and set the right contextual frame for their interpretation. To provide a taxonomy of meaning for cultural products then, it was important to define the specific culture from which these meanings derive, in this case, Colombia.

The research of the cultural context of Colombia was presented through two main areas, one related to identity qualities and the other to the state of the cultural economy. Analyzing the current state of the cultural and creative economies in the nation served two main purposes. It helped to understand the possible contribution the development of the field brings from a social and economic perspective and it evidenced that even though it is gaining track, it is still limited by the lack of definition of attributes and characteristics that together give the value added to promote it.

Regarding identity, a brief historical recount of the origin of the values of the nation was traced. This approach for understanding the factors of cultural identity of a region could be the starting step of a greater research in which the taxonomy of meaning by location or country is then compared and contrasted against major cultural models and values.

In sum, all the components related to national identity and the cultural industry mentioned above, create a structure of sentiments and meanings with which people manage to connect. This structure is what helps them to identify themselves as Colombians. The resulting structure of this part of the research is condensed in the figure below related to the factors of cultural identity in Colombia.

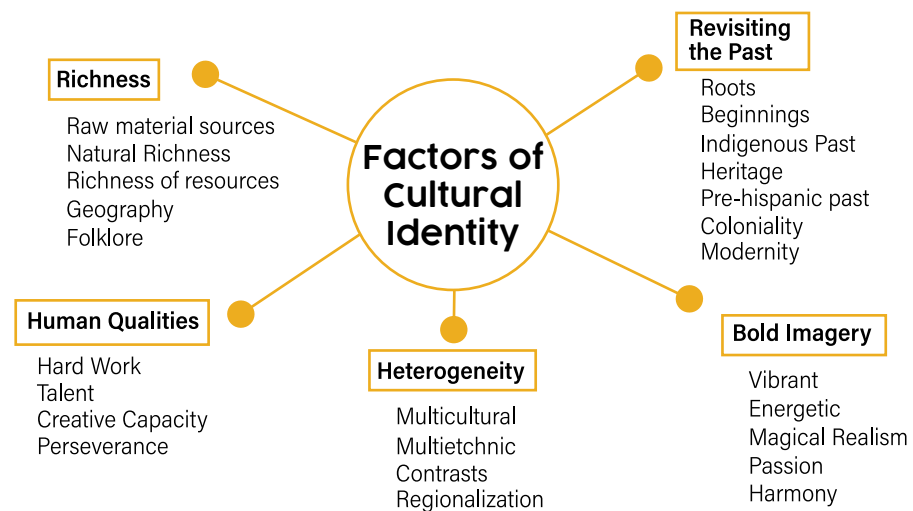


Figure 36: Structure of Meanings Derived from the Cultural Identity of Colombia

Identifying common cultural traits and regional symbols and their reinterpretation is what expands the competitive advantage of goods in a modern and global market, going beyond cultural cliches or appropriations. The resulting characterization contributes to the definition of values that may actually shape what a cultural product under a Colombian seal should possess. Likewise, it helps to evidence the symbolic values connected to the cultural context which may be further linked to design and used by designers to charge their products with meaning.

Put in simpler terms, the main contributions of this part for the subsequent stages of the research are as follows:

- Awareness of the potential benefits of the industry for economic and social sustainability.
- Awareness of the need for characterizing meanings related to the cultural context to bolster the development of the industry.
- Identification of meanings from the cultural context that may be linked to the meanings in cultural products.
- Identification of particular aspects of identity (for example artisan tradition) that are so strongly linked to cultural products that may actually influence and guide the cultural product design process (for example linking it to co-design approaches).

Empirical Study

(07)

Cultural Products within the Context

Part

3

7.1 Establishing a “Colombian identity” in design

In recent years the search for a Colombian identity in design has been developing with greater strength than before as a way to find differentiating factors from the dominant styles imposed by North American and European standards. Borrowing from its folklore, roots, music, craft, passion and talent, among others, designers have embraced a journey to translate Colombian identity into objects and elements that will empower their designs to face the global market.

Design room Colombia was created in 2018 as the first digital platform that promotes Colombian design to an international audience. The project was developed by ProColombia, an entity that promotes tourism, foreign investment in Colombia, exports of non-energy goods and the image of the country. Design Room aims to highlight “the diversity of styles present in the Colombian artisan tradition and contemporary design scene” (Ardilla, 2020).

The selection of designs included in this showcase is done under the idea that they should represent the cultural experience of the country and as a parallel mission, highlight the union of artisan work with world trends in the industry. The result is a curated offer of creative, innovative, and vibrant products that have the basis of international design but that are linked to the roots of Colombian culture.

Clearly visible in their latest collection, Relieve Tropical, or in English Tropical Relieve, is the intention of using the Colombian narrative as a way to differentiate and position the products. This collection is inspired by the different thermal floors and geography of Colombia. Through richness in textures, fibers, colors and shapes the history of Colombian design is made visible; for example, the hues of the Colombian Caribbean and its paramos or moorlands are represented through a variety of warm tones (Design Room Colombia. n.d).

Another initiative founded in 2020 on the basis of the search for a characteristic Colombian identity in design is Tei Identidad. A workshop that gathers young designers to guide them through a mentorship program to find their own identity. Regarding the motivation for the workshop the organizer, Francisco Jaramillo states: "Colombia's designers are not making use of their context and their own personalities to find traits that define their creative identity and generate a conscious and lasting design over time" (Ardila, 2021). The consumption of design in Colombia is mostly of European, Japanese or Scandinavian aesthetics since there is a lack of cultural ownership to create pieces that speak more of the country. The purpose of the workshop is to make designers aware of their personal experiences and contexts to design products that go beyond global trends and imitation.

Smaller proposals from a commercial perspective are also emerging. For instance, Jooki, a passion project of two Colombian-Swiss couples that are trying to bring Colombian design to Switzerland. Through their online platform they provide a space for Colombian designers to reach a wider international audience and showcase a limited amount of their products. Says Stefan Huggenberger, co-founder of JOOKI, that the basic and most important idea behind the brand is "to bring back more meaning to the products and objects around us. With the mass production and fast fashion and design popping up everywhere, people often lost their emotional connection to the things around them. Replacing this with things that have a human story behind and that we have a deeper connection with is what is at the core of Jooki" (NESS, 2021). They propose products whose meanings lie in the construction of emotional bonds because of their connections to the roots and stories behind the designs.

A columnist from Red Latinoamericana de Diseño (Latin American Design Network) mentions that *"the current Latin American home is the one that honors its artisan roots –which date back to pre-Columbian times– and embraces the trends of the modern world"* (Gonzalez, 2020).

After the study of the previous examples that try to embrace and position Colombian design as a source of value and differentiation, one can only agree with the previous statement. The return to artisan roots is definitely a recurring and probably permanent trait that defines the cultural design of Colombia. Additional values worth rescuing are also the vibrancy of textures and colors as well as the constant recurrence of naturalistic and environmental characteristics that make the nation unique.

7.2 Case Studies

The Following brands were selected as case studies to represent what can be intended as a successful development of cultural product design in a contemporary setting. These companies, brands or initiatives have used national identity and cultural traits as their main source of value offering from different perspectives and to different levels. They have captured cultural values and elements and incorporated a strong design sense from a functional, aesthetic and quality point of view to obtain products that are innovative and marketable. These efforts have also always kept in mind the source of their inspirations, labor and collaboration and have sought to retribute to the communities in different sorts of ways and to the preservation of tradition and heritage. The five brands presented here are Artesanías de Colombia, Tucurinca, Fango Studio, Verdi Design, and Atlas Design. These are of course not the only worth of studying and a broader discovery of these should be done to better understand the standing of Colombian brands in relation to the field of cultural product design.

1 | Artesanías de Colombia

Artesanías de Colombia is a Society adjunct to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism of Colombia. It was created in 1964 with the main objective of increasing "the participation of artisans in the national productive sector, in order to achieve a sustained integral development that is manifested in the improvement of the standard of living, seen both in an increase in the income of artisans as well as of spaces for social participation and greater productivity and positioning of handicrafts in local, regional, national and international markets" (Sobre la Entidad. Artesanías de Colombia, n.d.). This entity seeks to make Colombian craft a more competitive sector through the establishment of several strategic initiatives and ultimately participate in the preservation, rescue and appreciation of Colombia's cultural heritage. The company supports artisans in a wide range of areas such as organization, administration, design, management, product development, marketing, and sales. Part of the success of the company in the different areas lies in the collaboration and support from different organizations and private, political, and public offices which facilitate the link between regional and national actors and also provide reliability when facing external/international actors.

One of the most important qualities of this company is that it has become a link between many different actors that because of the nature and distribution of craft and indigenous communities in Colombia would be rather hard to reach. As part of its mission, the company provides new spaces for the promotion and commercialization of the artisans' work. Expoartesanas and Expoartesanos are the main events in which artisans are given a space to commercialize their production. These fairs are a window for artisans to promote their works to a national and international audience. Other spaces open to these products are the physical and online stores developed and curated by the brand. Initiatives like this also try to give artisans a more direct access to the market in order to reduce the number of intermediaries involved in the process and making a better and more fair distribution of income.

A big effort in recent years has been in achieving innovation in craft while fostering sustainability, inclusivity and high-quality standards. One of the strategic initiatives of Artesanías de Colombia is the Innovation and Design laboratories. Their main objective is to "articulate local actions, actors and resources, based on the development and sustainability of the craft activity in the different regions" (Laboratorios de Innovación y Diseño, n.d.). Another main responsibility of the laboratories is the "study of raw materials and the proper use of natural resources, product development, technical assistance and technological extension; and the promotion and



diffusion of design" (Designers Meet Artisans, 2005). These labs consist of an immersion of actors from the brand/company in artisan regions to co-design with their communities. An important part of them is the transfer of knowledge between both parties and the strengthening of the communities competences making an emphasis on innovation of products and processes. Through creativity workshops they seek to stimulate the artisan to recreate their craft collectively with the designer and strengthen identity-based values. As of 2020, the company has acted on all 32 departments of the country and involved 7.673 artisans.

The co-design process starts by identifying the artisanal communities and their human, technical and innovation capacities (Laboratorios de Innovación y Diseño, n.d.). This includes the identification of their craft and the level at which they are at, the type of products they currently make and the potential it may have for development. The program incites the linking of their production to design to make the artisanal units more productive whilst always preserving their patrimony and identity. The idea is to build upon their already existing capacities and exploit their potentiality. Part of the purpose of the Design Labs is also to give the communities access to commercial scenarios both by capacitating them on related topics to pricing, marketing strategy and the global context and by giving them a space to exhibit their work in fairs such as the ones mentioned previously. The condition to participate in these spaces is to create products of the highest quality.

Through its different projects, Artesanías de Colombia intends to find the "Colombian look" based on the reinterpretation of elements of national identity that also contribute to the image construction of the country. This is achieved through the exploration of forms, colors, materials and skills to create local products that are traditional but with a modern twist to satisfy contemporary demand.



Figure 37: Official Images from Artesanías de Colombia



Figure 38: Official Images from Tucurínca

2 | Tucurínca

Tucurínca, born in 2014, is a brand inspired by the Colombian tropics that rescues the ancestral weaving tradition used in the traditional “Costeña” chair by reinventing its designs, preserving the technique and innovating with new materials. This particular type of chair is part of Colombia’s popular design, commonly seen in the streets of Colombian Caribbean cities like Santa Marta, placed in the front entrance of houses where people sit to rest under the breeze and watch life as it passes. The name of the brand is borrowed from the town of Tucurínca in the department of Magdalena where, as told by the creator Rafael Zuñiga, his grandfather had a country house with this type of chairs. In its essence, the brand tries to reflect the life, energy and joy of the Colombian Caribbean. The main material used in the production of these chairs was originally “zuncho” or a plastic band. The brand has introduced a new set of materials including natural and plastic PVC cords and leathers to be weaved to the traditional metal tube used as structural material.

Some other locally found materials have also been used such as “mimbre”, calceta de plátano (derived from leaves of the plantain plantations of the Magdalena region), and cordón cienaguero. The aim of using this kind of materials is to give new value and change the perception of what may be considered “poor” materials and give it new meaning that brings out the idiosyncrasy of the region while setting them in today’s living contexts. According to the founder and designer, Rafael Zuñiga, “the only way to be competitive in the international market is to work with local primary resources, because they are fibers that are already there and can be obtained easily; besides, they have unique characteristics that give national products a differentiator” (Neira, 2019).

An extra layer of “local Colombian identity” is also added to the products by including patterns that are typical of other woven craft sources such as the hats in “caña flecha” and the “mochilas” or Wayúú bags.

A part of the focus of the company is based on inclusion of under-privileged groups of society including those that are victims of the Colombian armed conflict and that live in extreme poverty. Some of the weavers of the brand were previously dedicated to commercial street labors and have now become craft men. An interesting fact shared by the company is that most of their workers do not have prior experience in weaving but learnt it at the job after being taught by the most experienced weaver and now also teach their own families to do it. This speaks of the capacity of cultural enterprises to help promote and preserve the knowledge of manual traditional crafts.

Some of the designs presented are a more direct appropriation of the original versions of the “costeña” chair while some others, such as the “30-70” collection are mixed with new sources of inspiration that help to position it along global design trends. For instance, the previously mentioned collection is inspired by the works of the Cuban architect Manuel Carrera and presents a pop style color combination (AMBIENTES. Colección 30-70 por Rafael Zúñiga, n.d.). The brand complies with international standards since it aims to represent Colombian design in exterior settings, a strategy that has proven valuable and has even given it the chance to earn collaborations with brands like Louis Vuitton in 2019 who sought out the brand to create custom made products for their displays within the Colombian stores (Neira, 2019). The brand has also participated in international fairs like Wanted Design in New York that have served as a platform for expansion. Some of the products have been exported to countries such as Belgium, USA, Belize and Switzerland.

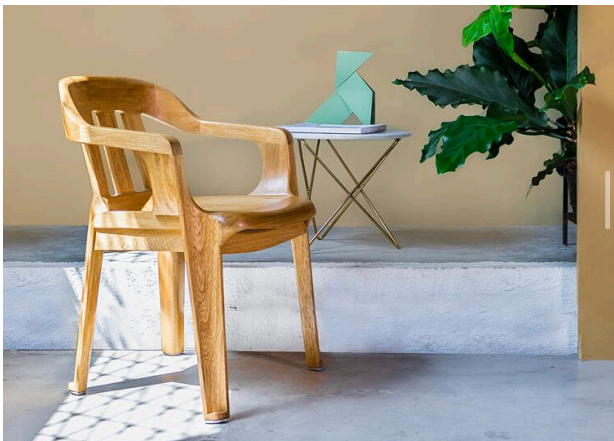
3 | Atlas

Atlas was founded by the Colombian designer Mariana Vieira who works exclusively with indigenous communities to create its interior design, furniture and art objects. The projects developed in Atlas carry a representative local identity that results from the constant travel of the designer within her national territory and her meeting with indigenous communities. Some of these communities are located in La Guajira, Bolívar, Chocó, San Agustín, San Jacinto, Tolima, the Andean Region and Bogotá (Atlas, n.d.).

The work with these communities is done through a participatory design approach in which knowledge is in constant exchange between designer and artisan, from the traditional to the modern and vice versa. Part of the intention of this approach is to preserve ancestral artisanship and techniques and to bring them to a contemporary setting while dignifying indigenous and peasant communities and their artisanal labor.

Vieira's work is based on the exploration, translation, reinterpretation and rescue of the culture of her country and of its artisanal, ancestral and popular techniques and the blend of these with new technologies. The designer refers to atlas as a travel journal through Colombia that represents its natural and cultural richness and the connections between the tangible and the intangible, with humans, nature and the mystical. The brand's products are expected to tell a story of the place or the hands that intervened in its creation.

The brand seeks to innovate in the development of craft products, always keeping in mind



the relationship between ethics and aesthetics and the generation of positive environmental and social impact. The brand is part of initiatives such as the White Label Project that supports brands and communities by sharing their profits, in this particular case a part of the profit from the sale of the products is directed toward favoring the access to education of the Wayuu communities in La Guajira, Colombia.

Guajira C3smica is one of the designer's personal artistic projects in which she works closely with the Wayuu community using the ancestral Gualdrapa tapestry technique, originally used to decorate colorful horse saddles for special ceremonies within the community. This technique is applied using a horizontal loom and cotton threads that create a thick fabric and a 2-hole wood needle. The collection resulted in a series of textiles for pillows, furniture and art, inspired by the nights of Cabo de la Vela in northern Colombia to which the designer refers to as a "surreal dream". The pieces represent the cosmos and its sacred geometry and the permanent dialogue that the Wayuu maintain with their origins. For this community weaving is a way to capture and translate the information from the cosmos and reinterpret it in simpler terms. The result is an abstraction and own interpretation of a cultural theme in the Wayuu community elaborated with an ancestral technique of the community which is also set in a new context of use. In such a way as expressed by Vieira, "the western and the Wayuú worldviews merge" (Jookie, Atlas, n.d.).

Another design in which Vieira borrows from popular national culture is the Ramada chair. This chair is based on the Rimax chair which is a plastic chair of Colombian production from the company of the same name in the year 1989. The chair has become a generic design, it is the most commonly used chair throughout the Colombian territory for external environments, pools, restaurants and such. Its widespread presence has made it a symbol of gathering, family reunion, vacation and recreation. It is likely that this chair, at some point, has been part of every Colombian's life regardless of its origin or social distinctions. The Ramada chair is taken into a contemporary context through the use of an unexpected material, thick wood. The chair is produced of 20 different pieces of wood carefully assembled using traditional woodworking techniques. The change in material elevates the product to be an object of desire and gives it the capacity to belong within the home as a decorative, functional but specially highly emotional object.

Figure 39: Official Images from Atlas. Top and bottom: Guajira C3smica; Center: Ramada Chair

4 | Fango



Fango is a Medellin-based studio with works in the fields of Product, furniture, and interior design. The brand takes inspiration from the experiences, origin and culture of its designer Francisco Jaramillo who, through simple objects, honors traditions of the daily life in Colombia while creating an exchange between craft and technology. The products created by the brand blend traditional techniques and materials with contemporary design.

For Jaramillo, designing is synonym of telling stories through objects which he believes have a strong connection with culture and carry a soul of their own. According to the designer the richness of Colombia is in its nature, its people, its customs, and in its empathy and this is the soul that can be transmitted into objects. He calls this type of product, narrative objects. Fango takes inspiration from the behaviors of people and the objects that have become meaningful in their lives and reinterprets them in the present to evoke the remembrance of a time's past. This gives its products a feeling of nostalgia and strong emotional connection to cultural roots.



In order to understand the cultural quality of his work one needs only to examine the different works of the brand. For example, the collection "breakfast in the mountain" is inspired by the traditional Paisa breakfast of eggs, arepa, milk and fruit. The ceramic breakfast set is intervened with materials related to this culture and the production of the food to give a particular texture to the different objects. For example, the Arepa tray is intervened with the corn cob, the fruit/flower basket has the texture of the fique sacks used to transport and store crops in the countryside and the milk jug is sealed using the actual milk to give it a particular finish and color (Ardila, 2017).



Another example is that of Cocó, a piece that reinterprets a traditional decorative object in the Colombian kitchen. The original concept of the hen shaped tureen was introduced by artisan Julia Castillo and became an icon of traditional handcraft. The object is part of the day-to-day inspiration craftswomen represent in their work. In Colombia the kitchen is a place of gathering and conversation, and the hen is the representative decorative animal of this space considered the "heart" of the house. Jaramillo describes this piece as a simple but emotional element. Like many of the works of the studio this piece combines artisanship and technology presenting a wooden body made in CNC machining and a handcrafted ceramic head (Revista AXXIS, Fango, 2021). In the creation of his pieces Jaramillo tries to involve artisans and bring value to their techniques in order to promote the continuation of their ancestral knowledge.

Figure 40: Designs by Fango Studio. Top: Breakfast in the Mountain Set; Center: Tertulia Collection and Cocó; Bottom: Inspiration for the design, Vaqueta Chair and Ceramic Hen by Julia Castillo

Tertulia is another collection of hooks by the brand in which cultural objects from the day to day life in Colombian towns are

taken as inspiration and reinterpreted in new applications and contexts. The Vaqueta chairs common in the towns of the coffee region in Colombia were the inspiration for this particular project, specifically its wooden turned legs. The resulting objects are also made in turned wood borrowing from the shapes of the chair and also the context in which it lives and the human interactions around the object. Jaramillo says "seeing this object in context allows you to understand that its use is sitting around a table to chat, drink an aguardiente and play parchis" (Revista AXXIS, Cápsula de diseño, 2019). The five hooks represent those activities as seen in their name and shape, one of them is called botón, or button in English as it represents the activity of sitting in company to sew and chat, three of them are based on traditional wooden games such as the pirinola, parques and diablo, and the last one called "platos" or plates represents a set of stacked dishes in a served table. In this case culture is the inspiration both formally and conceptually.

5 | Verdi

Verdi is a Colombian textile design studio that is born from the continuation of a family technique of weaving natural threads. The precursor of this technique, Carlos Vera Diep, intended to create a rug inspired by the Japanese tatami but using local natural fibers. The first prototype created was made by a weaver of coffee sacks in fique, a rough and durable fiber obtained from the leaves of an American succulent plant, covered in latex and then finalized with leather edges. Later on, the combination of materials was combined with the threading of metal cords giving it its unique, signature style. Today, the natural fibers used in their productions include plantain fibers, organic-worm silk, fique, cotton fibers, alpaca wool and copper and silver threads. They use these materials to produce rugs, cushions, handbags, curtains, tableware and other hand woven items. Their products are 100% handmade utilizing natural elements.

The main source of inspiration for the brand is the nature of Colombia: "Between landscapes, waterfalls, colors and natural fibers we represent the roots, the cultural heritage to print it on our products" (Design Room Colombia. Verdi Design, n.d.). In their showroom they exhibit what they call "the tree of life" exhibiting their material identity since it is made of fique fibers and a threaded copper trunk. This sculpture represents not only the connection to nature and to their ancestors but also the three pillars of the brand: home, fashion and art. The link to family is an important value for the brand since it was actually the transformation of a family legacy and made to honor a family tradition and Colombian craft and traditional techniques. According to one of the founders of the brand, Tomas Vera "the sole visit to [their] workshop is an immersion into Colombian tradition; an intimate glimpse of our country's techniques, feats and passions" (Verdi. Tree of Life, n.d.). The retail space in this case supports some of the theory studied previously in this research as it elevates the experience to help to reinstate the love for craft to those who visit and helps to communicate the idea that sustainable craft can actually be considered luxury in today's world.

The brand has revolutionized the artisanal market in Colombia mixing it with luxury and reinterpreted traditions by mixing traditional fibers with contemporary materials. In an attempt to dynamize their market and also as a marketing effort, they launched a new line of handbags in the style of the Traditional Ethnic Colombian Mochila. This move now represents 20% of their sales and allowed them to connect with big fashion houses internationally.



Figure 41: Official Images from Verdi

The mochila is one of the most representative and important crafts of Colombia, Verdi honors and reinvents this traditional object through the use of new materials and techniques but the preservation of the shape and name. According to the founder, Tomas Vera, working in the craft area "has been a challenge because people tend to associate craft to low costs and that is a mistake, they are products that are not given the value they deserve".

Craftsmanship and luxury are both guiding characteristics of this brand although they also have a social inclination. They work with master artisans directly in their workshop and also externalize some of their processes directly in the areas from which they source their main fibers. They support over 19 families of farmers in Curití, Santander, an area known for its fique fiber craft. They also obtain fibers from plantain and cumare plantations in the Amazon and silk from Cauca. This is part of their sustainability efforts focused both on social and environmental aspects considering the people and communities related to their work as well as the materials and processes used. Tomas Vera, co-founder of the brand says his hope is that "someday, Colombian design will not only be recognized for its craft and uniqueness but also for its inclusivity and sustainability, for how every Colombian designer takes it one step further to really help out his or her community" (Raclifestlye. Verdi, n.d.).

The brand has also carried out projects of inclusion and celebration of cultural collaboration like their collection of handbags SUR, based on Latin American luxury. The bags celebrate and unite three southern cultures through the use of materials, specifically baby alpaca from Peru, copper from Chile and silk from Colombia's Cauca region.

The brand has also achieved international recognition having been included twice in the Surface Magazine's LIST as one of the brands that are shaping the design world and has also reached retailer channels like Collete, Bergdorf Goodman, Moda Operandi and Net-A-Porter. They were also the first Colombian company to be invited to Salone del Mobile in Milán for its 2019 edition which was unfortunately cancelled because of the covid pandemic.

7.3 An Approximation to Meanings based on recurring themes

Making a parallel between the brands presented above allows to find recurring themes and meanings behind the products and brands. A visualization of these main themes is presented in the figure below. There is of course an agreement with some of these main themes and the ones studied previously regarding national values and identity. This leads to perceive a coherent narrative that can guide the considerations to make when developing cultural products in the context of Colombia. The next stage of the research seeks to find the connections or variation in this narrative and themes considering the input of designers and the perception of consumers.



Figure 42: Frequent Themes Found in the Studied Brands

Empirical Study

(08)

Applied Research and Findings

In the previous chapters of this thesis a detailed study of the theoretical framework and context was performed. In order to reach a closer understanding of the meaning behind cultural products in a real-world scenario, qualitative research methods were applied. This research aimed to tackle two areas of the initial research framework presented, that is the designer and the consumer perspectives. Taking into consideration both sides of the spectrum of meaning is relevant since, as seen before, in the studies performed by Ajovalasit and Giacomini (2019), the process of meaning formation is not static. Consumers tend to attribute even more meanings than designers do adding more semiotic and symbolic content to products. The result is a variation on meanings assigned by designers and meanings assigned by consumers.

8.1 The Designer Perspective

1 | Methodology

The designer perspective in this research is useful for two main purposes. On the one side, it helps to understand the motivations behind the development of cultural products and the meanings assigned by designers to them; on the other, it provides insight into the design process and methodologies followed by designers when creating culturally relevant designs. This last point is considered as one of the contributions of this research to the field of design.

The study on the designer perspective was performed through a series of semi-structured interviews lasting from 40 to 60 minutes. In total 8 people were interviewed. A series of base questions relevant to the topic were outlined, regardless, during the conversations with the designers the questions varied according to each individual case. The laddering technique was used when relevant as a way to reach more in-depth insight from the answers provided. This type of interview is useful to provide a basis for comparison between the different participants but allows the space to spontaneously explore topics that may be relevant for each particular interviewee and that may offer new ways of understanding the topic under observation. The sessions were performed using online video conference channels, they were recorded, and later transcribed to be analyzed and compared in detail in order to identify and extract key themes and constructs.

The research guide of questions prepared for the interviews are meant to tackle four main themes: Cultural products in general, culture in the works of the designer, cultural design process, cultural meanings in the context of study.

The question guide is composed as follows:

1. How would you define a Cultural Product?
2. Do you consider your product as a cultural product? Why?
3. Do you think your product is a reflection of Colombianity? Why?
4. How do you think the consumer's response to an object of this type changes? Is it different from others with less cultural significance?
5. How is this added value communicated to the consumer?
6. Do you use a specific design method for culturally relevant design? How is your design process?
7. What do you think would facilitate this process?
8. When designing for cultures other than your own, does your design process change?
9. Do you think your own culture affects your design?
10. How do you think that approaching a topic from a cultural perspective changes the choice of materials, the choices of processes, etc.?
11. What is your purpose or motivation for including cultural issues in your work and projects?
12. What would you say is the current state of design (general and cultural) in Colombia?
13. What value do you see in understanding culture in design?
14. What impact or benefit do you consider that the design of cultural products can bring to the nation or territory from which it is inspired?
15. What do you think about globalization and its influence on design?
16. What would you say is the key to mixing tradition and modernity without losing cultural/traditional values?

17. How do you think cultural product design could improve? What is missing? How can it be promoted?
18. What values do you think a Colombian cultural product should have? For example, Made in Italy reflects high standards of quality, attention to detail, beauty, luxury; What meanings would be attributed to a "Made in Colombia"?

Since the focus of study is cultural product design taking as a reference the context of Colombia, the respondents were all designers of Colombian origin who have worked on topics related to cultural design and/or work on the creation of cultural products as their main design activity. The interviews were held in Spanish language, notwithstanding, the verbatims displayed in this presentation of findings will be translated to English. The participants ages vary from 23 to 45 years of age. They are up and coming or already positioned designers nationally and internationally, owners of design brands in fields ranging from furniture to fashion, facilitators of cultural design processes, among others. A majority of the participants have lived and worked abroad especially in Europe, which is believed to give them a new perspective from which to compare and reflect on their own background. Going back to Krippendorff and Butter (2007), they mention that "within any one culture, how artifacts relate to a culture's grand narratives is typically backgrounded, unnoticed from within"; therefore, having a frame for comparison resulting from experiencing different contexts may enhance the designers' capacity to make their backgrounds visible.

2 | Findings

The relevant insight from the interviews performed will be summarized and presented in relationship to the four general themes based on the categorization of questions enquired.

Defining Cultural Products

The complexity of designing cultural products is also reflected in the difficulty of defining what is considered or not a cultural product. To create a frame of reference and understanding of what designers imply by cultural products all the participants were asked to define what they understand by cultural products. This were some of the answers:

"It is a product that has some features and characteristics that are very typical of a specific place." FJ

"It is a product that helps to sell the manifesto of a country about how its people are. There are two parts to it, what I want it to be and what it is. What it is, is like propaganda and what I want it to be are these objects of admiration and pride, that we should all know the meaning of. It is about showing indigenous philosophies and religions that are just as valuable as others." CP

"It is one that has a connotation, that tells something. It has a history, a provenance, a specific person who did it with a thought, with a technique. It roots all that information contained from generation to generation." ER

"A cultural product doesn't just represent formally a culture, it should also involve the culture it represents in its process. It is about respect and co-creation." MP

"When it comes to cultural products, in Colombia you go straight to crafts. It is an object that has intrinsic values of the culture that produces it, and this is reflected in how it is used, the icons it highlights, the stories it tells. They are a way of reading culture through objects" RT

"To define something as a cultural product it must transmit intrinsic values of a specific cultural context, the representations of cosmogony, of rituals, of values of a specific culture, whether through ancient or contemporary technologies. They must have symbolic charges that occur in certain events that only occur in that culture. It is that object, service, or interaction that represents intrinsic values of that culture and that differentiate it from any other." RT

"For a product to be truly cultural it has to be born within the internal context of a community, loaded with all the symbolic values of the product within the community and connected with the symbolic charge in each of its colors, figures, threads. Everything has a meaning, for a product to be cultural it has to have those meanings that the indigenous people, as a heritage, imprint to these products within the community. EP

From the answers one could say that a cultural product is one that is:

- Related to a specific place
- Related to specific people or communities
- Related to specific techniques (usually handmade)
- Related to Indigenous or ancestral philosophies and knowledges
- Related to specific uses and contexts (rituals)
- Related to Heritage or Generational
- Narrative
- Symbolic
- Respectful
- Co-created
- Emotional

Thoughts on Globalization and Modernity

The participants referred to globalization as a necessary force to promote the strengthening of the production of cultural products regardless, this positive impact is mostly in terms of consumption. In terms of inspiration, they realize that limits need to be established in order to avoid issues of appropriation or instead a lack of cultural meaning.

A clear description of the relationship that exists between tradition and modernity and the influence of global trends is described by one of the interviewees as follows:

"Let's say that there we make a link because we are also a product of it [globalization]. We are submerged by that west. We take those tools from our tradition, from our past, and we take these Western tools and unify it to be able to give a voice, to make ourselves visible, it is the means by which we can tell our stories and we can also take advantage of, in a very conscious way of it. It is like isolating the thought and putting the meaning and significance that we want to make known in it. So, let's say that obviously in this more commercial part there is the influence of trends, but it is also how one as an indigenous person, as a craftsman, and as a designer

reinterprets this information and makes it more of 'us.' It makes it more aware and internalizes it for our territory. Both sources are used, it is not that it is here the West and here traditional, we intertwine these two things and take advantage of that knowledge". ER

Contemporary design influence can become a tool for craft communities and a sustainable way to generate a greater visibility and support of their products. Increasing the market for their products can also increase the demand for fair labor related to the craft, so it can also promote the preservation and knowledge of the techniques used. In these tasks, the designer may also become a mediator between the traditional and the modern world providing knowledge of design processes and of the market.

Cultural meanings in the context of study

"The identity and design problem is huge in Colombia. We have to go back to our roots; the future is dictated by the past in terms of our Colombian design."

When speaking about the current state of cultural design in Colombia, most designers point towards a lack of identity and a reliance on cultural appropriation and copy. The value of the country is not being exploited in terms of design and hence no global recognition exists of it yet. At the local scale, the consumption of cultural products has increased according to them, but it is evident that the Colombian consumer tends to value more products from outside. The validation of external agents could have an influence in internal consumption behavior. Another scenario visible today is that of hybridization under which people from outside come to take inspiration and develop projects with Colombian communities. This was referred to as the 'phenomenon of positive contamination' by one of the participants which can help change the internal perception of products.

This contamination is also happening at a local level because of the changing characteristics of the communities of artisans who now are closer to the cities. Every time, you see more objects where the expertise of the artisan joins that of the designer, and they bring out more typologies of products that give more options to these communities and their people of having a decent life. Regardless, it was also pointed out that there is still a disconnect from designers that do not make evident the exchange with artisans:

"There are ruptures, a strong use of labor, from the West. We must be more human and conscious as designers and establish those dialogues with the communities and artisans who are developing and adding value to projects and making them have something more beautiful to leave to society."

The respondents were also asked to list the values that they believe a Colombian cultural product has or should have. Here are some of the answers:

"What would go more towards the made in Colombia, is to talk about artisan techniques or crafts made here, talk about an environment, a behavior, but it does not go in beauty or in luxury or detail. All objects that are consumed under the concept of design should have that, but each one from a different characteristic that would be the cultural theme." RT

"Passion, tradition, identity, joy, roots, diversity because the multiculturalism that we have in our country is impressive". ER

"I feel that it has to be respectful, of the workforce and of who is making it. It has to question the system, why or for whom it is designed, and it has to reimagine ways of building and not appropriating or dispossessing. Other than that, the typical: happiness, colors, blue, Green, yellow..." MP

"Resilience, the ability to lift yourself off obstacles. The ability to move on, the ability to dream, to dream that tomorrow is going to be a better day is what allows you to get up even if you have all the obstacles and problems in the world. That ability is very Colombian, to always face whatever it is with a dream. It is a country with so many problems that our generation is thinking about how we can improve, how we can face ourselves. That allowed me to be competitive abroad a lot. The aspect of social conscience, knowing that there are needs beyond luxury, such as helping communities, having compassion for those who do not have, those aspects that form you as a person perhaps in other places of the world have been forgotten. Rich countries lack certain values of empathy. When you see it and understand that you have to give something to the other and help in a certain way, it enriches you as a person and as a designer". RT

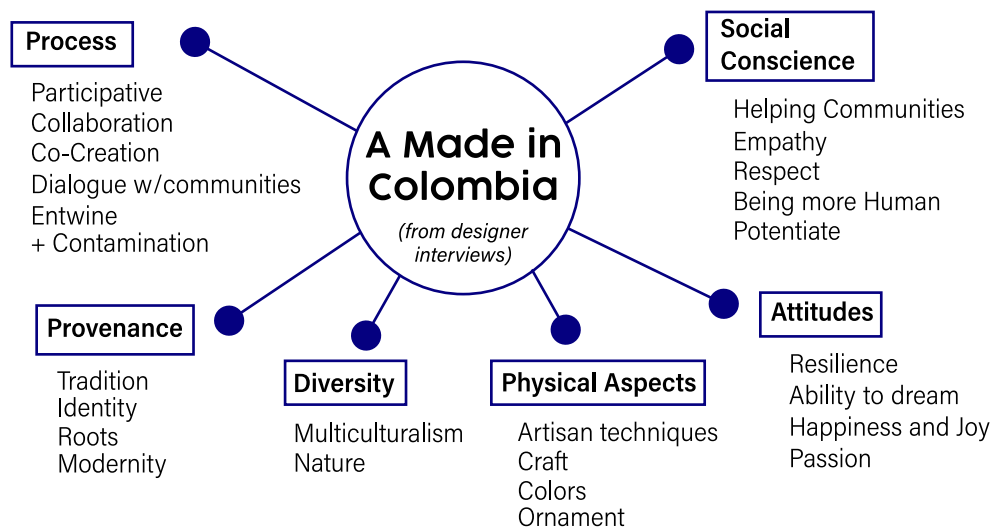


Figure 43: Overview of Meanings Attached to Colombian Cultural Products (based on interviews to designers)

The figure above condenses the main themes related to the assignment of values to Colombian cultural products based on the designer's understanding of what they should reflect. These values include both values in terms of design and in terms of identity hence the spectrum goes from more tangible values to other more abstract concepts.

The effect of personal culture on design output

One of the interview questions was directed towards understanding the effect of personal culture in design output. The answers provided by the participants evidence a constant tuning on their side between the influence of the country of their origin, the country of their design education and the trends of a global market. The following replies are examples to evidence this balancing process:

"I am not a fully Colombian designer because as a designer I was made in Italy, but I still have those human values that my family instilled, who are Colombian, and I am immersed in this culture. I am a hybrid. What I do and what comes out of me is unique because of that mix. And that is why it is easy for me to work with different countries, because I recognize in that melting pot the rough diamond for any culture. From learning from each other to building better societies and mixing values. That mix is what enriches you. In the end what I do represents my unique culture" RT

"In Colombia I am too colorful, of textures, of fabrics, more ornate, I think it is a lot of what the Colombian artisans have inherited to us. But in Europe it was as if I was appeased. I think that in the end the context in which you develop affects a lot the way you interpret your idea and develop the product. I think Colombian designers do have a load of colors that you don't see so much in Europe. I also value more when I see woven products, I remember our artisans and I see much more value" EP

"When I went for my master's degree, my tutors reaffirmed this idea of European design; if it wasn't a minimal or clean design, then it was immature. I felt that my aesthetic was not professional enough for the medium, so I cleaned my aesthetics a lot and left the ornamental part behind. Ornament is vital in our culture, especially in Latin American cultures, although in all" CP

"My designer uncle is Swedish, I am Colombian-Mexican, and I live in Colombia, and I feel that this influences a lot. It is where one is born, grows, is flooded with products. The first products you see are from the country where you were born. My first design references are Scandinavian. It influences the way one wants to see things. I love Scandinavian design, but I cannot deny with my designs that I am Mexican, and that colors matter to me; I cannot ignore the folklore of being Mexican Colombian. From textures, colors, I like simple but not so simple. What you eat, the music you dance to, everything influences the design. Everything is reflected from the activities that one brings from a childhood" MP

These answers are considered relevant because they influence the way a designer approaches a cultural design project and the processes they may need to consider during their research and ideation phases. It also makes clear the relationship between a culture and design choices that may resonate more in a certain context than others, helping to make a connection with the meanings of the place. They are speaking of the cultural baggage and value that already exists in the designer for the single fact of belonging to a context.

Cultural design process

The approximation to a process for cultural design but the lack of a systemic outline of the same leads to question what an actual detailed process would look like. This issue is tackled in this research and complemented with the insight obtained from qualitative research from interviews with designers that have a connection and experience with the field of cultural product design. The goal is to create a detailed description of the steps for designing cultural products which, based on the literature review, is not so clearly defined yet.

Through the interviews it was visible that even though designers acknowledge that designing cultural products is different from designing less culturally relevant design, there is no systemic approach or generalized guidance to indicate this variation. This finding supports the ideas reviewed in the literature studied which pointed out a research gap in the study of cultural design rules for creating culture-inspired products (Wang, Qin and Harrison, 2013). Then, the question of how to address this topic of cultural design using a logic and organized process that can make more manageable and approachable all the intangibles of the matter still remains.

When asked if they follow a particular process for designing cultural products most of the respondents said they do not or do not have it interiorized. Regardless, when asked if their design process changes when designing for cultures different than their own they mostly affirm it does.

"I never use the same process. For each project I make the process is different. But I feel it should change" Melchor peralta

The one participant who replied convincingly about having a process is one who is himself a designer, a weaver artisan and part of an indigenous community. He described his process as follows:

"It is a participative process in which we all have a voice. We talk and listen to the ideas of all. The design is born from that sharing of everyone's words and then we do look into other tools such as trends analysis and development.

This answer is connected to the ways in which the process should change according to the respondents. They suggest that the main difference is that immersion becomes a primordial activity. Refer to the following verbatims that visualize what the designers consider the most relevant change in a cultural product design process:

"The people who work with artisans in-situ need to have a completely different design process. The ideal would be to have a codesign with the artisan masters. You need to reach them with a completely different mindset. You cannot impose." RT

"When designing for a different culture the process has to change, you need to make a Reading of the context and the environment where the piece is going to be exhibited or commercialized" FJ

"You need to achieve a great connection with at least one person of the community. Designers

also need to stop generalizing and be more specific when referring to a culture" CP

"The main thing is to work hand in hand with the community. The more affinity and the closer the relationship is with them, the better results you achieve in the product" EP

The participants pointed out a difficulty in obtaining valid sources or connections that can really speak of the culture of a community, therefore going into the culture can provide more in-depth knowledge than relying on other more traditional forms of research. Another interesting concept shared was that of 'creative leisure' as a way to use personal experience and passion as the starting point for inspiring designs related to a cultural context. This approach speaks of the importance of bringing to awareness the designers' own background and perceptions of culture.

8.2 The Consumer Perspective

1 | Methodology

ZMET

Ajovalasit and Giacomini (2019) in their study of meaning attribution by designers and consumers evidenced the importance of involving users in the design process. In this instance the methodology used to dig deeper into consumer insight is the ZMET (Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Method) used to perform qualitative studies of consumers. The ZMET methodology has proven to be a powerful technique to uncover unconscious thoughts, feelings and needs. In market research this tool has been used to identify consumer behaviors, motivations, decisions, and values regarding different products. This tool can ultimately help shape strategic goals and innovation decisions, not only through concept evaluation but also through concept and product development since it helps to understand the meanings that are being created by consumers to evolve or optimize products, services or brands (Zaltman, 1997).

ZMET was developed by Harvard Business School Professor Gerald Zaltman for marketing research through the combination of theory and research from different fields such as neurobiology, psychoanalysis, linguistics, and art theory (Zaltman, 1997). Its main purpose is to gain in-depth understanding of consumer choice. Based on the fact that human thought and meaning is said to be mostly image based, this projective technique grounds itself on images or metaphoric language as the means to bring to surface deeper thoughts, emotions and experiences. Olson, J., Waltersdorff, K. and Forr, J. and Zaltman, O., (2009) suggest that "developing successful new products requires a thorough understanding of the metaphors (conscious and unconscious images of meaning) that customers use to understand the product, its benefits, and its relevance in their lives"; once understood, these metaphors should also be communicated effectively in the meanings assigned to new products.

This method "can be used to elicit consumers' meaning about the personal relevance of a topic and then map those meanings as mental models" (Christensen, G. and Olson, J., 2002). Specifically, for this study the method will be used to seek to understand the personal relevance and meanings consumers attribute to cultural products.

The ZMET interview consists of 10 general steps (Zaltman, 1997) that can be adjusted to fit each particular topic and research objective.

Step 1	Storytelling Participants describe the content of each picture collected.
Step 2	Missed images Participants include images they may have wanted to add but did not have available before.
Step 3	Sorting Participants sort their pictures into meaningful labeled sets. It helps to define initial constructs or themes relevant to the consumer.
Step 4	Meanings and distinctions Participants are asked to point out the similarities and differences between three randomly selected images to elaborate new constructs.
Step 5	Highlight Participants select the most representative image of the research topic.
Step 6	Opposites Participants describe images that are opposite to the task at hand. This step is based on negative case analysis.
Step 7	Sensory images Participants use non-visual senses (taste, sound, smell, colour, touch, feelings) to address the topic through other senses besides the visual.
Step 8	Vignette or Mental Map Participants create a cognitive mental map, or a vignette based on their thoughts and feelings toward the topic and the mental constructs elaborated in the previous steps.
Step 9	Collage Summary Using digital image editing tools participants create a summary image that expresses their final thoughts on the topic.
Step 10	Consensus Map The researcher creates a consensus model with the main constructs and themes elaborated through the interviews.

Figure 44: ZMET Interview Process Steps

The final step (10) is the resulting contribution of the ZMET methodology. After the careful coding and analysis of the interviews, a mental model or consensus map is created. This map represents the dominant themes and concepts identified and the links between them (Christensen, G. and Olson, J., 2002). This map is composed of central constructs which are the ones highly connected to other sub-constructs and define frames or themes of reference that organize consumer's thought. To include constructs in the consensus map, Zaltman (1997) states that at least half of the participants should mention them. Another construct to look for in the elaboration of the consensus map is the Overall Goal or end state.

Respondents

A sample of eight to sixteen respondents is suggested when performing ZMET interviews (Christensen and Olson, 2002), following this consideration, the minimum of eight volunteer participants was gathered.

The respondents of ZMET interviews were volunteers who self-claimed to be consumers of cultural products, they affirm to have purchased this type of products in the past. People who have a previous connection to the topic were chosen because it is expected that they have a more elaborate mental model related to cultural products which can provide a richer source of meanings. The participants are all of Colombian nationality from different regions and cities; they are between 27-35 years of age.

The Process

The process for the research with customers consisted of two main parts. The first part was provided as a 'homework' or task for the interviewees to perform independently a few days before the interview, after receiving the instructions; it involved mostly the collection of images. The second part consisted of a one-to-one meeting via web call (zoom) to elaborate on the images going through each of the 9 steps of the ZMET method.

Part 1: Just as the definition of culture can be broad and vague, so is the definition of cultural products. For this reason, the first part of the research was to study what consumers understood by cultural products. To analyze this definition, as a preliminary step to the ZMET process, a variety of people were asked to provide 8 to 10 images of what they considered cultural products that they may possess and have in their homes or that would come to their mind and be found on the internet. They were then asked to explain briefly why they considered those products cultural.

After this initial exercise, they were given the definition of a cultural product presented previously in the literature review:

Culturally relevant designs are embedded with cultural significance which gives products a unique character. Cultural products have a strong connection to cultural values and can be defined as "a society's creative expression and artistic forms, as well as its traditional knowledge and practices, which reflect a living culture and express the distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group" (Aiello and Cacia, 2014).

At this point they were given the option to add additional images in case new ones came to their minds after having read the definition of a cultural product.

The last step of the initial part consisted of collecting the 8-10 images for the ZMET method. The participants were asked to select images that reflect the meanings cultural products have for them, what they represent to them and why are they important.

These different images and descriptions were sent by the participants and organized using the digital tool Miro so that they would be easy to retrieve, visualize and work around during the different steps of the ZMET analysis with the participant.

Part 2: This part of the study was performed in direct collaboration with the participants during an online call lasting on average 60 minutes. The participants were asked to reply to the questions posed in each step of the ZMET while discussing the thoughts, motivations and feelings behind each of the images selected and shared. The 9 steps presented were structured as follows:

Step 1	Storytelling Explain why you selected each of the images
Step 2	Missed images Is there anything else you would add to the images about the feelings and meanings that cultural products reflect for you?
Step 3	Sorting If you had to classify these images into groups or themes, how would you do it?
Step 4	Meanings and distinctions If we took 3 of these images at random, what do these two have in common and what would differentiate them from the third?
Step 5	Highlight Which of these images is more representative of what these types of products mean to you?
Step 6	Opposites What objects would you say 100% that are not cultural products? / what would you not associate with that?
Step 7	Sensory images What other types of sensory sensations do you connect with cultural products, for example colors, smells, emotions, sounds, textures...
Step 8	Vignette Think of a scene related to a cultural product. Who would be the characters, the location, the climate, the type of environment, the tone, what is happening...?
Step 9	Collage Summary Using the most representative images (approx. 5) that you selected at the beginning, how would you summarize or highlight the meanings that you attribute to cultural products?

Figure 45: ZMET Process steps for Cultural Product Design Research

After the completion of the two parts and each of its steps, all the materials including interview recordings and transcripts, images and notes were reviewed in order to identify the main themes and constructs of meanings elaborated by the participants. This process corresponds to step 10; it was done both individually and for the sum of the interviewees in order to build the consensus map that represents the mental models of structures of meaning for cultural products based on the respondent's response.

2 | Findings

A general finding of this study is related to the usefulness of the ZMET methodology to reveal deeper insights behind consumer's perceptions of cultural products. The use of images helped to evoke feelings and memories from the past and created a direct relationship to the day-to-day experiences and interactions of consumers with cultural products.

The discovery from the most relevant steps will be described in the following paragraphs considering both part one and two of the study.

Part 1

The preliminary steps that were added based on defining cultural products through the use of images as suggested by the ZMET methodology were highly relevant. As has been mentioned before, defining a cultural product may be a complex and subjective task, so to begin to speak of these it was necessary to understand how consumers define them. The images provided by the respondents presented a certain degree of commonality. They were mostly related to products that are characteristics of a specific country or region because of defined customs, traditions, actions or consumption. Additionally, products that were artisanal and made by indigenous communities were also common. In this step participants tended to present images of food recurrently. It is possible to say that there is an opportunity in exploring culture through food and food related products as a way to connect to people's day to day life as characterized by a context and resources available. This can be a matter of additional exploration outside the context of this thesis.

After reading the definition of cultural products provided, only a few of the respondents added additional images. Those who did, tended to expand the definition to other, more intangible forms of cultural representation like books and music or feelings and emotions. This speaks of the symbolic qualities of cultural artefacts which are difficult to represent visually. Figure 46 is a collection of some of the images presented by the respondents.



Figure 46: Collection of Images Provided by Participants of ZMET Study that Show Cultural Products.

The following step of the study was the collection of images that reflect the meanings cultural products have for consumers, what they represent to them and why they are important. In this stage the results started to variate. Some of the participants provided images that relate more specifically to their experiences while others did so for more general concepts. Many references from national identity and popular, rural-regional culture are visible here too. Other recurring themes are nature, craft, identity, history and narratives. The images collected in this step were used for the further elaboration of the 9 steps of the ZMET technique.

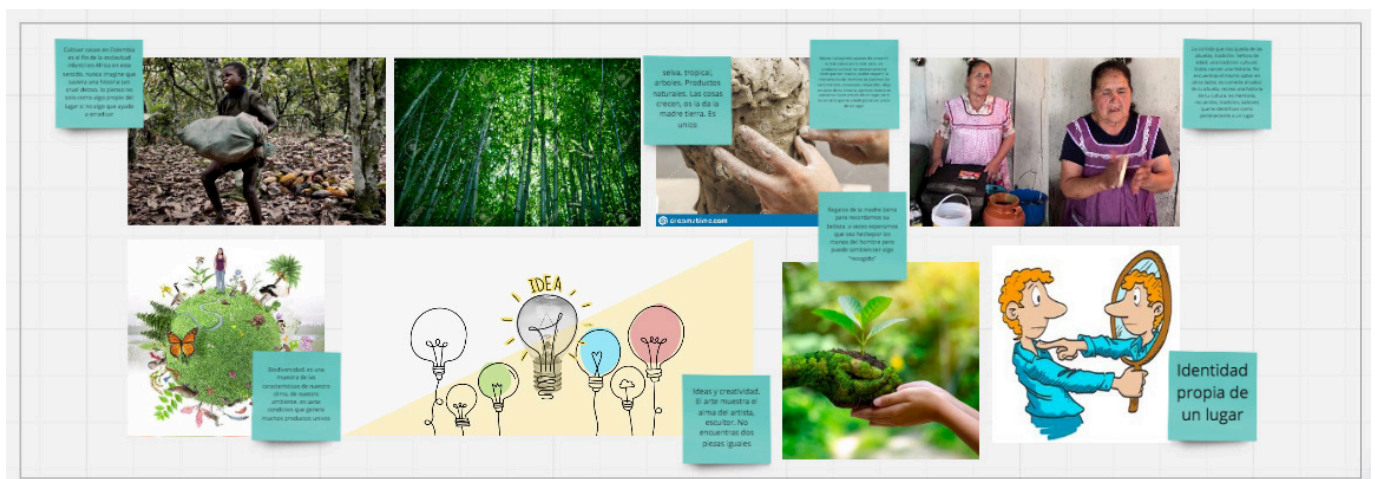


Figure 47: Example of ZMET Interview Responses by Participants on the Meanings of Cultural Products, (Step 1).

Part 2

In the first step of the ZMET study, the participants were asked to explain the reasons for their selection of the images they presented. This step helped to expand on the meanings cultural products have for consumers making them go beyond their preconceptions and stereotypical visions. A connection to personal experiences surfaces in this step. The relevance of cultural products is also connected to memories, identity, ideas of belonging and longing and social contribution.

Step number three of the ZMET asked the respondents to classify these images into groups or themes. This step is useful because it provides an understanding of the way in which consumers classify and categorize cultural products and their meanings in a simplified way. Some of the categories included for example geographical classification, link to nature, relationship to friends and family, crafts, identity and even "fun" or relaxation. The different categories express an emotional side based on the experiences related to these objects, a functional one related to actions and the contexts in which these objects exist, and a narrative side related to the stories, origin and people who make them. In this sense, the existence of meaning as characterized in part one in the literature review becomes more visible in cultural products.

In step 4 the participants pointed out the similarities and differences between three randomly selected images to elaborate new constructs. More tangible meanings emerge from this comparison, they point out differences in materials, colors, use, who makes them. New constructs that emerge at this stage are for example the responsibility of consumers who purchase this kind of products which may vary depending on whether they want to celebrate the culture in respectful ways or whether they give more value to its aesthetic qualities. Identification towards others also emerged to reference the reasons why a person may use a certain cultural product. According to the respondents, using cultural products is a way to show others that they belong to a certain place and borrow the characteristics and meanings of that object to reflect who they are.

In Step 5 participants selected the most representative image of the research topic. This step served as a way to summarize the discussion held until that point with each of the interviewees. After having identified previous constructs and clarified definitions during the previous steps the main idea of what cultural products are and represent to them was filtered. The reflections highlighted remembrance, tradition, folklore, diversity and authenticity.

Step 6 is based on describing what something is by describing what it is not. The interviewees described images of what they consider are not cultural products. The most common answer was technological devices such as cellphones and computers. One of the participants made the distinction of cellphones being cultural only recently because they have become representative of a population like millennials or centennials, they are representative not of a geography but of an age group.

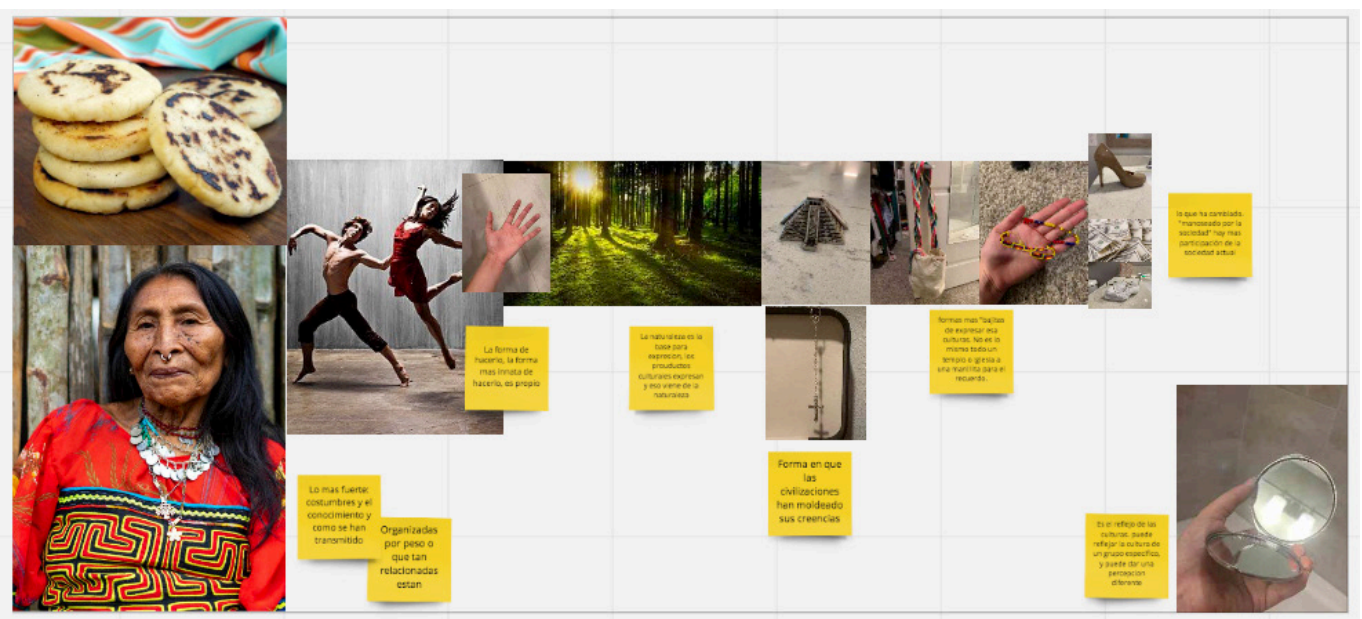
Other objects mentioned among others were pen, calculator, or clothes because according to them, they are standard or equal and too common in the day to day. In general, these objects are not considered cultural because they do not represent a particular person or community, they are common to many nations, globalized and mass produced, they don't

arise from folklore, they do not evoke feelings or history or stories, and they break with the identity, patterns and local economy of a place. If these characteristics are what make them not cultural, the opposite would apply to what a cultural product should be or represent.

In step 7, the interviewees expanded their definitions of cultural products by thinking about them not in terms of images but in terms of sensory qualities such as colors, smells, emotions, sounds, textures. Some of the emotions that were connected to cultural products were happiness, warmth, tranquility, and nostalgia. They were also related to attitudes such as amiability, comfort, patience, and remembrance. In visual terms, cultural products were interpreted as colorful, vibrant, usually presenting primary colors and colors that are common and available in nature. Likewise, they were described as striking, intricate, usually with geometric figures.

In the following step many of the same feelings and sceneries seen in the previous step were evidenced. The vignettes were again connected to images elusive to nature, tropical settings and extroverted personalities in vibrant atmospheres. References to family and artisanal products were brought out too. Functional descriptions of how the cultural product imaged by the interviewee is used in context were also common. For example, the hat to blow fresh air or the hammock to lay and relax.

The final step, number 9, allowed the respondents to conclude in their own terms what cultural products represent to them. The digital collage was mostly based on the positioning, sizing and selection of images according to the relevance they had in relation to the topic. They explained in a few words and images the relevance of cultural products for each of the participants including the visions that emerged throughout the study. The following images are an example of the digital collage created by a couple of the participants.



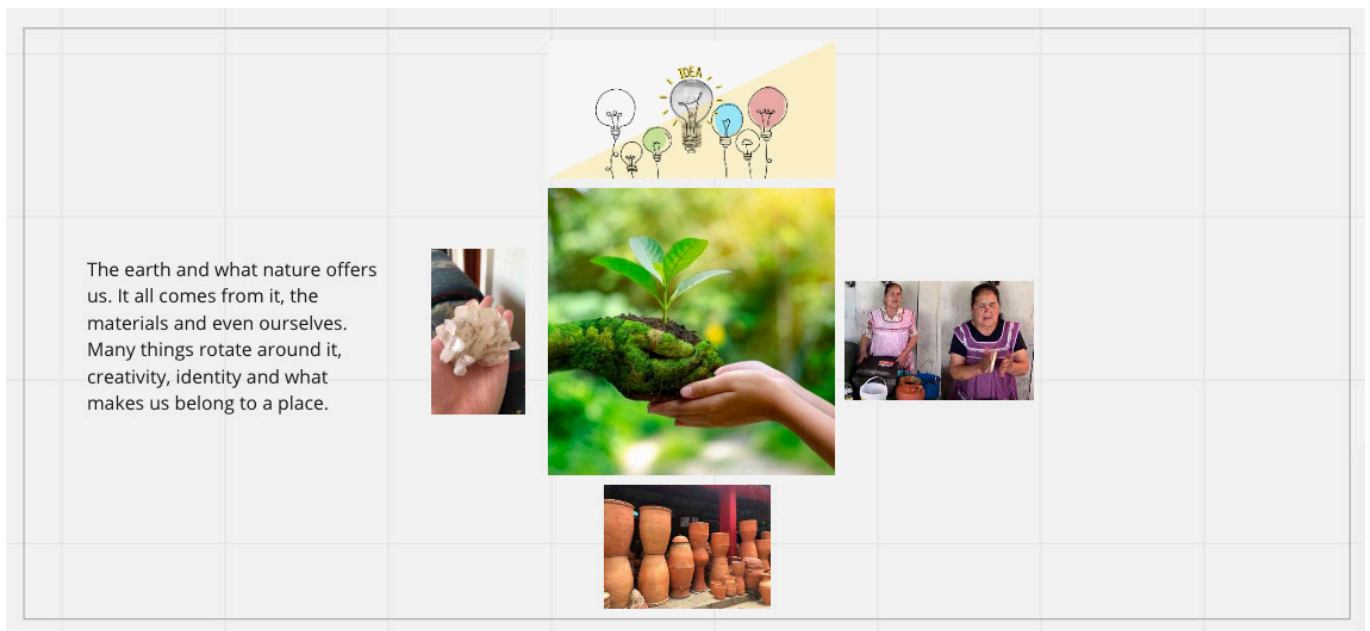


Figure 48: Examples of Digital Collage Made by Participants of ZMET Study, (Step 9).

The final constructs of this study will be presented in the following chapter (09) and will constitute the framework for meaning in cultural products. This result will be evidenced in the shape of a construct map which corresponds to step 10 of the ZMET method.

Empirical Study

Results and Proposals ⁽⁰⁹⁾

9.1 Proposal: A process for cultural Product Design

Speaking of a process for cultural design was complex since there is no actual definition of it. Currently it is understood in very broad terms as was visible from the interviews with designers. Taking this insight and the initial approaches from the literature review and approximation to a structured process focusing on cultural themes will be proposed. It must be made clear that this process does not replace other established design process frameworks such as the Double Diamond or the Human Centered Design process. It is more of an aggregate perspective or lens to view design projects from a cultural perspective.

The following steps for a cultural design process are suggested based on the literary review and studies performed:

Step 1- Investigate the Cultural context:

This step is related to the completion of a rigorous desk research that can provide an initial understanding of the culture under study and elicit thematic interests or points of questioning that could be delved into for further study. It also helps to create a parallel for the further step in which the designer contrasts new knowledge and understanding to his preconceived ideas and can also find areas in which the difference to his own culture becomes both problematic and inspiring.

Step 2- Limit the target culture:

Doing cultural design implies a flexibility in the focus of target populations going from the general to the specific. It is important to determine whose culture the designer is referring to and be specific about it to avoid falling into generalization or misrepresentation and incoherence in the narrative of the product and the narrative of the culture. Here it is important to outline the culture of inspiration, the consumption culture, and the market culture.

Step 3- Understand your frame of reference:

The context within which the designer exists, and his experiences related to that environment play a significant influence on his design input. The designer needs to be aware of two main things. On the first hand, of his own biases and preconceptions and on the second, of his own cultural charge that can too be translated as design inspiration or output. In this step the designer should consider his stance in respect to the cultural targets defined in the previous step of the process.

Step 4- Define a design intention or goal:

Establishment of goals for considering culture in design: Having a design priority and goals for recurring to culture in design is an approach suggested by Rubin (2012) and Van Boeijen (2015) as they may influence the directions of research or methods to attain the level of cultural relevance needed. Having clear goals aligns with the culturally informed value creation strategy as proposed by Ravasi, Rindova, and Dalpiaz (2012) in the sense that it sets a cultural intent to facilitate defining explicit strategies to obtain cultural knowledge. Some goals can be for example, merging cultures, enhancing cultural practices or behaviors, bringing awareness to a community, promoting the preservation of certain cultural practices, avoiding cultural specificity, etc.

Step 5- Immerse into the culture:

Cultural studies require a close exploration of dynamics and values that can only be observed in proximity and experienced in first person. This idea was also confirmed by the interviewed designers who expose immersion and the establishment of close connections with the communities or the 'subject culture' as the main point of a cultural design process.

This step will set the path for the translation of cultural features into design features through the understanding of the cultural context and values. In order to obtain those cultural features designers should also study cultural models that may give an insight of the different ways in which cultures are characterized.

Step 6- Translate into Design Features:

This step consists of the translation of cultural features, obtained in the previous step, into design features and to then reinterpret material and immaterial qualities derived from cultural values. As suggested by the designers, if working with communities, this step should begin to involve processes of collective creativity, collaboration and cocreation.

Step 7- Implement into Product Design:

This step prompts to the material and formal exploration of design. It is important that the designer understand that a cultural product cannot be just a copy or appropriation of other forms of cultural products. The design content should be heavy and together with the community, if such is the case, a heavy reinterpretation through design should take place. In this stage it is also important to consider new possible applications or functionalities that may lead to new typologies of products and a perceived innovation.

Step 8- Evaluate the Cultural Match:

The appropriateness and connection between the cultural input and user needs have to be evaluated in this step. This is a three-way process that sets the design, the subject culture and the consumer culture under the same frame to understand if the meaning transfer is successful and adequate. Some questions asked on this step would be: Are the values of the culture represented in this design? Is the community or culture included in the design process? Is the outcome ethical, respectful and sustainable? Is a connection created between the culture and the consumer? Is the product relevant for the current market? Are consumers perceiving the cultural meanings intended? How are these values being communicated?

Contribution and design implications

This process serves as a recommendation to designers when dealing with cultural product design. In the interviews to designers the lack of structured methods and processes to pursue the design of culture-related product design was made evident. The different steps reflect areas which designers could focus on when developing cultural products starting from a reflexive view to a more practical one. The different steps address some of the obstacles and frequent questions that may influence a culture related design process. Failure to address these steps in a cultural product design process may result in products that fail to stand beyond cultural appropriation or copy. Similarly, this process prompts the designer to be more aware and responsible of his/her choices and cultural implications of their work.

The implication of this process for the following stages of this thesis rests in the fact that it guides the development of the initial approximation to the tool set for cultural product design. In other words, the tool should be a way to visualize and support the requirements of each step of the process.

A Process for Cultural Product Design

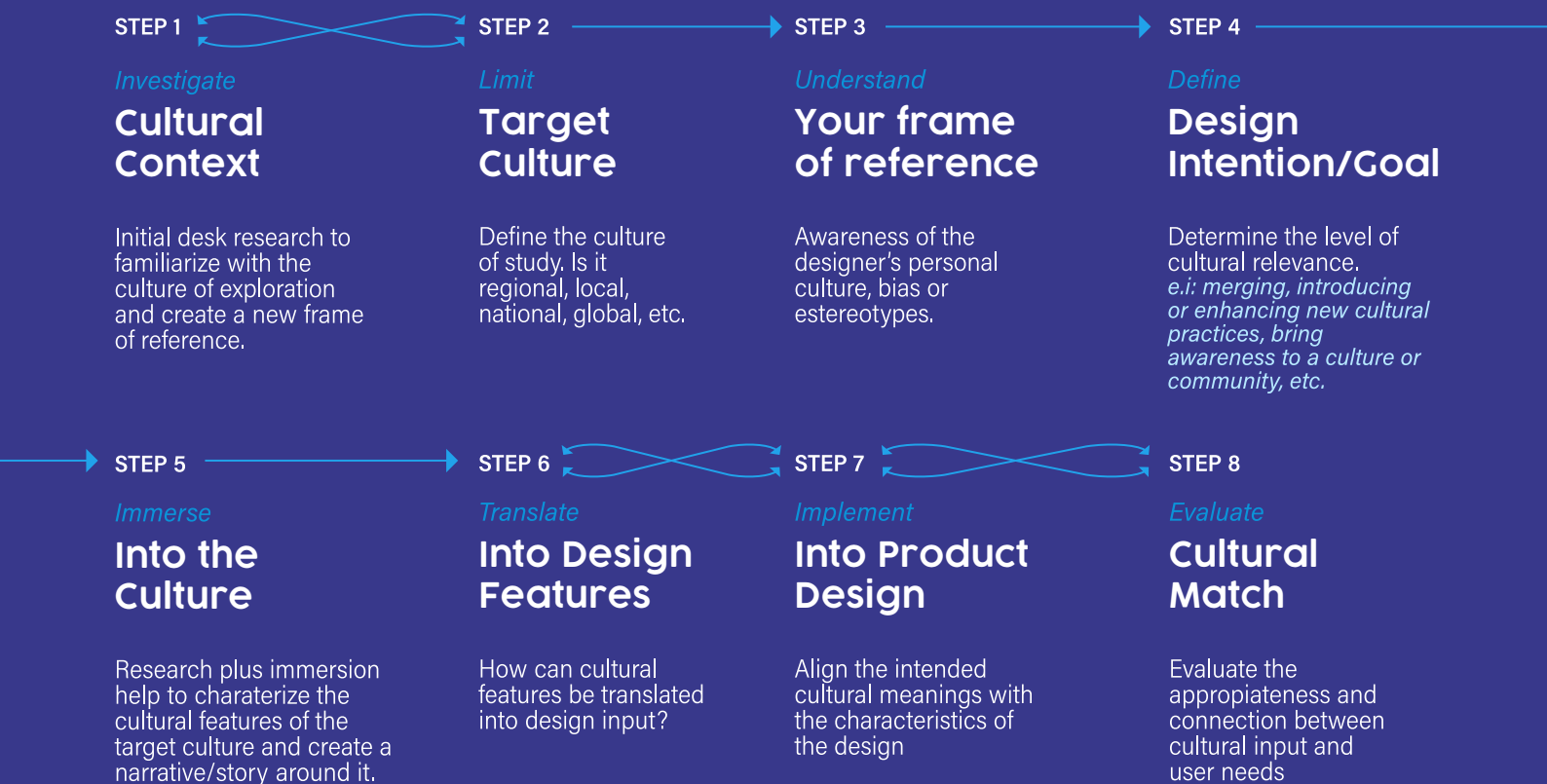


Figure 49: Process for Cultural Product Design

9.2 Framework of Meaning for Cultural Products

The meanings attached to cultural products in the context of Colombia will be presented in this section based on the participant's responses. These are presented through the consensus map that corresponds to step 10 in the ZMET method. A total of seven themes of meanings were identified: Connecting to nature, Living joyfully, Social contribution, Connecting and sharing, Honoring the origin, Telling stories, Appreciating tradition. Each of these is presented in the consensus map with their corresponding sub meanings and later explained in detail.

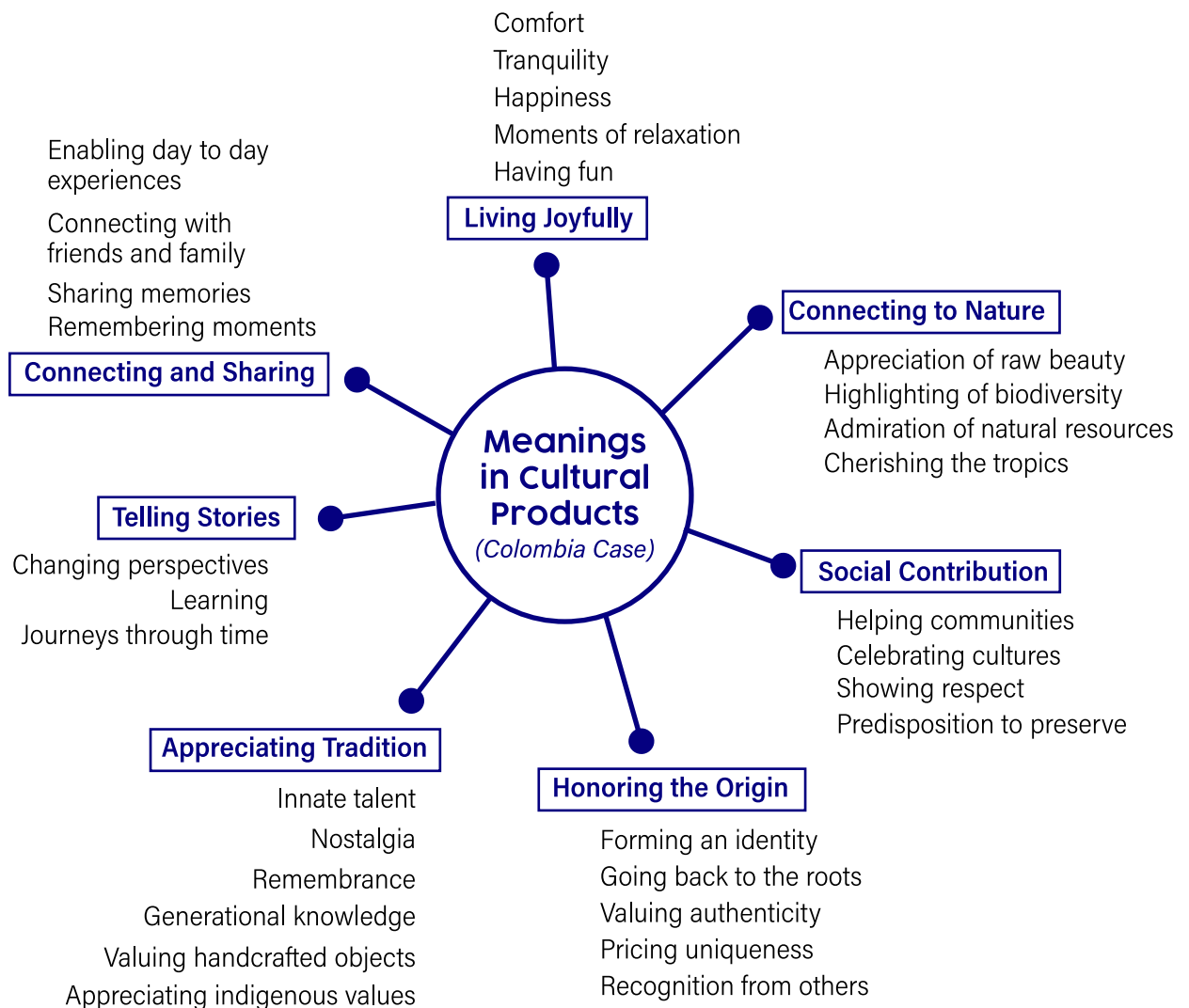


Figure 50: Consensus Map: Framework of Meanings for Cultural Products (in Colombia)

Connecting to Nature

Nature orientation is one of the most central themes when addressing the meaning of cultural products. Images and mentions elusive to nature were common in the ZMET interviews relating to resources and materials but also to the spiritual and inspirational value of elements of nature. Consumers see in cultural products the exaltation of the richness of their land and materials that are unique to it, in other words, they see a connection to the earth which provides resources for transformation. Geographical and material richness is directly connected to specific cultures and communities. The connection to nature is perceived through sensory experiences that involve touch, textures, colors, sounds, and also through the environments in which the imagined products exist, usually rural outdoor spaces. Some sub themes identified under this construct are the appreciation of raw beauty, the highlighting of biodiversity, the admiration of natural resources, and cherishing the tropics. These characteristics have been frequent throughout the study as they are visible also in the meanings presented from the cultural identity of Colombia when speaking of richness and in the frequent themes found in the analysis of case studies.

Living Joyfully

A recurring theme that was brought about by the respondents was joy and happiness. These values were used to describe cultural products both physically and contextually. Cultural products represent the best conditions of a place and seek to exalt positive feelings related to the contexts in which they exist. Some sub meanings attached to this construct are having fun, moments of relaxation and happiness and tranquility and comfort. The sense of relaxation and rest attributed to these products results from the connection they have to rural settings and the countryside which are a scape to the pace of cities and work life. These products are also related to attitudes such as exuberance, friendliness and warmth which are visually perceived through the use of vibrant color and sharp geometries.

Social Contribution

During the interviews the participants brought up the reasons why they consider people acquire cultural products. They recognize that even though part of the motivation is the style, a more important one is helping the community of producers or makers be it the artisan or indigenous community. People see in the consumption of cultural products a respectful way to make a culture known and financially support their craft and practices so that it may be preserved in the future. Cultural products are signs of cooperativism and union. Some sub meanings under this construct are helping communities, celebrating cultures, showing respect, and predisposition to preserve. In the case studies the theme of positive impact had already been identified in the analysis of the case studies. Social contribution is both a meaning and an added value of cultural products that makes them even more relevant.

Connecting and Sharing

The brand meaning of Connecting and sharing comprised the following sub meanings: enabling day to day experiences, remembering moments and sharing memories. In the elaboration of constructs around cultural products, the participants brought out the connection to family and friends. Cultural products are linked to people's day to day life, actions and rituals that become symbolic within a culture. They are charged with an emotional side based on the experiences related to these objects. For example, the chocolate maker pot typical of Colombia acquires

its meaning both from the fact that it transforms the food, an available natural resource of the country, and that it is enjoyed in family and with friends. In this understanding, cultural products are means to an end; to the making of memories and representations of activities that signify union and sharing. Cultural products are also understood as mediums for connecting because they are objects that unify one culture to another through tangible means.

Honoring the Origin

An inseparable meaning given to cultural products during the interviews was that of honoring one's origin. Identity, belonging, origin, history, were mentioned by most of the participants when expressing the significance of cultural products. This category of products is seen as a way to identify and recognize one's roots. Cultural products, in the case of Colombia, were also understood as differentiating objects between regions. Consumers use products that carry characteristics of a specific region in order to connect to that origin and its customs and folklore. Identification towards others also emerged to reference the reasons why a person may use a certain cultural product. According to the respondents, using cultural products is a way to show others that they belong to a certain place and borrow the characteristics and meanings of that object to reflect who they are. The interconnected sub meanings to the meaning of Honoring one's origin are forming an identity, recognition from others, valuing authenticity and uniqueness and going back to the roots. These meanings are connected to that of Revisiting the past which was defined as one of the meanings derived from the cultural identity of Colombia (refer to figure 36).

Appreciating Tradition

As mentioned in the previous part, speaking of Cultural products in Colombia implies speaking of artisanal tradition. All of the participants spoke of indigenous populations and handcrafts when referring to cultural products. Cultural products are connected to the knowledge of the elders and the transmission of it through generations. Cultural products are linked to old ways of doing which call for preservation, emotionally they evoke feelings of nostalgia and remembrance of past times and experiences. Through the consumption of cultural products people seek to preserve traditions that evidence the customs of a place or the community of makers. The sub meanings that make up this category of meaning are appreciating indigenous values, valuing handcrafted objects, generational knowledge, nostalgia and remembrance and innate talent.

Telling Stories

Telling stories was perceived as a very important meaning; it is a characteristic that if absent would eliminate the value of a product as cultural. When an object doesn't tell a story, it doesn't narrate the history of a culture or the stories that make it relevant to people. On one side cultural products are understood as mediums to communicate the story of the people who make them, the places in which they are made or the moment in time in which they were elaborated, on the other side they narrate personal stories that the consumer has created around them. Some participants even spoke of these products bringing to the present childhood memories since they mark moments and actions performed in the past. The sub meanings linked in this case are changing perspectives, learning, and journeys through time. Cultural objects should transfer new knowledge to consumers that allows them to expand or change their perspectives in relation to certain topics or communities. Telling stories was a common meaning found also in the analysis of the case studies and the conversation with designers.

Connecting to previous research

The seven themes of meanings identified: Connecting to nature, Living joyfully, Social contribution, Connecting and sharing, Honoring one's origin, Telling stories, Appreciating tradition, can all be analyzed and connected to the theory of meaning in artefacts and cultural products. In general terms, cultural products are rich in expressive and empathic meaning because of their experiential and symbolic value.

If understood through the Framework for Design for Meaning Ajovalasit and Giacomin (2019), the different meanings are mostly connected to the ritual and myth category since they are mostly related to symbolic actions and behaviors. This kind of products are given semiotic and symbol content based on the consumer's experiences and personal interpretations. The context of the user and the cultural context from which the objects are born become highly influential in this attribution process.

Considering the three dimensions that characterize the meaning of an artefact (Fournier, 1991) one could say that cultural products have a shared source of meaning giving them Commonality, which at the same time makes them highly emotional. In regard to the third dimension of tangibility, it is possible to say that cultural products have a subjective center of meaning. Meaning resides in the objects mostly subjectively through interpretation, experience and associations. These associations point out the importance of performing effective cultural research to extract cultural features that can be implemented into products and traced back to a culture.

Contribution and design implications

This study represents a methodological contribution thanks to the application of the ZMET method to the context of cultural products in which it has not been used before. Additionally, slight research has been developed on understanding the meanings that consumers attach to cultural products, the present study provides a contextual contribution by adding knowledge on this specific context.

The themes that were brought out during the ZMET interviews were analyzed and coded by carefully revising them several times. These recurring thoughts are the starting point of the elaboration of constructs that guide the consensus map. Those that were recurring for at least four to five participants were considered for the formulation of the constructs as is suggested by Zaltman (1997)

These findings help designers understand the directions cultural projects may lead to and help consumers be aware in explicit terms of what it is that they value and what should be important in the products they consume. The consensus map can provide insight to be used by designers and companies in product development, branding and marketing strategies and can serve as a frame of reference for evaluating the incorporation of those product meanings into existing and future product offerings.

These meanings can also influence target segmentation, product specification and design criteria, because they reveal how people use and perceive products. Moreover, as suggested by Olson, J., Waltersdorff, K. and Forr, J. and Zaltman, O., (2009), "at early stages of the innovation process, deep insights into customers' experiences can help guide the design of innovative

products" and the effective positioning of innovations.

In the specific context of Colombia, through the findings of this research future actions can be recommended, especially for the design community, to incorporate values and meanings into their products that resonate with the essence of Colombia. The findings may enable companies to use cultural resources as drivers for innovation, originality and differentiation.

9.3 Approximation to a Cultural Product Design Toolset

Until now the proposed results have served mostly as frameworks that provide guidance for designers developing cultural products. The previous proposals are referential, in contrast, the development of the tool set is a means to provide an actionable method that delves deeper into the results obtained in this thesis. The tool uses the design process and the taxonomy of meaning as a frame to provide the right information valuable for the development of cultural products and merges it with the theoretical input studied in the literature review from part one.

It is envisioned that this tool assists designers to navigate culture more efficiently and guides the development of cultural products specially in the ideation and inspiration phases. With the tool, designers will be able to reflect and create information around the four cultural dimensions within a cultural product (refer to figure 32), that is, the culture of the designer, the culture of inspiration, the culture of consumption and the culture of the market. The idea of the tool is to give an overview of the key aspects to consider when working on cultural products. It should not be understood as a "how to" guide but as a road to approach culture and inspire new directions and interpretations.

This set of cards is directed to designers who are interested in including cultural themes in their projects, but it could also be useful for settings in which the lines of designer/artisan/maker are more blurred thus facilitating co-creation sessions when communities are involved. In this setting, the tool can be a means to establish a common frame for communication. The cards could help manage the complexity of the topic of culture and translate it into manageable chunks for guiding product design research and ideation.

The proposal of the tool in the way of cards is founded on the fact that these facilitate the grasping of information in quick ways. As mentioned during this thesis, culture is complex, presenting it in simpler terms facilitates the access to it and reduces the limitation of complexity. It also allows flexibility to follow a process which is not linear and gives the possibility to use just the most relevant ones as needed or to, for example, use in conjunction with other tool sets which are common in the design practice.

The initial proposal for a toolkit would be structured in three main categories, Exploratory cards, Culture Dive cards and Reinterpretation cards. These three categories consider the three levels of culture going from an inner level, to an intermediate and an outer level. Likewise, they touch the three different approaches to design for meaning relating to function and form, expressive meaning and empathic meanings. A combination of these cards could be a way

to frame a design brief for the elaboration of a cultural product and also for assuring that the qualities that make a product 'cultural' are addressed even if to different extents.

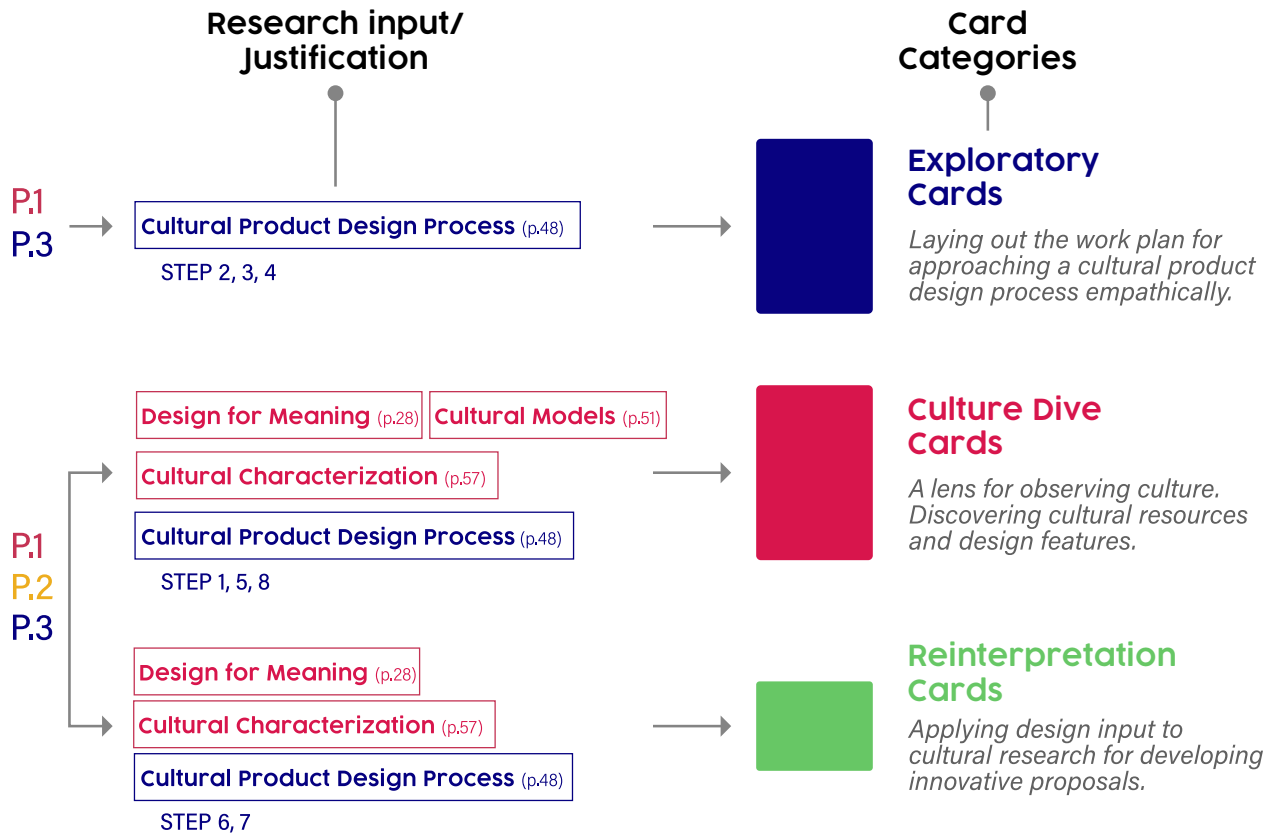


Figure 51: Structure of the Toolset for Cultural Product Design

A brief explanation of what could be found within each category will be presented with some examples.

1 | Exploratory Cards

This section takes into account some of the first steps of the proposed process for cultural product design, respectively, define design intention, limit target culture and understand the frame of reference.

The purpose of the exploratory cards is to provide the groundwork for the development of the further steps of the process by first understanding why culture is relevant in general terms and for the specific goal of the designer, understanding who the cultures of interest are, and the positioning of the designer in respect to those. These cards invite the designer to lay out his work plan for approaching a cultural product design process and promote empathy and connections by making him aware of his own stereotypes and biases and cultural impact towards the different cultures that may be involved.

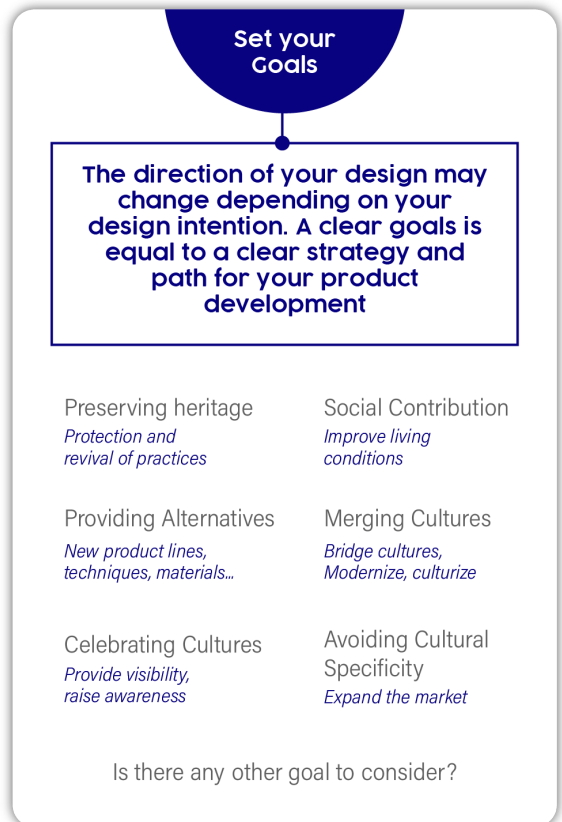
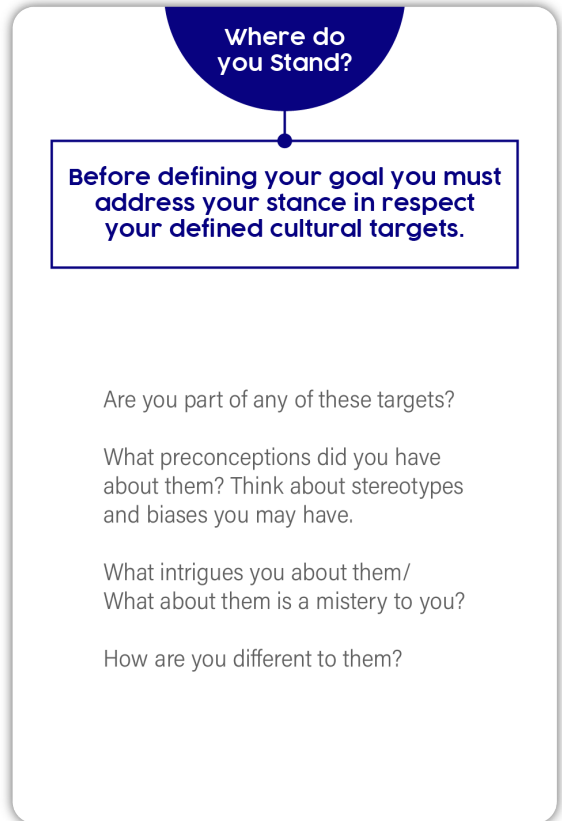
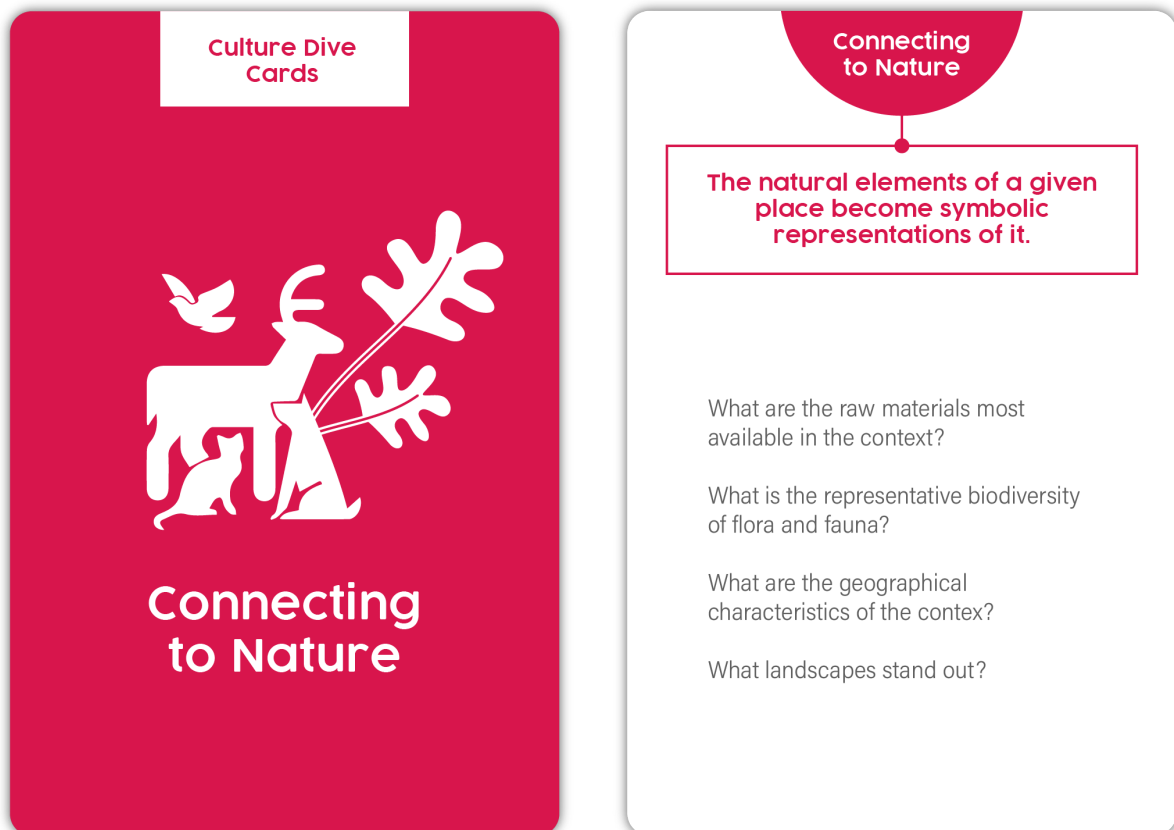


Figure 52: Two Exploratory Cards (front and back) of the Category 'Where do you Stand' and 'Set your Goals'


2 | Culture Dive Cards

This category of cards is equivalent to the cultural study part of a cultural product design process. In respect to the proposed process, it relates to the steps of investigation and immersion into the cultural context and the extraction of cultural features. This section comprises the findings from the research of the literature review and the study of cultural models. They serve as a lens through which to observe culture by translating insight from anthropological cultural models and empirical study. For example, if we consider one of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, individualism vs collectivism, the designer could be directed to think about the practices and rituals that may be linked to a product and how they may involve different interactions between people. Another example for a card that reflects the meanings of cultural products as found on the consumer perspective study could be 'Connecting to Nature', such a card prompts the study of places and its natural resources and materials.

A remaining question for this section is whether it would be helpful to include culture specific cards that refer in particular to the country of study, for example, just related to Colombia. A further study of the same style that focuses on other cultures could serve as a cross cultural study that compares and contrasts to which extent the meanings in cultural products vary from one context to another and what elements are common and relevant to all. The culture specific cards would be a subcategory of the Culture Dive category.



Culture Dive Cards



Narrated Stories

Narrated Stories

The magic of a product lies in the stories it tells. through stories people connect emotionally to products.

What are common childhood memories of the target culture?

Are there any myths or tales from folklore that tell stories of the traditions of these cultures?

Are there stories specific of the community that would be new to people outside of it?

What are the characters, scenarios, and moods of shared stories?

Culture Dive Cards



Particular Doings

Particular Doings

There is a reason to why people do the things they do. Culture becomes visible through established practices and rituals.

What rituals are representative or unique of your target cultures?

How are these different and alike between your different target culture dimensions?

Are there objects that enable the development of these particular doings?

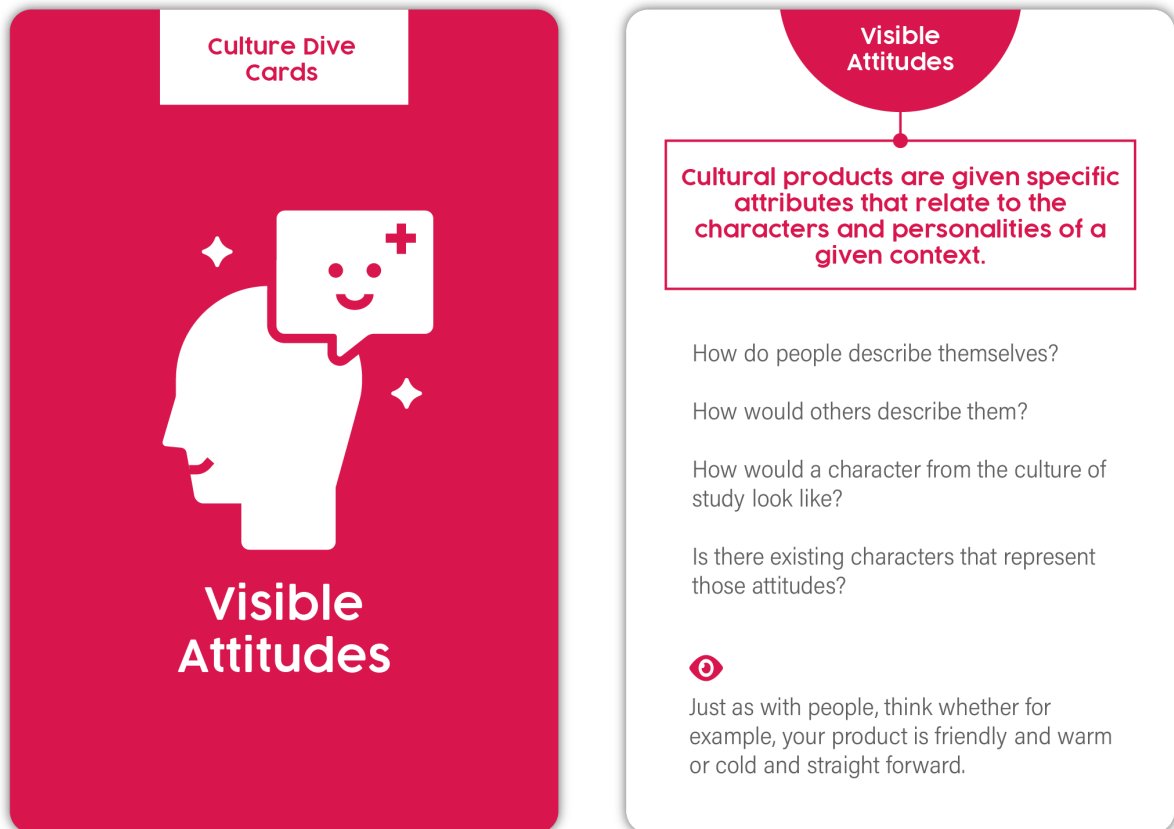


Figure 54: Four Exploratory Cards (front and back) Based on Content from the Framework for Meaning and Literature Review.

3 | Reinterpretation Cards

The reinterpretation cards focus on the design input that is applied to the cultural research and investigation collected in previous stages of the process. This could include material reinterpretations or considerations related to market trends. The cultural value of products resides mostly in the narrative and intangible qualities of objects, if these are extracted and interpreted properly, through visual and formal aspects it is possible to reinterpret them into innovative proposals. These cards could take the form of design actions that stimulate the designer to consider different means to reinterpret culture in more tangible ways. For example, how could you change the scale, flip, mirror, change the colors, replace, combine, swap, freeze, texturize, change the technique or material, etc. These actions give the tool a gamification and interaction quality that makes them engaging while helping to stretch out concepts deriving from the meanings and values of the cultural study.

The cards could be even mixed between them to create connections that may lead to new insight and considerations. For instance, a card related to the target culture (exploratory card) can be matched to the action card 'Flip' (reinterpretation card) which could prompt the designer to flip roles with the culture and think for example, if the target culture was designing for him, what would they do and how would they do it? These changes in perspectives can open up the designer to explore new paths and question what is actually valuable to him and the other culture by thinking in more empathic ways.

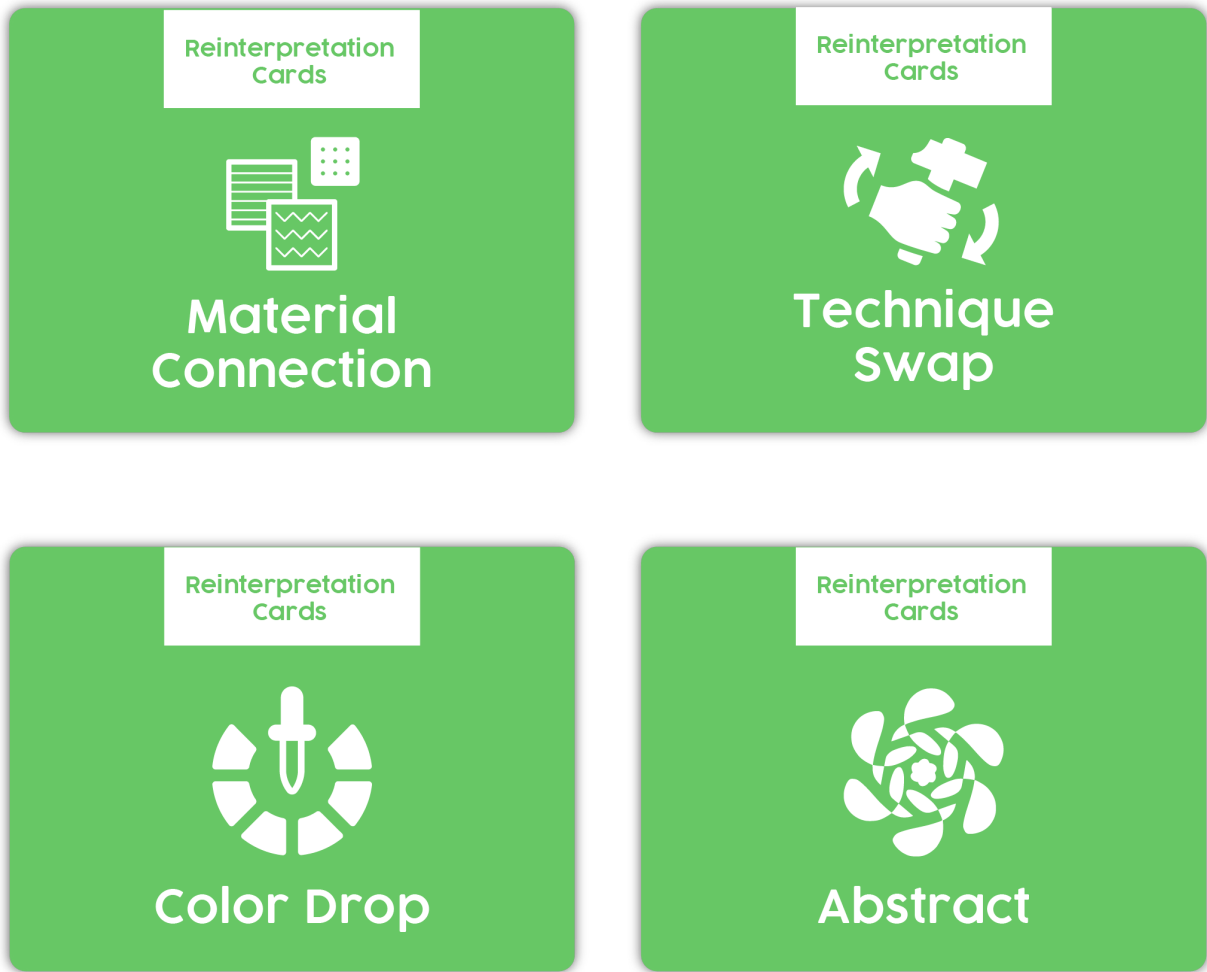


Figure 55: Example of Four Reinterpretation Cards (front)

Empirical Study

(10)

Final Remarks

10.1 Final Conclusion

Globalization has changed market conditions and the profile of consumers who are now in a constant search for differentiation and more meaningful purchases. The increased interest in local purchases and purchases from small businesses can be understood as a reflection of that search which is connected to feelings of differentiation through national pride. "Country image identifiers" (Papadopoulos, 1993) and product "nationalities" (Phau & Prendergast, 2000) are increasing in relevance because "competition and standardization in globalizing markets reduce uniqueness and stimulate the demand for authenticity and provenance" (Clifton, 2011). In parallel, there is also an unexplored context and potential lying in cultural products which may align with the previous statement.

Nonetheless, cultural product design is an understudied field because of its complexity and abstract qualities which make it

difficult to easily grasp. There is space for developing a structured and systematic understanding of the themes and processes around the field which provides designers and companies with the methods to motivate them to pursue it.

The field of cultural products and cultural design is still to be further studied. In fact, Wang, Qin and Harrison (2013) point out a research gap in the study of cultural design rules for creating culture-inspired products. Perhaps the way to promote the development of this field as well as the promotion of this kind of product is to develop the category properly by creating a clear and practical frame of reference. Designers must be aware of the cultural impact their products play within a society and need to begin to question how they may bring innovation through the study of culture to aggregate value to products that resonate with consumers.

This thesis contributes to the efforts on the study of the field specifically geared towards the development of cultural products. It brings to the surface the strong link between culture and design and sets them as mutually beneficial concepts to each other. The thesis positioned culture in the context of design and proposed a process on how to approach cultural product design and a taxonomy of the meanings attached to cultural products. The findings are condensed and reflected in an initial approximation to a tool set for designers that places culture as a path for innovation in product design and guides designers in the development of cultural products by helping them to understand and rescue cultural resources.

The investigation was conducted using Colombia as the context of study, but the findings are applicable to other contexts with similar characteristics. The results propose a path to perceive cultural resources or features to be implemented and reinterpreted into product design without losing the transmission of cultural values.

All in all, this project is a suggestion to consider sustainability in systemic ways which go beyond environmental issues instead, focusing on the conservation of knowledge, values and traditions that can set the path for a meaningful future in products. Cultural products are a way of connecting with one another and using diversity and the beauty of the contexts that surround us as sources of design inspiration and transition of narratives and stories from around the world. The Nasa indigenous communities from Colombia say, "the future is behind", as such, to go forward and create meaningful and innovative paths we must first recognize our realities and the values that craft our present and encircle us.

10.2 Further Research

1 | The Tool Set

The research and results presented in this thesis are the initial steps for the development of a more robust toolkit for designers to approach cultural product design in a systematic way which complements the current empirical approach. The tool set presented previously is just an initial approximation. Further research on the specific content presented and its validity should be conducted. A definition of where, when and what content remains to be done.

Aspects to consider more in detail are the categorization of the cards, the specific information

to include and format or design criteria. The dynamics and ways in which the cards may be used are also a matter of further research, for example considering whether they are used by designers individually or in co-creation sessions. Likewise, it would be useful to analyze how they could be used in relation to other models and processes already existing. An evaluation of references from existing tools and creativity cards such as the IDEO method cards, or frog's Collective Action toolkit would also be helpful to define some of the criteria mentioned previously.

An aspect of interest is understanding whether culture-specific cards are relevant or necessary. As mentioned later, this would require cross cultural study in order to compare how much the meanings between cultures in cultural products vary. The question here is if culture-specific tool sets or add-ons are pertinent; for example, specifying a set for Colombian cultural product, a tool set for Italian cultural product and so on. This approach could risk resulting in stereotypes so its study should be a thorough one.

2 | Validation

The results proposed through this research are hypothetical in the sense that testing would be necessary to put them in context and practice. Further study with an experimental approach could validate the process and tools proposed by involving designers to develop projects using the methods and taking their review and reflections onto how it adds or influences their own process as compared to previous experiences and how it integrates with other design processes. One place for controlled testing could be for example in design education where a design brief could be formulated incorporating the methods to then contrast the development of projects with or without the guidance of a process and a tool. Different testing settings would need to be considered as well, for example considering designers who are close to the culture of their target users, creating for a culture they belong as compared to designers creating for cultures different than their own. Or used in collaborative design processes with other non-designer communities. These different settings would help to understand in which context a tool like this is relevant and if it can be further specified for each required setting.

3 | Sampling

This study covered the perspective from a designer and consumer point of view. Future work could be broadened to include a greater sample of these as well as people from other disciplines highly involved with the topic, for example from anthropology, social design, or even artisanal communities.

Additionally, a cross-cultural comparison would be highly valuable for the further elaboration of the findings presented. Both from countries of similar development and socio-economic characteristics as well as more developed countries could be studied to understand more accurately if the meanings attributed to cultural products vary from one nation to another and which qualities remain constant. From the designer perspective it could also provide insight on how the process for cultural product design changes given a new context. This research would contribute to the understanding of cultural creativity in product design and its standing in a worldwide context.

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**Taxonomy of meaning for Cultural
Products: Insights for designers to
envision new meanings.**



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