

# SustainDesign – A Project with Young Creative People

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**Abstract.** Roby Attisano and his team of „young creative minds“ introduce their approach to the topic sustain design. After a period of long and intense work, two interesting and sustainable projects from two completely different areas emerged. The young students from the little North-Italian province of South Tyrol focused on sustainability in waste prevention issues and on consciousness-raising concerning gambling addiction. All work steps and developments on logos, campaigns, apps and much more will be presented hereinafter. Our main focus relied on interactivity, sustainability as well as the contact to other people. Answers to the question of all questions – „*can design contribute to sustainability?*“ – were searched and possible solution processes were revealed.

**Keywords:** Sustain Design, Sustainability.

## 1 Sustain Design – A Project with Young Creative People

After I got to know Aaron Marcus during an education project in 2010, I met him in Berkeley in 2011 privately again.

I was reasoning with Aaron about „good“ design and the challenges related to sustainability in the design industry. The discussion was sophisticated, passionate and highly inspiring. Problem-solving approaches, that should be studied and tested more precisely, came up. During that afternoon, a special connection developed between Aaron and me and at the end of our conversation he stated a unique invitation and said: „Roby, come to Las Vegas and make a guest speech at the DUXU 2013!“

For a graphic designer from South Tyrol like me, a golden opportunity: not only taking part, but also making a contribution to one of the world’s most important design conferences, is a great honor for me. It has filled me with pride, excitement and the will to accept this challenge. I’m also looking forward to exchange views and perceptions with my appreciated colleagues from around the globe. Since I don’t limit myself as a graphic designer in order to deal with all design disciplines and furthermore to share my knowledge with young students as a specialist teacher for design, the right topic of my speech was quite easy to define. I have decided against presenting one of my own projects. To me, it was of greater importance to include my

students, so we have developed and elaborated this project together. The only input the students got from me was the main issue: Sustainable Design.

We live in a throwaway society. Far too often, things are created for disposable use only – but design can and has to do more. Good and modern design has to be sustainable. This task requires certainly more mental efforts and more courage in order to develop new approaches and to reveal new perspectives.

It didn't take us too long to find the appropriate support for this forward-looking project at the academy, my colleagues from Marketing, German, English, 3D and Video realized the huge potential immediately. The project allows us a new and different way of teaching: theory and practice merge and powerful synergies with great learning potentials arise. The students learn theory through practice and testing. They also have to learn that mistakes are part of the learning process. In this way, the receptiveness of the young people is increasing many times over and the value of self-awareness for the acquisition of knowledge is getting more conscious. The fluent passages of the teaching subjects explain the necessity of „lateral thinking“. I want to show the students, what it means to implement and accomplish a project with gut instinct, passion, capacity for suffering and endurance. They should experience, how versatile, also painful but in the end how satisfying our work as designers can be.

Shortly after the project started, the initial enthusiasm, passion and anticipation vanished. Self-doubts, difficulties in communication and concerns coursed through rapidly. The team dynamic was unbalanced and the energy of the working groups dwindled increasingly. Discussions have gone round in circles, achievements came to nothing and decisions were postponed more often.

Doubts and concerns spread amongst us teachers, who accompanied the project. Did we expect or demand too much from the group? Can they handle a project of this dimension at all? Very quickly it became clear, that the size and complexity of this project has been underestimated. This led to uncertainties and tensions.

The whole project evolved distressingly into a race against time. We always knew that our available time resources were limited, but we hoped, it would become a process with its own dynamics that leads the students to do extra work during their spare time and continue to work on the project. Unfortunately, this was not the case.

Piece by piece, through our decision support and assistance, we could regain the student's confidence in themselves, the working groups and the project. We strengthened their faith in their own ideas and discussed the meaningfulness of those very same ideas. Step by step, we could finally achieve our common goal through hard work. Now and then we had the feeling of losing sight of our main focus, sustainability. But at some point we realized that we just had to take a closer look at the group in order to see that they were actually reflecting about sustainable considerations all the while. Their actions and designings were becoming increasingly sustainable. The students have definitely changed for the better. Today they think and act more sustainable and affect their environment in a positive way.

Most certainly, we can't affect the whole world with our projects and ideas, but we could prevail on eighteen students and six teachers to think, live and work in a more sustainable way and to let their environment consciously participate.

The students present their projects on the following pages themselves, only by this the text can remain honest and authentic. It's about a well researched and demanding topic, though it's no professional article in the proper sense. With this concept, the young students want to advance parts of their sustainability studies. They paid attention to a content-related structure and tried to ensure that the text leaves positive marks. In this sense I wish you all a lot of fun and sustainability while browsing in our projects.

*Roby Attisano, graphic artist, South Tyrol*

## 1.1 Why Sustainability?

Sustainability indicates the development, which is adjusted to the needs and requirements of today's generations, without putting the satisfactions of needs of future generations at risk. The aim is to keep our planet as intact and sustained as possible for our posterity. Many large companies have a focus on these developments for years already and find thereby new ways for sustainable solutions. For us and our project, sustainability takes top priority within the scope of DUXU 2013. But we don't want to keep it in mind for this brief moment of this presentation here in Las Vegas only. No!

We want to affect our future sustainably.

We want to raise awareness and galvanize.

We want to change views of people we can reach in the long term.

We want to leave traces, traces in the minds of people.

Traces that will not fade. Due to our individual diversities it was hard to agree on one single topic, so we decided to develop two different ones. We chose the subject areas **gambling addiction** and **environment**. Both topics are based on the main concept of Sustainable Design and will be developed in respect of sustainability.

## 1.2 What's Wrong with Our Approach to Environment?

Just the thought of a world that has been destroyed and buried under huge piles of trash, a world, that has nothing in common with the planet we know and love anymore, makes us shiver.

Just the idea, that our grandchildren and great-grandchildren may not be able to see and experience the earth as we do, that they can no longer play outside, that they can't see the sun and the sky anymore.

Just the thought, that our children can never drink water straight from the tap again and that tigers and bears are only known from books, makes us upset, but responsible at the same time. With every animal or plant species that becomes extinct, we bring nature a bit more out of balance. Our carelessness and wastefulness play, without any doubt, a big and shady part in this grave development. Every day, each and every one of us produces garbage. A sizeable part of this trash is only packaging material. So it seems that the thesis „Garbage is nothing more than bad design“ could come close to the truth in a sense. If we would be more mindful and conscious of reducing and

decreasing our packaging materials, or if we would even find better ways how disposable packagings could be led to another, more sustainable purpose of use, we would have already achieved a reduction of future landfills. Each city and every community has to reconsider and rethink over and over again, from generation to generation, where our future garbage should be deposited or stored. But this is not as easy as it may seem. Waste storage is a very delicate issue, especially when you take sustainability into consideration. We definitely don't want the next generation to build their homes on a contaminated landfill. Where garbage was deposited in the 1980ies, no clean water can seep into the ground any longer.

That leads, among other things, to a strong obstruction of the soil, with all its already known disadvantages for nature and environment. Furthermore, the redevelopment of old landfills causes huge and unavoidable financial expenditures. People in South Tyrol have realized decades ago that they have to find sustainable solutions to the waste problem. In our country it is self-evident by now that waste has to be disposed of separately. Glass, plastic, cans and paper are collected separately and recycled again. Organic waste can either be composted directly at home or brought to organic waste facilities, where for instance compost for the wholesale trade is being produced. Batteries and toxic waste is also collected separately.

In this way, „only“ residual waste, which has to be incinerated or stored, remains. Any idea, where we shall put it in 20 years? For that reason sustainable waste disposal is already part of child education. We teach our children how to separate garbage properly and which garbage belongs in which garbage bin.

Parents, kindergardens and schools have been working hand in hand for years to improve the situation. „Garbage collection days“ have been launched, where pupils and students from different communities and cities inspect hiking trails and other public spaces in order to pick up carelessly discarded trash.

Despite all this we see again and again, day after day, how much trash is carelessly discarded on the ground directly next to garbage containers, in the open countryside, or in places of silence and contemplation. Even in food stores you can watch how people rather pack each fruit or vegetable individually in plastic bags than to summarize and use fewer bags. Moreover, the packed goods are packed again.

Entrance areas of bars or office buildings are paved with regardlessly discarded cigarette butts. On hiking trails you can find garbage bags and used tissues.

If monthly a hundred people pass a resting spot for hikers, at least a hundred tissues lie there at the end of the month and already 1.200 at the end of one year. Why does everyone think, he or she is the only one who tosses a tissue to the ground? Waste collection areas and likewise the trash cans themselves would need a redesign. They should be located within easy reach and could be designed more attractiv in order to reverse the image.

People should love to go to waste collection areas, they shouldn't be disgusted by old, dirty containers. The friendlier a collection area appears, the more likely people would go there and use it in order to dispose of garbage sustainably and properly. We are living in a fast moving time in the middle of a consumption-focused society. Nevertheless, each and everyone of us can contribute in helping designers find new,

sustainable ways regarding product packaging issues. Usually it takes just a few steps to reach the nearest trash can and a simple handgrip ensures that the world is a bit longer the way as we know it today.

## **2 The Project “Each One Teach One”**

### **2.1 The Situation in South Tyrol**

In South Tyrol, waste has been collected and disposed of separately for decades already. Appropriate educational efforts happen from an early age. But despite all that, it’s alarming to see what’s happening in our school alone: The schoolyards are often littered with trash after the breaks and incorrectly discarded garbage can be found in the provided trash bins every day. Student’s behaviors in dealing with garbage must be described as careless and apathetic. Many students just chuck everything, that is no longer needed, to the ground instead of bothering to dispose of the trash correctly only a few meters further. This thoughtlessness can be watched almost everywhere and it’s a cross-generational phenomenon. Everybody knows the right behavior pattern, no matter if you’re young or old.

Is it a question of laziness or indifference?

### **2.2 Our Aim**

We decided to implement the project in a sustainable and social way. Everyone should be able to participate actively and give each other hints and ideas for a proper waste handling and also for protecting our planet. Our concept is about constantly sharing advices and ideas, where the students learn from each other instead of being consciously instructed. In this way we hope and expect that they are willing to reflect on their behavior pattern. We want to provide the opportunity for everyone to contribute with ideas, thoughts and opinions as an inspiration to others. This approach increases the participation rate. Our effort is to make this topic tempting for the people. With little effort and in small steps we are able to preserve the world for our posterity. We are confident that it would make sense to redesign waste collection areas. The idea is to make them more attractive. Due to the anticipation of redesigning these areas, through a possible interaction, we could even convince reluctant persons that sustainable waste separation can be fun.

### **2.3 Research and Planning**

In order to perceive all difficulties concerning our issue, we have observed and analyzed the behavior of our students in dealing with waste. We talked to people from different age groups, how they deal with garbage. In order to design our print products and implement our actions, we want to make shure that the appearance is exceptional, fresh and modern. For a period of three months we collected the garbage that

was improperly disposed of at our school and documented these misconducts. The installation of a „garbage road“ should make the students conscious of how much trash accumulates immediately, though there are plenty of trash bins standing by for a proper waste disposal at every turn. For now the garbage road was solely realized at our school, but it could be extended to public spaces any time. The garbage road arouses attention, provokes and offers space for actions and reactions. In this way we will get the chance to share information in order to start an exchange of ideas. The whole thing could be based on the principle of the famous parlor game „Chinese whispers“: „Did you already know...and spread the information!“ A big challenge is the age limit: everyone learns from one another. No matter, how old the person is, whether eight or eighty years old – everybody can learn something from the other. In this way, we as designers are greatly challenged. Our design, the content and all relevant information must be structured and designed in a way, that they are applicable to all age groups. Keeping the participant's inhibition level low or offering them an enticement in order to get them involved, is another principle. We want to touch people's hearts, address them and evoke something in them. „Each one teach one“ relies on learning with and from each other. We asked two members of „Be the Change“, that's a group of people who put themselves out for an environmentally sustainable, socially equitable and meaningful existence on this planet, to perform a „wake up call“ with us. We believe, the uniqueness of our project lies in the fact that we give each individual the opportunity to participate and to learn from each other. We support our project with video and audio recordings to capture the developments and to document our work.

## 2.4 Our Problem-Solving Approaches

We also use social networks for the project, where we have the opportunity to create a place of exchange and get-together. The participants come together in these networks and share their experiences. For younger audiences we focused on garbage recycling by building useful objects.

For a coherent look we developed a campaign logo, whose principal element is the geometric shape of a triangle. The rarely used triangle increases the logo's potential of attention clearly, because it is in contrast to the common rectangular and circular shapes. It stands for stability and durability. Our triangle has rounded edges, that distinctly underlines the positive signal effect.

Our triangle points to the right, which is equivalent to „forward“. Firstly, this has a positive effect on the viewer and additionally it arouses the association with a start button, the PLAY button that we can find on technical devices. This association gives our logo triangle a powerful meaning. It stands for the beginning of a new future, the start of becoming a society of health and sustainability. This signal effect gives us the feeling of something is not ending here, something is starting. It builds on our goal of „spreading the word“ and invites to participate. Our campaign logo consists of six colours. We have deliberately included two green tones. The colour green occurs in all shades and variants in nature and has an additional beneficial effect. In the traffic

light system, green means „go ahead“ and signifies the permission to take off. This brings us one step closer to our „start button“. Our researches have shown that in America the colour green is hardly used in advertisements. That surprised us a lot because in Italy many use this color in order to appear more green-minded and eco-sensitive. Besides: Green is also the colour of hope.

In order to persuade people, especially young people, to commit themselves to environmental issues, we need to attract their attention. On the basis of this perception we have initiated the garbage road campaign „glorious mess“. Several projects related to the topic „touching arts“ followed. The viewer can see, feel, touch and comprehend art that is made from recycled materials. One idea and example are our „bottle pictures“. We construct mobile walls in school buildings, on which different kinds of bottle caps are fixed. The students can screw their empty bottles onto these walls. Through the different shapes, colors and sizes constantly new and ever-changing pictures emerge. Discussions, actions and reactions result from this initiative.

Special theme installations can be created. In gastronomical facilities for instance these bottle pictures could symbolize forks or a chef’s hat. Action, participation and creativity of all participants will be included and utilized. Another approach will be furniture design. The students miss additional seating possibilities in school’s hallways and recreation rooms. There is also a shortage of coat racks and the garbage containers could be more appealing. We want to dabble ourselves in furniture designing in order to find ways to produce these items from recyclable materials.

### **3 Why Is Compulsing Gambling Dangerous?**

Gambling, in other words: playing on computers or with gaming consoles, is contemporary and omni-present for us young people. Nowadays, we are used to have access to the internet and to online games everywhere and anytime, the choice of games has become incalculable. At the beginning, most of the people just play for the fun of it. Then they become ambitious and play with increasing frequency. Today we go less often a football field to work off, we rather sit at home alone at our computers to spend hours on the alleged relaxing.

More and more people start to play for money at some point. The sums, which are gambled away on a single day, are alarming. Monthly salaries are quite often gambled away in just half an hour. At this moment, the players don’t think about their living expenses. What happens when the first negative effects set in? When we started our researches, we found out that this issue is ubiquitous and hotly debated at the moment. Headlines like „Ban on slot machines in bars“ or „Ex-gambling addict writes book about her experiences“ dominate the local press. The human need for security is understandable and comprehensible. Money provides security. According to that, the multiplication of money has top priority. The more money you accumulate, the more you consider yourself save. In these efforts, many people slide into addiction. „Game over“ doesn’t always mean that it’s over, it’s much more an invitation to continue playing. You want to prove yourself that you’re not a loser. The losing streak must at

some point become a winning streak. Big profits attract attention. People very often don't just lose their hard earned money, they don't shy away from raising a credit. Then the debt trap snaps shut. Gamblers mostly act in secret, don't tell anyone about their debts and want to regain control without the help of others. Gambling addiction reaches the climax when family members and friends being robbed in order to finance the addiction. The secret-mongering leads to social isolation. Gambling addicts seclude themselves and want to solve the problems, which are not really problems for them, alone. They start to neglect their families and friends, though they surely know that social contacts provide stability in life. Friends and family can help when live becomes difficult. The characters from computer games can't be of any help when you're in trouble. None of these virtual friends comforts you or takes you by the hand, no slot machine claps you on the shoulder, cheers you up or pulls you out of your depression.

Playing is a part of live, a part of growing up. Through learning by playing, children and young adults grasp a lot of what they need later on. Playing with other individuals is an important part of human development, it strengthens us in our social skills and increases self-confidence. In recent years, digital games and game consoles for kids and teenagers have been spreading like wildfire. Today kids don't play „cowboys and indians“ or run around in the woods to collect pine cones anymore.

Doubtful about this development is the fact that digital games must be played most often alone and undisturbed. The teenagers lose their contact to the outside world and neglect their social contacts. Even the perception of time is distorted heavily, so they increasingly lose track of time. Playing on the computer for hours and days is the negative outcome. While kids previously had to go home from the playground at nightfall, today's games don't require any natural time limits.

We want to inspire young people to spend less time playing computer games or slot machines, we want them to spend more time with real people. We don't want them to throw away their lives or to neglect their families and friendships. We want them to change their attitude to live. We want to advise them against addiction and underline the importance of dealing with real people in a real world.

## **4 Plato's Allegory of the Cave and Gambling Addiction**

When we exchanged views with Martin Osen about gambling addiction in combination with shadows, he told us about the well-known „allegory of the cave“. The shadow, equal to a dark companion, that symbolizes gambling addiction, reminds strongly of Plato's allegory of the cave. Human beings, who live in constant darkness, merely perceive their own shadows. Everything else is unreal and wrong for them.

Their behavior pattern reminds us of gambling addicts who are detached from reality. The shadow becomes their reality. With the idea of an abstract world, Plato refers to people's narrowmindedness, obstinacy and credulity. In this „parallel world“, addiction becomes reality, and people who live in this illusory world, become the shadow of their former self.



## **5 The Shadow Project**

### **5.1 The South Tyrolean Situation**

Many people spend most of their leisure time with gambling on vending machines or with playing computer games, they waste valuable time they rather could spend with their family or friends. The numbers of recently diagnosed gambling addicts and people at risk for addiction in our country are constantly increasing. This disease is still declared taboo and nobody likes to talk about it publicly. Compared with alcohol or drug addiction, you hardly find any educational material concerning gambling addiction. This addiction is hardly accepted and often takes place in secret. Affected people keep silent, because they refuse to believe the problem for a long time and feel ashamed later on. We are sure that these factors facilitate the addiction.

### **5.2 Our Goal**

We want to address young people in order to keep them from using slot machines or money-guzzlers to spend more time with their families and friends. They should realize that they need their social contacts like the air we breath. Friends and family give us wonderful moments, safety and security. In the long term fortune and happiness most likely can be found within family and friends. Kids should know, that temperate playing is alright and beyond dispute, but they shouldn't forget about their social environment.

### **5.3 Research and Planning**

Besides theoretical researches in books and newspapers we took to the streets with open eyes and open ears. We sat in bars and casinos, watching people's approach to both, machines and human beings around them. I remember the incident in the middle of the night, when I saw a young mother gambling on a slotmachine while her five year old daughter was sitting next to her half asleep just waiting to go home...we see clearly that social responsibility must be the key to success.

Parallel to the attitude survey we began to examine different light sources and locations. We wanted to find out how shadows of different light sources really look like and which influencing factors have an effect on the intensity and shape of the shadow. It shows that space has an enormous influence on shadows, shadows cannot exist without space. Shadows can adapt themselves to space, no matter if it's open or confined space and which building materials were used. We tried to understand how light, shadows and space are related to each other in order to work with these components purposefully. After we had finished our studies, we began to illustrate shadows analogously and digitally. We experimented with various shapes and combinations. We printed digital templates, cut them into shape and produced stencils that are suitable for shadow theatres. Then we tried to find suitable light sources, which could be used by everyone and everywhere to cast shadows by the help of our stencils. We noticed that the daylight was not ideal for casting shadows, the light was too scattered

and the stencils were too small. Various lamps were out of the question, who constantly carries around a torch?

Just when we wanted to discard the idea of casting shadows, we spotted the flash on one of our cellphones. We experimented around and lastly found the optimal solution: Today, almost every cellphone has an integrated flash. Our target groups have their cellphones always within reach and could easily cast shadows with their integrated flashes and appropriate stencils.

In support of the recognition value we created a campaign logo. This logo will be placed on all advertising materials and serves as a mark simultaneously. The logo consists of shadows, which are arranged according to the golden grid system. No logo illustration is identical to another, in that way the logo stays in motion and looks exciting and interesting. Players demand varieties, which we provide them in order to get them interested in our project. All logo illustrations have similarities that ensure recognition. They are all quadratic and the colour scheme, that consists of dark colours, black and white, also remains steady. The logo lettering „The Shadow“ runs through all illustrations and always stays in the same font and font colour.

#### **5.4 Our Problem-Solving Approaches**

As a particular implementation, we have thought of shadow plays that will be implemented analogously. In this way, stencils, memory cards and classical games, that were formerly played by two people very often, emerged. On all these advertising materials, information on gambling addiction can be placed discreetly in order to inform about the disease. Thereby we firstly cause a debate about gambling addiction and secondly, we ensure that two people can spend time together playing a haptic game. We have to assume that gambling hall operators and bar owners will have little interest in supporting our campaign against gambling addiction. Therefore we have to operate publicly in order to gain people's attention. Public areas around gambling facilities would be perfect for spreading the information.

Currently we are working on the idea to project real shadows of passers-by with the help of strong light sources onto the street. Next to it, the passers-by should read a catchphrase like „Take a picture with your shadow“ and at the same moment we inform about our campaign.

In the digital scope we create an app to detect the severity of the addiction. The users should declare, how many hours they played and how much money they won or lost. Based on these data, the app generates the appearance of a shadow. The higher the numbers are, the more demonic the shadow appears. If the numbers are low and the user gambles less, the shadow gradually returns to its natural shape.