

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Northumbria at Newcastle		
Unit of Assessment: 32 (Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory)		
Title of case study: Design and Social Innovation in Asia-Pacific Network: Transforming professional identity, and evaluative practices for social impact		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014 - 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Joyce Yee	Associate Professor / Professor	14/05/2001 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015 - 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Western-centric and economically driven design methods are not equipped to support and evaluate impact arising from social innovation initiatives within non-Western cultures. They can inadvertently obscure, disrupt, or replace culturally specific practices and relationships during the design process. Research by Professor Joyce Yee of Northumbria University on culturally-specific design approaches helped establish the Design and Social Innovation in Asia-Pacific (DESIAP) network which has supported nearly 600 social innovation practitioners from 100 organisations in 14 countries. Yee's research has enabled Asia-Pacific organisations such as Re:public (Japan) who were already using design methods to establish a stronger professional identity as <i>design and social innovation</i> (DSI) practitioners. Her work on evaluation approaches (for example with Impact Hub Phnom Penh) has helped transform the way organisations use evaluation and has resulted in improved social outcomes for the marginalised and excluded communities they serve.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Design and Social Innovation (DSI) uses design methods to co-create new ideas, services, and programmes to address social problems with the people who will use them. Traditionally, design methods have centred on unlocking economic potential, typically in Western-based commercial organisations and contexts (Europe and the United States). In contrast, DSI initiatives that aim to create social impact are often delivered in communities by third and public sector organisations. Evaluating social impact is challenging as it is not measured through profit and market successes, but through changes in behaviour, systems, and policies that ultimately benefit an individual or a community.</p> <p>Research led by Professor Joyce Yee from Northumbria University explored the value of design in supporting social innovation and investigated the most effective ways for DSI initiatives to create social impact. A key example was the AHRC-funded project [G1] that examined the impact of design in public, voluntary, and community sector organisations across England, Scotland, and Australia. Rather than focusing only on <i>how</i> design adds value, Yee uniquely looked at the conditions required to <i>maximise</i> this value and her research revealed that creating a community and building trusting relationships between all stakeholders is the most important condition for successful co-creation in this context [R1].</p> <p>Yee's experience of living and working in the South-east Asian region led her to be concerned that the dominance of Western-centric DSI methods can inadvertently obscure, disrupt, or replace culturally-specific practices and relationships during the design process, and impede the potential of successful DSI. Therefore in 2015, in collaboration with Dr Yoko Akama (RMIT University, Australia), Yee hosted a symposium and workshop on Design and Social Innovation in Asia-Pacific (DESIAP) in Singapore. Akama's expertise in participatory design and experiences with indigenous populations in Australia complemented Yee's specialist</p>		

understanding of innovation and social impact in design, particularly in community-driven organisations [R1]. The success of this event led to an AHRC network grant [G2] that resulted in the foundation of the DESIAP Network – a virtual platform and community of practice to address the needs of oft-overlooked organisations engaged in DSI within the region. DESIAP events designed to improve understanding of DSI in Asia-Pacific countries included 3 international symposiums, 8 workshops, and 4 projects attracting nearly 600 participants in total.

Yee conducted research using insights from participants at DESIAP workshops in Singapore (2015, 2019), Bangkok (2016), Newcastle (2016), Yangon (2017), Phnom Penh (2017), Melbourne (2017), and Kuala Lumpur (2017). Findings revealed that respecting and understanding cultural sensitivities is key to fostering the trust and interdependent relationships with stakeholders that enable DSI practices to work successfully [R2]. Yee's research also highlighted that design practices need to be sensitive to a blend of cultures, relationships, materials, histories, philosophies, and world views to encourage inclusive practice and avoid domination by Western ideals [R3]. Building on this, Yee and post-doctoral researcher, Cyril Tjahja (Hanzehogeschool Groningen, The Netherlands) highlighted the positive influence of social hierarchy in participatory DSI in Thailand [R4]. This conclusion challenges the potential negative perceptions of hierarchy in DSI derived from Western pre-judgements. It illustrated the importance of more culturally-specific and culturally-grounded ways of working in DSI and provided an example of how it works in practice.

Yee's research also highlighted how using a Western perspective to evaluate DSI in non-Western contexts is inappropriate and proposed new culturally-sensitive and transformative-learning methods for evaluation [R5, R6]. Yee and colleagues suggested that traditional quantitative evaluation fails to account for the long-term impact related to social value and its potential to transform individuals [R5]. A key example of this was the 'DSI Social Impact Framework', established in 2017 with input from 12 DSI practitioners from Malaysia, Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia, and The Philippines. The new framework assessed changes in participant mindset and recommended the use of evaluation tools to share stories and learning, crowdsource opinions, explore unknowns, and develop shared understandings of impact. The framework encouraged DSI projects to embed community-led evaluation from the start to help shape the project as it progresses and so maximise social impact [R6].

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

R1. Joyce Yee and White, H. (2016) 'The Goldilocks Conundrum: The "Just Right" Conditions for Design to Achieve Impact in Public and Third Sector Projects' *International Journal of Design* 10 (1): 1991-3761 <http://www.ijdesign.org/index.php/IJDesign/article/view/2381/730>

R2. Akama, Y. and Joyce Yee (2016) 'Seeking Stronger Plurality: Intimacy and Integrity in Designing for Social Innovation' *Proceedings from Cumulus Hong Kong 2016* 33/16: 173-179 <https://www.cumulusassociation.org/cumulus-working-papers-3316-cumulus-hong-kong-2016-open-design-for-e-very-thing/>

R3. Akama, Y. and Joyce Yee (2019). 'Special Issue: Embracing Plurality in Designing Social Innovation Practices' *Design and Culture* 11 (1): 1-11 <https://doi.org/10.1080/17547075.2019.1571303>

R4. Tjahja, C. and Joyce Yee (2018) 'Social Hierarchy in Design and Social Innovation: Perspectives from Thailand' In C. Storni, K. Leahy, M. McMahon, P. Lloyd, & E. Bohemia (Eds.) *Proceedings of DRS2018: Catalyst 2*: 704-716 <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2018.420>

R5. Joyce Yee, Raijmakers, B., and Ichikawa, F. (2019) 'Transformative Learning as Impact in Social Innovation' *Design and Culture* 11 (1): 109-132 <https://doi.org/10.1080/17547075.2019.1567984>

R6. Joyce Yee, Akama, Y., and Teerapong, K. (2020). 'Being Community and Culturally-led: Tensions and Pluralities in Evaluating Social Innovation'. In Y. Akama, L. Fennessy, S. Harrington and A. Farrago (Eds.), *ServDes.2020: Tensions, Paradoxes, Plurality* (pp. 458 - 471). Melbourne, Australia: Linköping University Electronic Press.

<https://www.servdes2020.org/events/32-being-community-and-culturally-led-tensions-and-pluralities-in-evaluating-social-innovation>

Research funding:

G1. PI, Arts and Humanities Research Council, 2014-2015, GBP37,423 (AH/L013444/1)

G2. PI, Arts and Humanities Research Council, 2016-2017, GBP37,717 (AH/N004736/1)

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Yee worked with over 100 organisations from 14 countries around the Asia-Pacific region who support communities to deliver social innovation initiatives which led to 1) the establishment of a professional identity for DSI practitioners and 2) the transformation of professional evaluative practices for social impact.

4.1 Establishment of a professional identity

The organisations Yee worked with through the DESIAP Network address diverse social issues, but all adopt methods from the field of design in their work, although they have not always recognised these methods as DSI. Yee worked with 145 participants from these organisations through 8 DESIAP workshops to re-frame and embed their work within design frameworks and concepts, providing an international platform to showcase their work and extend their reach. Furthermore, they cascaded their new understanding of design to their organisations and local communities, carving out a professional space to ensure their work (and their use of design) was recognised and valued by funding agencies.

Engagement with DESIAP resulted in a stronger professional identity for DSI practitioners. For example, Re:public (Tokyo, Japan) trains citizens to develop sustainable responses to social needs in their communities via city-wide programmes. Fumiko Ichikawa, co-founder and MD of Re:public, noted that working with DESIAP has '*proved invaluable for us*' and resulted in them recognising and validating what they do as DSI: '*We have been able to develop our own disciplinary specific language to make what we do accessible and recognisable as design and innovation in Japan...enabling us to gain a level of understanding about our work that we otherwise would not have been able to achieve*' [E1].

Demonstrating value is particularly important for emerging markets, such as in Myanmar. As Klaus Oberbauer, from Impact Hub Yangon explained, working with Yee '*strengthened our perspective in how we use design in our programmes; gained knowledge in how other organisations use design and helped inform what we do next. [It has] given us a platform to share our work with other practitioners and with an international public [...] These changes have ultimately aided us to improve the support that we are able to offer the young entrepreneurs that we encounter*' [E2].

Between January 2019 and November 2020, 3631 users visited the DESIAP's website (www.desiap.org) from 108 countries, with 56% (14/25) of the top 25 countries based in the Asia-Pacific region. Visitors from other parts of the world, including, USA, UK, Germany, and Canada also appear in the top 10 [E3]. DSI practitioners value the website which offers inspiration, examples of good design practice, and provides connection to practitioners working in other countries; the resources page is the second most viewed (1116 page views) after the home page [E3]. These resources have been used to support and argue for more culturally-specific and culturally-grounded ways of working in DSI. Penny Hagen, a co-design lead in a public sector innovation team based in South Auckland, New Zealand noted: '*I frequently refer to DESIAP in professional settings as a reference point for an alternative, local design practice and dialogue to counter and complement more dominant Western models*' [E4].

4.2 Transformed practitioner and funder evaluative practices and improved delivery

Traditionally, evaluation frameworks used to capture the social impact of design initiatives are limited, funder-focused, and measured only against criteria defined at the outset, e.g., the number of new enterprises, or number of people trained. Yee's work resulted in DSI practitioners and funders changing how they think about the social impact of their work within communities and informed the evaluation of specific programmes. Participation in a 2017 DESIAP event led one practitioner to identify '*different levels of evaluative practice (personal reflection, internal to the team, and with external partners) and new methods of capturing audio/visual inputs*' [E5].

DESIAP's new 'DSI Social Impact Framework' [E6] provided professionals with an alternate evaluation framework that is suited to the relationship-, community-, and culture-driven aspects of social innovation. The DESIAP Impact and Evaluation report published by Yee and collaborators [E6] has been used to argue for changes in practices. A funder based in South and Southeast Asia, Nicky Wilkinson at Firetree Philanthropy, recognised that the framework '*helps to surface and "crystallise" ... a process that many of our partners are "inherently doing"/a way of working that is fundamental to how they approach designing and evaluating any intervention*' [E7]. The report [E6] was cited in Firetree's blog describing their funding approach, where their Director of Philanthropy, Nicky Wilkinson, acknowledged that '*we [funders] need to find alternative, more flexible ways of "reporting"*' [E8, p11].

Yee also worked with Impact Hub Phnom Penh on the evaluation of their CLEAR programme. The Hub provides entrepreneurship training to youths and CLEAR is an online course which trains and mentors young Cambodian leaders to help them develop culturally-specific leadership skills. The programme trained 1,500 people (March 2019 - October 2020) and was the Hub's first to have a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation plan to inform future improvements; now an embedded approach to future programmes. The Hub's co-founder, Laura Smithman, explained that as a result, the programme content integrated '*intentional steps of empathy building [and...] develop[ed] overarching mindsets in creative confidence and comfort with ambiguity*'. Further, she states '*we now embed evaluation in the development of our current programmes... by planning the evaluation at the start... [and we...] monitor participant responses*'. This design-led evaluation plan proved effective when the Hub needed to move one of their programmes quickly to virtual delivery, in response to Covid-19, and they used participant feedback to '*enable rapid participant-informed adaptation to this new format*' [E9].

The impact of Yee's research also reached beyond the Asia-Pacific region, in contexts where DSI is being utilised to address localised issues. The DESIAP Impact and Evaluation report [E6] led the Tower Hamlets Communities Driving Change (CDC) programme team at The Young Foundation (based in the UK) to change how impact is measured in their work. Through training delivered by Yee to 8 team members (July – Dec 2020), they explored alternative forms of evaluation that were then embedded within the programme and wider organisation through new individual and team-based reflective practices. This changed how the team understood and evidenced the social impact of their work [E10]. [text removed for publication]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Ref.	Source of corroboration	Link to claimed impact
E1	Testimonial - Fumiko Ichikawa, Managing Director and Co-founder of Re:public, Japan	Confirms improved recognition and accessibility of design for the company
E2	Testimonial - Klaus Oberbauer, Co-founder of Impact Hub Yangon	Confirms improved understanding and use of design within the company
E3	DESIAP website Google Analytics Data	Confirms number, locations of website visitors and page views
E4	Testimonial - Penny Hagen, Co-Design Lead from The Southern Initiatives and Co-design Lab, Auckland, New Zealand	Confirms DESIAP as a reference for local design practices in the Asia-Pacific

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E5	Anonymous post event survey from participant of the DESIAP Kuala Lumpur 2017 Workshop	Demonstrates new ways of evaluating social impact
E6	Impact and Evaluation in Designing Social Innovation Report, 2019	Publication of the alternative evaluation framework for DSI Practitioners
E7	Post-workshop survey feedback collected via email from Nicky Wilkinson, Director of Philanthropy, Tondo Foundation (now known as <i>Firetree Philanthropy</i>)	Confirms the impact the new framework has on DSI organisations
E8	<i>"Firetree Trust, Our Partnership funding approach"</i> (Blog post, Nicky Wilkinson, August 2019)	Confirms the uptake of the new framework to support the organisations funding approach
E9	Testimonial - Laura Smithman, Co-founder and COO Impact Hub Phnom Penh.	Confirms how the new evaluation framework has informed programme development and organisational strategies
E10	Testimonial - Isabel Young, Senior Programme Manager, Communities Driving Change, The Young Foundation, UK	Confirms the new evaluation framework has informed organisational approaches and programme development