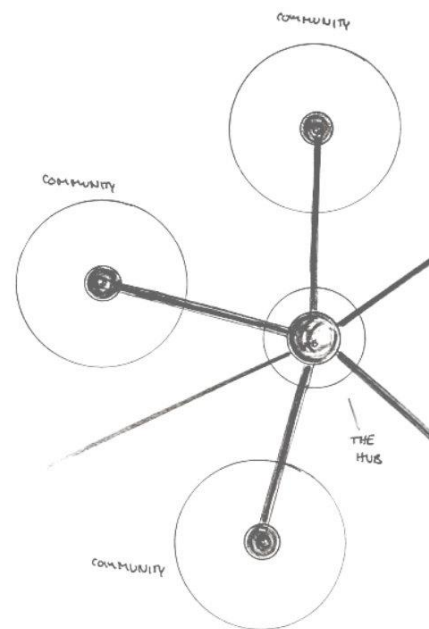
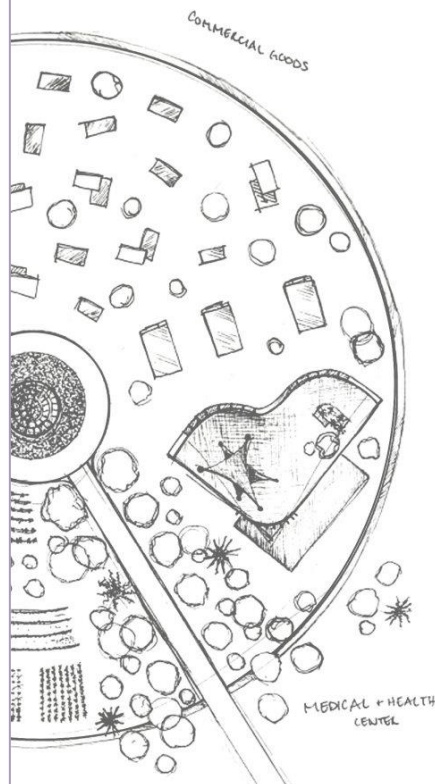


Section excerpted from:

# INSIGHTS

4th-Year Students' Reflections on  
Design for Social Innovation



Edited by Chiara Del Gaudio

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## Co-Creating Pillars: Building Networks for the Future

CO-DESIGN - NETWORKS - ENVIRONMENTAL - ECONOMIC  
- SOCIAL ISOLATION

Individuals think and perceive their world in unique ways, and what each person values is built around their experience. Environmental, economic, and social factors emerge over time and are specific to each person. These have been defined by Imbesi (2016) as pillars. Pillars are specific to each individual and are a combination of conscious and subconscious thoughts and interactions between the user and the world (Imbesi, 2016). Designers need to be aware of what each pillar means to the people involved when designing a product or system. This will allow for design that is capable of connecting people within their lifestyles, and in turn will result in socioeconomic support in people's communities and environmental resilience over time (Manzini, n.d.). Through researching the topic, a particular network was identified for having created a food delivery system that is known for its efficiency and resilience over its many years of existence. Founded in 1890 in Mumbai, the network was meant to incorporate the lives of the Warkari, the local population, and the influx of people who were currently migrating into India for work (Roncagila, 2013). The network did this by improving the communication and the connections between each social group. Furthermore, a system was designed to balance the pillars, allowing multiple communities to foster healthier choices.

### Pillars within a Community

For most of history, Northern-European designers have taken a user-centred approach to designing (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). Sanders and Stappers (2008) have called this an *expert perspective*, where design is based more on designers' opinion. The design is developed based on standards (e.g. ergonomics and human averages) and

regulations stated by laws. However, it is not designers who will be making use of their design. Instead, it will be the people most directly affected by it, also known as stakeholders. By including immediate stakeholders in the design process, it will result in a more personalized outcome, with more stakeholder issues and concerns to be heard (Imbesi, 2016). Manuel Castells studied from 1996 to 2001 about society as a network (PHY ORG, 2016). He stressed the importance behind the structure networks and the communication in between, and of being able to determine the similarities and differences between them to highlight how they can best communicate and what their pitfalls may be.

An example of a group of people that has been able to do this for 126 years (as of 2019) is the Warkari. Warkaris were formerly isolated from other communities and live solely in Mumbai (Pinch, 1996). Today, they are revered as saints and hold traditional knowledge such as culinary dishes. These dishes are made without alcohol or meat and make use of local ingredients (Pinch, 1996). The Warkaris' talent and traditional culinary knowledge were recognized by a local man named Mahadeo in 1890. He created a system to deliver lunches to citizens' homes and workplaces across Mumbai. He started with 500 men. Warkari men worked as cooks and locals completed the deliveries (PHYS ORG, 2006). Locals were illiterate so the system needed to accommodate this. It also needed to be efficient to accommodate the increasing number of workers. The food that the Warkaris made traditionally was packaged in metal containers and labelled before being delivered over the course of two hours across Mumbai. Once they were all delivered, the local workers went in reverse order to collect the used containers and return them. The service was directed at feeding workers

during lunch when they otherwise did not have access to food during the day, such that they would only eat in the morning and evening each day (Roncagila, 2013).

**Discussion**

Mahadeo started a conversation and a connection between several communities in Mumbai. Although connecting different social groups was implicit, he was able to satisfy the pillars. Mahadeo’s design relies on efficient communication between each community.

Each person’s life is complex and difficult to unravel from an outside perspective. In order to have mutual understanding, communication needs to happen with more ease. This allows for specific pillars to be identified. Similarities and disparities between groups can then be compared to best support as many people as possible. Through this support, people will be free to make the decisions required to support their own future growth and that of their community. As stated by Sanders & Stappers (2008): people who are empowered to engage in their future will eventually become more aware of the products and services around them and continue to make informed decisions in the future.

In the described case, communication allowed for the preservation and sharing of culture. By using the Warkaris’ skills in cooking, they were able to exercise and share their traditions, keeping them connected to everyone else (where otherwise they would remain completely isolated from others).

The service was also free, resulting in larger changes. Typically, residents would eat only one or two large meals a day, however this service encouraged citizens to eat several smaller meals a day. Eating this way has been proven to be healthier for both people and the environment (Rosi et al., 2017)

The organization has also been allowed to grow. As of 2007, deliveries are increasing in number by about 15 new clients a month. With the introduction of fast-food services, the local population has kept its tendency towards this lunch service (Roncagila, 2013). Dabbawallahs today have been showing interest in expanding the business with upcoming technology such as apps for making one-time deliveries and giving people the option to order groceries and branded merchandise (PHYS ORG, 2006).

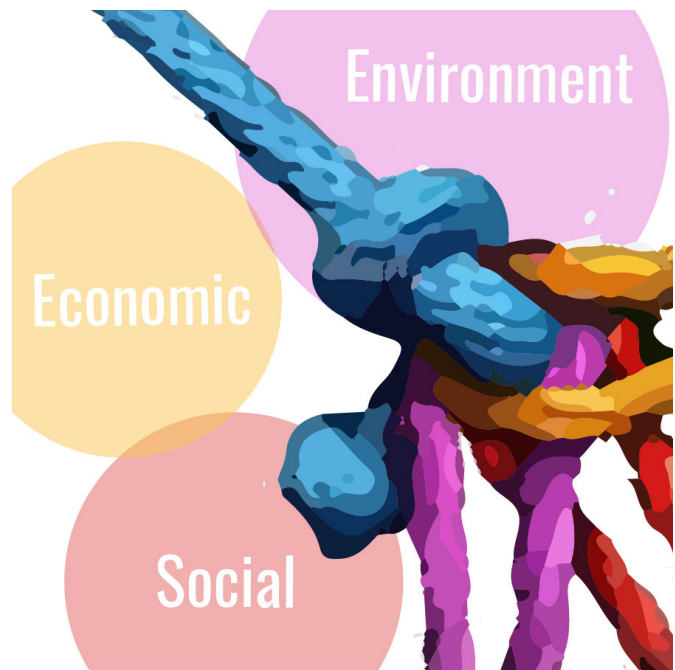
With the support received through communication, people have been able to prosper through the years by making collective decisions. As the workers and all the communities have been given some sense of ownership, the system has taken its own name. Over the years, the people working in this system have come to be called

Dabbawallahs (Roncagila, 2013).

By approaching situations today with the goal of working with communities to identify environmental, economic, and social pillars, it is possible to draw connections to what is most important to people and create a collaborative atmosphere where people are involved for generations.

Table 1: Pillars within the Mumbai Community

Environmental	Economic	Social
- Little infrastructure for travelling	Locals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Poor</li> <li>- Unemployed</li> <li>- Illiterate</li> </ul> Migrant Workers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Minimal pay</li> <li>- Saving/Sending money to family members</li> </ul> Warkari: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No wage</li> </ul>	Locals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Keep to families</li> <li>- Stay home most of the day</li> </ul> Migrant Workers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Separated from family</li> </ul> Warkari: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Small community</li> <li>- Revered by local population</li> <li>- Isolated from other communities</li> </ul>



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