

Title of paper

Indigenous Design Thinking Conversations: Engaging with cultural design protocols.

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Title

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Abstract

This article will reflect on working with Indigenous knowledges and engaging with Indigenous communities in professional design practice. The author will outline the process of extensive consultation that was undertaken to develop the International Indigenous Design Charter and the consequent academic and industry response. This analysis will draw on the presentation of industry representatives during Melbourne Knowledge Week, May 2019 at the Indigenous Design Thinking Conversations evening. These presentations provide insight into the impact of the International Indigenous Design Charter, a first-of-its-kind guide for practitioners to follow when representing Indigenous culture in commercial design outcomes. Speakers clearly articulated some of the challenges working with the Charter and discussed the difficulty of ensuring ethical and appropriate engagement throughout the design processes. However, each presenter resolved the document's guiding principles were essential to change current design practices and enhance engagement methods concluding that ongoing discussion will only improve professional practices.

Biography

Dr Meghan Kelly

Dr Meghan Kelly is a visual communication designer whose experience includes working on large, high profile campaigns and a range of corporate companies during her time as a practicing designer. Kelly is currently serving as the Associate Head of School (Teaching and Learning) and senior lecturer in the Visual Communication Design at Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia. Her research interests are in exploring issues surrounding identity creation and representation in a cross-cultural context, and the process to achieve a respectful, culturally owned outcomes in professional design practice. Her passion for a global understanding of design extends into her teaching practice and continues to be explored in research projects and design opportunities.

Kelly has worked with Dr Russell Kennedy to co-author the Australian Indigenous Design Charter (winner of the Premier Design Award (Design Strategy) and Award of the Year 2018) and the International Indigenous Design Charter (winner of the Good Design Award (Indigenous Design) 2018). In addition, Kelly co-authored the book *Museum development and cultural representation: Developing the Kelabit Highlands Community Museum* (2018). This research interrogates the challenges of developing a visual representation from intangible cultural heritage.

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Introduction

Activism mostly begins at home, locally, with the multitude of issues that beset Indigenous communities. Most of these issues turn out to be international issues, as activists usually discover for themselves when they start talking to others and mobilizing support (Smith 2012, p.350).

This paper is presented as a discussion paper and will outline the process of transforming the Australian Indigenous Design Charter (Kennedy and Kelly, 2016) into the International Indigenous Design Charter (Kennedy and Kelly, 2018b) through extensive Indigenous consultation nationally and internationally and the subsequent feedback developing from an Australian industry symposium. The author of this paper has a vested interest in this discourse as she is a co-author of the Australian Indigenous Design Charter (The Australian Charter) and the International Indigenous Design Charter (the International Charter). She is a non-Indigenous designer, teacher and researcher of design, examining the process to achieve a self-determined representation in visual communication.

The Australian Indigenous Design Charter was developed in 2016 and presented at the ACUADS Conference, September 28, 2017 (Kelly and Kennedy) where the concept of the Charter document was explained, followed by a case study example of how the Charter could be applied in teaching practice. The Australian International Indigenous Design Charter was successful in winning the 2018 Good Design Award: Strategic Design (Kelly and Kennedy, 2018). Since that date, the document was further developed and refined through consultations involving a series of presentations and workshops around the globe include international consultation in Denmark, Sweden, Greenland and Canada. The process was endorsed by the International Council of Design (ico-D) and Indigenous Architects and Design Victoria

(IADV). This research was financially supported by Deakin University and the Australian Federal Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The International Indigenous Design Charter (2018) emerged as a result of these consultations and was launched in 2018. The revised document aims to help both non-Indigenous and Indigenous designers working in or out of country, internationally providing guidance to navigate what can be a challenging but extremely satisfying area of professional practice. The International Indigenous Design Charter was successful in winning the 2018 Premier Design Award: Strategic Design, and the Premier Design Award: 2018 Award of the Year, Australia (Kennedy and Kelly, 2018a).

The International Indigenous Design Charter

The process of engagement outlined in the Australian Indigenous Design Charter document was also the process maintained to develop the ten step protocols for the International Indigenous Design Charter. Following the guidelines of the United Nations (2007), the Charter documents were created with an understanding that Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. 'By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development' (2007, p.8). In addition, 'this includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures' (2007, p.11).

Following on from the Australian Indigenous Design Charter, the International Indigenous Design Charter was developed based on an extensive research project stemming from a series of workshops undertaken in the Nordic region with Inuit and Saami community, academic and design representatives. The research tour was called Was.Is.Always: South to North, on route to an International Design Charter. In attendance were seven Indigenous students studying at Deakin University's Institute of Koorie Education (IKE), one Indigenous academic and the authors of the Charter (both non-Indigenous). The workshops were conducted in November 2016 at the University of Greenland (Nuuk, Greenland), KEA University and Greenland House (Copenhagen, Denmark) and Jonkolping University (Jönköping, Sweden). In addition, Ambassador Damien Miller, Australian's first Indigenous Ambassador and Australian Ambassador to Denmark, Norway and Iceland 2013 – 2017, joined the group for aspects of the study abroad program.

Following on from the workshops the first draft of the International Indigenous Design Charter was presented at the World Design Summit, Canada, November 2017 for further discussion. Participating universities included McGill University, Montreal; University of Manitoba, Winnipeg; Concordia University, Montreal; University of Montreal; University of British Columbia; Vancouver Island University, Nanimo; and Emily Carr University, Vancouver. Some of these meetings were face to face conversations while others were phone meetings. The World Design Summit involved participation of a number of Indigenous stakeholders, cultural organisations, design companies and designers including the Mohawk Reservation Montreal, Indigenize Montreal, Native Montreal and the Canadian Research Chair in Global Indigenous Rights and Politics.

Based on this extensive range of consultations and the feedback provided, edits were made to the Australian Indigenous Design Charter document to develop the International Indigenous Design Charter. The principles of the initial charter document were not challenged, instead the consultation led to a focus on the language used in the ten steps and the articulation of the concepts to suit a broader range of understandings. A number of alterations were made transforming the Australian Charter to an International application. The first was the introduction of the term deep time. Although the principles of deep time were clearly present in Australian discussions, the term deep time emerged as a more articulate way to examine the need to consider the long-term impact of a design outcome where seven generations are considered in the development of a design; three generations in the past, the current generation and three generation in the future. The second alteration was expanding Step 6 (Shared Knowledge) to include the details 'developing a cultural competency framework to remain aware of Indigenous cultural reality'. Indigenous cultural reality was a term raised to recognize the specificity of the Indigenous standpoint as experienced from each country perspective, and to acknowledge the reality of Indigenous people historical experiences and the impact this will have on engagement and design outcomes. In addition, Step 8 (Impact of Design) included specific reference to the environmental and sustainable impact of design, highlight connections to land and cultural practices. Lastly, there was removal of the reference to implementing a Reconciliation Action Plan which is an Australian concept not reflected internationally, and the term cultural competency framework

was introduced to Step 6 (Shared Knowledge) as outlined earlier. This resulted in a refinement of the ten steps and a reordering of the key points to provide more clarity.

The final ten steps of the International Charter were resolved as follows:

1) Indigenous led.

Designers must ensure Indigenous stakeholders have the opportunity to oversee the creative development and design process.

2) Self-determined.

Designers must respect the rights of Indigenous peoples to determine the application of traditional knowledge and representation of their culture in design practice.

3) Community specific.

Designers must respect for the diversity of Indigenous culture by acknowledging and following regional cultural understandings.

4) Deep listening.

Designers need to develop a safe space and a sense of belonging to ensure recognized cultural knowledge keepers are actively involved and consulted.

5) Indigenous knowledge.

Designers must acknowledge and respect the rich cultural history of Indigenous knowledge including, designs, stories, sustainability and land management understanding ownership of knowledge must remain with the Indigenous custodians.

6) Shared knowledge (collaboration, co-creation, procurement).

Designers must cultivate a respectful, culturally specific, personal engagement behaviour for effective communication and courteous interaction to encourage the transmission of shared knowledge by developing a cultural competency framework and remain aware of Indigenous cultural reality.

7) Shared benefits.

Designers must ensure Indigenous people share in the benefits from the use of their cultural knowledge, especially where it is being commercially applied.

8) Impact of design.

Designers must consider the reception and implication of all designs so that they protect the environment, are sustainable, and remain respectful of Indigenous cultures over deep time; past, present and future.

9) Legal and moral.

Designers must demonstrate respect and honour cultural ownership and intellectual property rights, including moral rights, by obtaining appropriate permissions where required.

10) Charter implementation.

Designers must ensure the implementation of the Charter to safeguard Indigenous design integrity and use the Charter document to help build the cultural awareness of clients and associated stakeholders (Kennedy and Kelly, 2018b).

Similar to the Australian Indigenous Design Charter document, the International Indigenous Design Charter remains an iterative document aimed to evolve and adapt over time with feedback and input from all stakeholders. The document offers a system of accountability for commercial design practice beyond measures of excellence or impact and is to be used to encourage designers to ask questions. As Jefa Greenaway explains, this is particularly pertinent when the document is used in an international context, 'consequently, it's not an imposed solution; it's a collaborative process and developing a framework, or a structure, to order the thinking of how one can think about these things' (Kelly, Kennedy and Greenaway, 2018).

The challenges of working with Indigenous knowledges.

The need for these discussions continues to be recognized. Nicola St. John's clearly articulated 'Indigenous visual culture has been used and abused by western designers' (2018, p.262). St John expands by arguing the contested and highly political space of misappropriation has been perpetuated by commodification and objectification of Aboriginal art and a history of exploitation (p.262). Dori Tunstall, Dean of the Faculty of Design at Toronto's OCAD University and design anthropologist, in an interview published by Janna Levitt, acknowledges the challenges and awkwardness faced by many designers working in this field.

I would characterize it more as anxiety. What I mean by that is that it's coming from a place of 'I want to be able to do this, but I don't have the knowledge, I don't have the tools, I don't have the resources (Tunstall cited in Levitt, 2017).

This position is supported by Myles Russell-Cook who states 'if we are to dismantle hegemonic structures of inequity and rebuild and collaborate equally and respectfully, we need to formulate new tools, paradigms and ways of thinking' (2017, p.207).

Another way to explain this is in the words of Pedro Oliveira (cited in Schultz et al. 2018, p.94) who states decolonizing design is less about an opposition of 'decolonized' and 'colonized' and more about a process of un-learning and re-learning how we see the world. This reflective practice helps designers interrogate their relationship with cultural knowledge and their role in professional practice, with instruction for designers to begin thinking again about the design process.

Peter West and Yoko Akama (2018), academics, refer to process when supporting the idea of designing *with* rather than *for* a community. West and Akama also identify that some of these challenges are exacerbated when you consider the concept of 'design-as-problem-solving', placing designers in the role of being commissioned to resolve a communication issue (2018, p.10). For this reason, West and Akama attest for designers to design appropriately there requires a shift in emphasis where designers do not speak on behalf of the community but act in respectful relation with the community through the design process.

With an aim to address these concerns, the International Charter challenges designers and their clients to acknowledge the appropriate, collaborative and respectful ways of engaging with cultural knowledge and encouraging culturally appropriate working practices that value diversity. In the development of the International Charter document, the authors are careful not to speak for any Indigenous cultures. Instead, the focus is on helping to inform non-Indigenous policy makers and design practitioners, their clients and those who embrace design, of best practice processes of working with and learning from our Indigenous people. The document aims to construct easy to follow principles and places the spotlight on the process of creating design outcomes more than on the design artefacts. Process is an important consideration as Greenaway explains:

I think the reason why this (the Charter document) has been so well embraced internationally among First Nations Peoples is because it's never been articulated so clearly and codified in a very accessible and legible way (Kelly, Kennedy and Greenaway, 2018).

The response to questions about working with the International Charter.

The International Charter document continues to be adopted by industry and in the education sector. With interrogation of how the Charter document works in practice, questions have started to emerge as evident in the response of industry and design

professionals during the Melbourne Knowledge Week Symposium *Indigenous Design Thinking Conversations*, Australia (City of Melbourne, 2019). Six Indigenous speakers provoked a rigorous discussion; Jefa Greenaway (Greenaway Architects, IADV and Melbourne University), Marcus Lee (Marcus Lee Design), Kyle Vanderkuyp (Schiavello Group), Michael Hromek (WSP), Nimrod Wies (Eness) and Master of Ceremonies, Shelly Ware (Presenter on Marngrook Television Program, Melbourne). The Melbourne Knowledge Week Symposium was streamed live (City of Melbourne, 2019) and the comments have been drawn from the recordings of the event. Although the debates oscillated around cultural competency and process, key topics to emerge can be summarised under three themes; time, money and control. The very well-articulated response of the presenters are an important contribution to address the challenges identified when following the ten steps of the International Indigenous Design Charter.

Beginning with the topic of **time**, Step 1 (Indigenous Led) and Step 4 (Deep Listening) both imply an indeterminable amount of time be dedicated to the process of engagement to ensure the steps of the Charter are appropriately undertaken. Concerns were raised by an audience member that time is not always adequately accounted for in a schedule or a budget. Greenaway made the comment: 'personally, I think we just have to carve out the time and the space to do it right'. Greenaway explained how his company, Greenaway Architects, would withdraw from any projects they saw as being completed in a tokenistic way. He elaborated further by explaining the need of an elasticity with time to manage risks and expectations. Wies followed Greenaway's comments explaining if there is a project with Indigenous content, organizations need to understanding the project could take some additional time but this would have a positive outcome on results.

In a similar vein, concerns of financial compensation and **money** was raised addressing Step 7 (Shared Benefits). An audience member questioned how to determine the cost to include Indigenous knowledges and whether there were intangible benefits by publicly increasing the profile of Indigenous knowledge in the broader community without the need for financial recognition. To this Greenaway made the point that people pay for the activities of a structural engineer, for instance, who has a five-year university education. People should also pay for an Elder's time who has over 40,000 years of Indigenous knowledge passed on through generations. Supporting this position Ware clarified there were many requests for Aboriginal

people to do things for free because they are Aboriginal and they should want to pass on their culture to 'do the right thing'. Ware explained that the knowledge should be respected and paid for. Often someone was making money out of their knowledge and she suggested it was not Indigenous people or their community.

Lastly, concern emerged about managing the design process and the designer's ability to maintain professional design integrity and **control** when working with an Indigenous community. Hromek reminded the audience that along with the desire to engage with Indigenous knowledge, designers need to remember the first point of the Charter document, Indigenous led. Greenaway provided the following advice; the starting premise should be to leave all egos behind when working with Indigenous knowledge and remember the designer is often the least knowledgeable in the room. Designers are reliant on the traditional owner groups, and the elders, who are the Indigenous knowledge holders.

Conclusion

The Melbourne Knowledge Week Symposium exposed three key pressure points that are important for designers to navigate. Concerns of the amount of time required for engagement, navigating the cost of paying for knowledge and the tension of control over design aesthetics when working with a community are areas to be navigated. Essentially these points reflect a Western construct and way of working and demonstrate a need to rethink our design processes if we are to engage ethically and appropriately with Indigenous cultures. The Charter document has brought these to forefront of our conversation which is a positive first step to navigate change. However, the changes in the way designers are taught, the expectations of an industry and the seismic shift required in professional practices to achieve ethical and appropriate design outcomes when working with Indigenous knowledges will continue to present some challenges.

Each presenter at the Melbourne Knowledge Week Symposium articulated the challenges in working with Indigenous knowledges yet resolved the document's guiding principles were essential to change current practices and enhance engagement methods. They agreed the concepts of community led, self-determined, community specific, deep listening, using community knowledge and shared knowledge with shared benefits are all concepts that will positively impact on design practice and the way we collaborate with cultural knowledge holders. The presenters

concluded this rich discussion would only improve professional practices in the coming decades however the obstacles of time, money and control presented in this article still need to be navigated.

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