Cultures of
CARE

Imagining Care through Design

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राष्ट्रीय डिज़ाइन संस्थान
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF DESIGN
A H M E D A B A D

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The **OPEN ELECTIVE** is a set of two-weeks long multidisciplinary workshops offered to the second year students of the Bachelor of Design (B.Des.) and the first-year students of the Master of Design (M.Des.) programmes across the three NID campuses in Ahmedabad, Gandhinagar & Bengaluru. Some of the primary objectives of the Open Elective are to inculcate trans-disciplinary approaches, explorations, experimentation, expansion of thinking, consciousness, & possibilities amongst the students.

OBJECTIVES OF OPEN ELECTIVE

...transgress disciplinary boundaries
...introduce newness/freshness in context and/or
  methodology of engagement
...keep it fun & joyful
...maintain lightness with exactitude
...provide opportunities for fearless explorations
...celebrate diversity
...theories/ insights emerging from practice
...build connections
...scope for dialogue

ABOUT THE THEME

Care is ubiquitous, a universal language intricately woven into the fabric of every culture. It manifests in countless ways, from the warm "take care" exchanged at the end of a heartfelt conversation to the thoughtful "handle with care" label on a fragile package. Each culture has its unique expressions and rituals of care, highlighting our shared humanity and the deep, intrinsic value we place on nurturing and protecting one another. These acts of care can be for an individual or a community, ranging from the silent and invisible, like sending a hug emoji, to the loud and visible, such as hugging a tree to safeguard against deforestation.

In India, acts of care have taken many powerful dimensions. Similar to the Chipko movement, the Save the Sundarbans movement mobilized efforts to safeguard the largest mangrove forests against industrial threats. On a more personal level, a lone father filled potholes at his own expense after losing his son in a road accident. Traditional communities, such as those in Meghalaya, care for their natural environment by preserving sacred forests with strict rules to neither bring anything into nor take anything out of the forest.

In recent times, we have witnessed the dedicated efforts of individual tribal women in the villages of Orissa, who passionately work to preserve the seeds of local crops, particularly millets. In many parts of the northeastern and eastern states of India, thriving local markets known as haats support the local economy and celebrate the unique character, people, and culture of the region. Similarly, in densely populated coastal cities, locals have been participating in beach cleanup drives. Through social media, motivated individuals share their everyday stories of home garbage segregation and composting routines, fostering behavioral change and reversing urban lifestyle norms. Additionally, young entrepreneurs are working with various types of discards to create functional, trendy, socially responsible products driven by genuine concern for the environment, addressed through innovation and imagination. The evolution of care in society has indeed been transformative. The emergence of roles like "pet parents" and "plant parents" reflects a deeper emotional investment in caregiving, extending beyond traditional roles and demonstrating the evolving nature of care in our lives.

Design is a powerful tool that shapes human intent. From creating fire and steam engines to fast-moving bikes, humanity has placed need at the center of these advancements. How might our next actions change if we place 'care' at the center instead? As designers and creative individuals, we are committed to passionately addressing new contexts and new users, presenting relevant design solutions in the form of aesthetics, messages, products, interfaces, or systems. However, while we continue to innovate, we must also find ways to care for what remains and what already exists. How often do we consider what remains unused due to our creations? Might there be ways to create something new as an extension of the old?

In today's world, which offers a plethora of choices, how might we channel our thoughts to strike a balance between our actions and our true intentions? For instance, does a simple recycle stamp or a "do not litter" label adequately address the end of a material's life cycle? How might we find ways to care for the local tailor as much as we care for sporting a branded garment? How often do we take actions to care for the many birds or animals affected while we celebrate our festivals in a loud and colorful manner? How often might we care to fix an old device rather than discard it for a new one?

Care also takes prominence in understanding the changing age-centric demographics in rapidly growing economies, with some countries' elderly populations outnumbering the young, unlike in India, where young and old are almost equal in number. However, with immediate family members often spread across states or even countries, there is a need for a new social fabric that demands new forms of trust, relationships, and people engagement. These new changing trends present us with tangible realities that are dynamically shaping our world. This compels us to imagine a future centered around the concept of "care."

The concept of "Cultures of Care" is a multifaceted approach to nurturing and sustaining well-being on the planet, in society, and in every living being's life. It is an umbrella term encompassing various practices and values, all aimed at fostering an act or attitude of care within our everyday lives. At the heart of this concept lies the making of not one but different cultures. For example, the culture of repair and communities that thrive on repair as an act of care, investing time and expertise in fixing broken things. How often do we feel the urge to chase a vision of what might be called active care? The culture of preservation, where one cares for safeguarding knowledge, objects, architecture, seeds, and societies among others. The culture of community engagement works towards fostering strong community bonds where people look out for each other, volunteer for community service, and participate in local decision-making processes, favorable for both people and the environment.

This vision of a new culture of care must also be one where voluntary acts of care, though they may not provide monetary rewards, contribute to a better tomorrow. In such a world, we would care for the makers as much as we care for their products, valuing farmers alongside fashion. We would respect our water sources and planetary resources, using them thoughtfully rather than exploitatively. We would provide a voice to the voiceless and create spaces that are not gendered, creating a space where we truly coexist in harmony.

These diverse ideas of cultures and many more are interconnected, each reinforcing and being reinforced by the others, together creating a holistic ecosystem where care is not just an afterthought but a deliberate and integral part of societal design. They collectively contribute to a world where care is designed, practiced, and experienced in manifold ways, leading to a more harmonious and sustainable existence for all.

Through this elective, we aim to delve into the various facets of care, from facilitating change to designing care for the living and the non-living, from re-imagining contexts from a care perspective to revisiting old narratives to currentpractices and imagining the future of care. We will map modes, forms, acts, and expressions of care to celebrate mindful actions. We envision a shift from profit-driven motives to those guided by care, prioritizing people and the planet. As designers, we will strive to consider our creations' purpose and consequences. We shall reflect on whom we are designing for and what drives our intent.

We expect this elective to start a dialogue to explore active listening, emphasizing the importance of understanding and empathy in fostering a compassionate and inclusive society. As a design community, we will strive to make 'care' central to our way of thinking, informing design-led actions and shaping our culture of design responses at all levels of society for the larger public and planetary growth and well-being.

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THEME FRAMEWORK

Imagining-CARE

TO ACHIEVE	FOR	WITHIN	BY
Belongingness	Personal	Societal	Re-visiting: Cultural & Traditional Practices
Inclusivity	Generational	Ecological	Re-imagining: Human interactions with objects & services for emergent care trends
Joy	Marginal	Political	
Coherence	Community	Economic	
Collective Growth	Multispecies	Educational	Re-building: Inter-Connections & Broken Associations
	Planetary		

through-DESIGN