University of Tehran
Kish International Campus

JOURNAL of DESIGN THINKING

Print ISSN: 2645-3304
Online ISSN: 2717-1183

Design Thinking in Context: From Problem Solving to Meaningful Change

Editor-in-Chief Note

It is my pleasure to introduce Volume 7, Issue 1 (June 2026) of the *Journal of Design Thinking* (JDT). This issue brings together twelve studies that, despite their diverse subjects, methods, and contexts, share a common concern: how design can respond meaningfully to the complexity of contemporary life. From adaptive mass customization and design education to climate-responsive architecture, disaster preparedness, co-creation, digital nudging, cultural heritage, and architectural design strategies, the contributions in this issue demonstrate the breadth of design thinking as a field of inquiry and practice.

One of the most striking characteristics of this issue is the movement from **design as problem solving toward design as contextual understanding**. The study of adaptive degrees of freedom in mass customization, for example, questions the assumption that users have a universal preference for the number of choices offered to them. Instead, it points toward adaptive and context-sensitive systems that respond to differences in users and situations. Similarly, the study of furniture in tiny houses and remote-working environments demonstrates how spatial limitations, changing patterns of work, and everyday activities can reshape the relationship between furniture, space, and human behavior. Such complexity reinforces the importance of understanding design problems not as isolated technical challenges, but as situations involving multiple actors, values, and perspectives (Buchanan, 1992).

This emphasis on context is equally evident in the issue's architectural contributions. Research on energy sustainability in Iranian tourism buildings examines how form and orientation interact with different climatic conditions, while the study of a climate-responsive building envelope in Isfahan proposes design strategies grounded in locally calibrated thermal-comfort conditions. These studies remind us that sustainable design cannot be reduced to universal solutions. The effectiveness of a design is often inseparable from the environmental, cultural, and geographical conditions in which it exists.

Another important theme emerging from this issue is the relationship between **design, values, and meaning**. The article *Function, Aesthetics, and Values: Reframing the Definition of Industrial Design* questions the changing boundaries of industrial design and proposes understanding the designer as a mediator among competing forces rather than merely a maker of forms. This perspective is particularly significant at a time when design increasingly operates across physical, digital, social, and systemic domains. It invites us to reconsider not only what designers make, but also what kinds of values their decisions embody and negotiate. In this sense, design thinking involves particular ways of framing, interpreting, and approaching problems that distinguish design knowledge from other forms of inquiry (Cross, 2006; Dorst, 2011).

The issue also invites a more critical understanding of participation. The study of co-creative design thinking through Critical Systems Heuristics draws attention to power, participation, and the boundaries within which design problems are defined. Participation, in this view, cannot be understood simply as involving users or stakeholders in a workshop. It also requires questioning who defines the problem, whose knowledge is recognized, and whose interests shape the resulting system. Such questions are essential if design thinking is to move beyond procedural methods toward more reflective and responsible forms of practice. The capacity to reframe situations and challenge underlying assumptions is central to this broader understanding of design thinking (Dorst, 2011).

University of Tehran
Kish International Campus
JOURNAL of DESIGN THINKING
Print ISSN: 2645-3304
Online ISSN: 2717-1183

At the same time, several contributions demonstrate how design knowledge can emerge from particular cultural and material contexts. The study of Persian gardens through the principles of traditional Iranian architecture, together with the investigation of *Moshabak* as an operative surface strategy, shows how historical and cultural practices can be examined not merely as heritage to be preserved, but as sources of design knowledge. Here, traditional forms become opportunities for understanding relationships among material, environment, geometry, light, privacy, and human experience.

The issue further expands the scope of design thinking through its attention to education, resilience, and behavioral change. Evidence from design thinking interventions in school education highlights its potential for developing problem-solving abilities, while the study of GENSAI products explores how product design can contribute to disaster preparedness through culturally adapted strategies. The research on digital nudging similarly demonstrates that designing for behavioral change requires more than selecting an appropriate intervention; it requires understanding users' cognitive states and considering the ethical implications of influencing decision-making. These perspectives resonate with broader approaches to design that emphasize collective participation and the capacity of design to contribute to social change (Manzini, 2015).

Taken together, these contributions suggest that the future of design thinking may depend less on applying a prescribed sequence of steps and more on developing the ability to **see relationships, recognize context, question assumptions, and understand consequences**. Design thinking becomes richer when it accommodates different forms of knowledge, different cultural perspectives, and different ways of understanding human experience.

This is also an important direction for JDT as an international journal. We believe that design knowledge should not be limited by geographical, disciplinary, or cultural boundaries. The international character of design research is not simply a matter of bringing together authors from different countries; it is an opportunity to allow different intellectual traditions, experiences, and ways of knowing to encounter one another. Such encounters can challenge established assumptions and open new possibilities for design research and practice. A more plural understanding of design recognizes that there can be multiple ways of knowing, designing, and imagining alternative futures (Escobar, 2018).

The diversity of this issue reflects this aspiration. Contributions addressing contexts in Iran, India, Japan, Malaysia, and Australia, alongside different disciplinary perspectives, demonstrate how design thinking can acquire new meanings when situated within different cultural and professional environments.

As we present this issue, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all authors who have entrusted their research to JDT, to our reviewers for their careful and constructive engagement, and to our editorial team for their continued commitment to academic quality and integrity. Their collective efforts make it possible for JDT to remain a space for critical inquiry, dialogue, and exchange.

Ultimately, design thinking is not only about finding better solutions. It is also about asking better questions: **What matters? For whom? In what context? And with what consequences?** These questions lie at the heart of meaningful design research, and we hope that the contributions in this issue will encourage further reflection, dialogue, and discovery.

Sincerely,
Yassaman Khodadadeh
Editor-in-Chief
Journal of Design Thinking (JDT)

University of Tehran
Kish International Campus

JOURNAL of DESIGN THINKING

Print ISSN: 2645-3304
Online ISSN: 2717-1183

References

Buchanan, R. (1992). Wicked Problems in Design Thinking. *Design Issues, 8*(2), 5–21. https://doi.org/10.2307/1511637

Cross, N. (2006). *Designerly Ways of Knowing*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/1-84628-301-9

Dorst, K. (2011). The core of "design thinking" and its application. *Design Studies, 32*(6), 521–532. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.destud.2011.07.006

Escobar, A. (2018). *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds*. Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822371816

Manzini, E. (2015). *Design, When Everybody Designs: An Introduction to Design for Social Innovation*. MIT Press. https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9873.001.0001