

SINGGIH S. KARTONO

magno: the story behind



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The essay "magno: the story behind" was written by
Singih Susilo Kartono in 2008.



magno was created by the Indonesian designer Singgih Susilo Kartono. Together with a team of 30 young and skilled cabinet makers he produces individual radios and small items in his workshop in Temanggung, Central Java. The output of his work helps to develop the village-community in a remote area in Indonesia.

magno comes from the word “magnify”. Kartono interpretes magno as “see details” like the functioning of a magnifying-glass. The small magno products all have a simple and beautiful form. They are built with a high quality of craftsmanship in order to draw the attention of the people to the details of the products.

We are happy and proud to represent this worldwide unique product-series in Europe. Please discover magno and the idea behind by this brochure.

Best regards from Hamburg

The people at Wooden Radio

INTRODUCTION

During my final years at university, I was troubled by a very big question: »Where should I go and what should I do after I graduate?« Should I work as an in-house designer, for a design office, somewhere in the city or should I go back to my village Kandangan in Central Java and set up a business?

After I graduated, I did not straight go back to Kandangan to start a business, but eventually, I did. I returned and started a business without any precise financial calculations or preparations. The lack of planning was actually a blessing. If I had been prepared in detail, Magno would not have been born.



The community's concern about the slowing down and deterioration of Kandangan's village life has prompted me to use my knowledge, skills and experience to strengthen this village with the output of my business. I am thankful that my knowledge in 'product design' has proven to a successful 'weapon of survival' that enables me to endure and grow in Kandangan.

KANDANGAN, MY HOME VILLAGE

Due to the lack of money and the long distance between the university and Kandangan, I was only able to visit twice a year. The long periods of time between each visit enabled me to clearly observe the changes in my home village.

At first glance, these changes were seen as a "progress". But when I looked more closely I concluded that it was only the "surface" which experienced change. The basic structure of the village did not undergo any changes; moreover, some was actually deteriorating.

In the agricultural sector for example, traditional farming has always been the economic backbone for the majority of villagers. It took the worst hit. Whatever the government did within this sector, it was never for the further development and enhancement of traditional farming. The government constantly came up with "modern and instant" ways of agriculture and farming, which were unsuitable for the community. These included intensified farming, man made fertilizer promotions, GMO seeds that were imported and the government funded loan scheme for farmers. In the end, the government "efforts" did not pay off. Furthermore, these efforts actually did severe damage to existing farming methods as well as village and community life.



Having lost their farms, many were forced to find jobs in the city or to stay in the village with only the bare minimum for survival or to find new sources of income around the village. The latter activities usually ended up exploiting the forest and nature.

Craft is an alternative economic activity that has the potential to be developed and to grow in villages. It has characteristics that are suitable for villages' living conditions and growth prospects. These characteristics are that it is labour intensive, requires low technology and investment and abundance of local material input.

NEW CRAFTS

It is Mr. Surya Pernawa, a sculpturer, observer and craft practitioner, who unlocked my insights to the potential and as well as the solution of the problems in the Indonesian craft sector.

Mr. Pernawa was my sponsor and mentor for my final year university project and thesis. His idea on craft has driven me to learn about the issues of village life. In principal, New Craft is a manufacturing process that uses traditional craftsmanship as its main means of production and uses modern management techniques in organizing its activities.

The basic system of the New Craft is to ensure that every step of the production process contains standard procedures of manufacture, quality standards as well as output and material usage standards. Every new product or design is analyzed first for the purpose of creating a production manual. Based on the manual, the manufacturing activity is then implemented.



There is no actual new system or technology within the New Craft method. Nevertheless, these basic modern production management methods are not widely used in crafts manufacturing. In craft, the most important factor is the human resources behind the craft activities. It uses human skills as its main production resources – it is important to have correctly managed worker attitudes towards crafts. The New Craft method takes these factors into account.

A new worker on his first day working can jump straight into the production activities. For those who possess craft talents, within a few days, they will display craftsmanship and abilities that are adequate to meet our standards.

The approach of New Craft's method and concept has many benefits. With these approaches, we can set up a new craft manufacturing centre in villages and communities with no craft background. It becomes the new, alternative source of income that can

accommodate a surplus of manpower from declining agriculture. The new method can also be implemented to grow or revive existing crafts activities that are in decline. As a result, the New Craft method will produce high quality products that have the potential to compete in the export market. Through selling in the export market, production activities are sustainable and provide income that can further the economic growth of the village.

WOOD: LIFE, BALANCE AND LIMIT

I was born and grew up in Kandangan. This experience fostered an intimate relationship between me and the nature, especially the forest. When I was a child, I made some of my toys with wood gathered from the nearby forest. I also enjoyed watching the carpenters working to pass time. These curiosities were captured by my father. I still remember how happy I was when my father bought me a used handsaw from one of these carpenters.



It was not a good saw, but it was a better tool in comparison to my mother's knife.

My past experience with wood and my education in Product Design have intensified my appreciations of wood. To me, wood is somewhat a perfect material – especially if I compare it to synthetic ones. In wood we could find strength and weakness, advantages and disadvantages or roughness and also softness. Wood is hard and solid but yet it is 100% eco-friendly as it is degradable and leaves no waste materials on the earth. I believe that a perfect material should be a well balanced material. This material will teach us the meaning of limit.

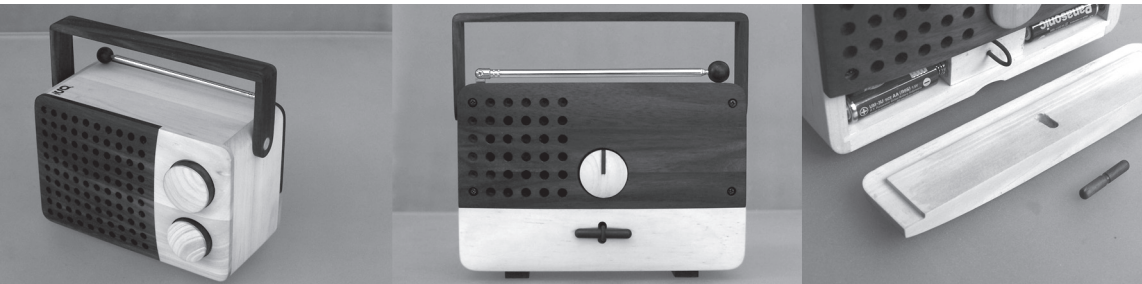
Wood is a type of material where its beauty comes of history. Wood's growth is an amazing process and it is stored in its lines of age. Its technology is sophisticated. It is remarkable how a small seed of wood can be more complex in comparison to machines

that are ever made by human. Wood records good and bad time before it is materialized as a beautiful drawing. Its texture and grain is a story of life.

If we compare wood to synthetic materials, we can feel how it is 'closely' related to us – it is part of us. Wood is a "soulful" material; it is a living material. When its time is up, it will ease itself back into the nature . . . Sophisticated, beautiful and meaningful.

DESIGN: RE-DEFINE

I strongly believe that the relationship between a user and a product is not merely a relationship between a subject and an object. It is a relationship where a product is an integral part of our life.



The advancement of technology and competition in economy has created products with sophisticated features. On one hand, it has made tasks in our lives easier to do, but on the other hand it creates a certain behavior. It creates subjects and objects behavior and at the same time it also creates façade and provisional relationship. I believe that this behavior is a negative excess of a modern industrial way of life. We should be aware of this behavior and to change it for the better. The combinations of using natural materials in modern products are a kind of soul embodying ritual. It makes products alive. My aim is to sensitize us with the nature, just like the way it was in the past.

In designing, I endeavor to recreate unperfect and uncomplete products through minimizing the unnecessary features. This unperfect-ness is a conscious and deliberate creation that will hopefully allow the users of our products to be deeply involved with each of them.

All of Magno products are not coated. We only apply a wooden oil to finish them. This finishing is not going to completely protect our products. However, it will give a chance

to its owner to feel the wood and also to care for the wood, as the care of its owner is the only real protection of the products. I disagree with the maintenance-free approach in products. We must maintain and take care of products we buy. This is what I call as a moral obligation between product's owner and its products.

I like simple form as I believe that it will enhance the life cycle of products. The simple form with well prepared details, the usage of natural materials in our products has purposes and the built-in fragility in our products is aimed to encourage user to be deeply connected with them.

This is one effort to minimize the waste-producing society. Design for us is more than just creating a well designed product that is produced and consumed in colossal amount. Design must be a way to solve and minimize problems.



Furthermore, the usage of natural materials is also due to its psycho-materialistic property and to maximizing the scarcity of local based material. The small size functional wooden craft products will give a positive contribution in economizing the base materials and to provide work opportunities; one of many problems that are faced in Indonesian villages.

In terms of design process output, products for me are only mere three-dimensional objects. However, I have other important output that I want to get across to the users of my products. It is the ideology, message and spirit behind the products. Think your products as living beings that send us messages and spiritual meanings in a passive way. Our society has begun to loose these meanings and products are becoming our robot servants.

DESIGN PROCESS

In designing, I cannot start the process with a completed and detailed concept. This will ensure the loss of my mood and energy. Sometimes the design process is triggered with only a tiny clue from my surroundings. For me, designing is like a trip without a map. I make an effort to enjoy the process and savor the meaning of the trip. Like any voyage, sometimes the objective is very clear but the journey is blurry or sometimes both are blurry. But in the end of the journey, I know that there will be something with a deeper meaning which awaits me.

I never start my design according to the market research or demand. I design by absorbing events, global or local events and even mundane daily life things that happen around me. Consequently, I start to think what will be good and better for these people. I am



aware that I own a business, an economic activity. However, I often see that many things went wrong when people are driven by economic demands.

RESPONSIBILITY

With quality of highly skilled craftsmen, it is possible to sell products with a good price and achieve market stability. Hence we can draw a conclusion that this way of designing produces low ratio of material usages and high labour capacity. To produce high quality products requires extra manpower and energy. The result of this activity can also include the worker's positive psychological growth towards achieving professionalism at work.

Nevertheless, using fewer materials is not enough. As a wood consumer, I feel morally responsible towards replacing the woods that I have used. This will ensure that all manufacturing activities that I conducted would not destroy the nature. I do this by re-planting every single wood that I've used from the forest.

The amount of wood replanted and selected is based on our yearly wood consumption, suitable age for wood to be grown and cut, and the requirement of land per tree. We estimated that for the 40 people we could employ, we could have replanted one to two hectares of land with our selected wood.

Currently, Kandangan has almost no forest land. The population is about 4.000 people. If we are to employ the whole population of Kandangan, we will abolish unemployment but most importantly, for every people we employ, we will generate more woods through our forest regeneration programs. Additionally, based on our current income, we receive USD 2.500-3.000 per month; enough to sustain 10 employees. If we are to employ 1000 villagers we would have received USD 250.000-300.000 per month – more than enough to sustain our village life.



With regards to the forest regeneration, on the top of preparing our own tree seed, we are also in collaboration with a Gunung Sumbing (Mountain Sumbing) junior high school. We work together with the school to create a practical curriculum within the field of environmental generation. Four months ago, the students from this school have helped us to grow seeds. Currently, these seeds have grown into 1.000 young trees that are ready to be planted. We are planning to have these trees replanted around the school area. The students want to have schools that are surrounded by trees. All this activities are funded through a part of our sales income.

My production company, Piranti Works, has 30 employees. They are locals. We are in the process of extending our workshop so it is able to employ around 50 employees. They will use only around 50 to 100 trees per year. The remaining 2.200sqm lands that I own are used as a tree nursery, where I will distribute free trees to the villagers. I purposely

distribute these trees freely as I want to teach the villagers that the right economy activity will give positive contribution towards sustainable environment. When we discuss sustainable environment, one should not forget that we are also discussing a large scale economic activity.

CONCLUSION

The most fundamental understanding of sustainability is to understand that the environmental damages are caused by a defective way of living. Humans should be the smartest creatures that inhabit the planet earth, but we are doing dull things to destroy our host. All environmental damages are caused by humans. We live in the circle of production and consumption that grew bigger, faster and uncontrollably, forgetting that our resources are limited.



The damages in environment should be a wake up call for all of us. We should redesign the way we live and take steps towards better ways of living. I believe that in these last centuries, there are important aspects in human life that we abandoned while pursuing the advancement in technologies and the wonder of science. We forgot the spiritual aspect of being a human. This is an aspect, which cannot be separated from human as it is part of our brilliant minds. We have evolved into an intelligent race but are no longer acting wisely.

As a designer, I strive to create designs that will contribute to our quality of life, be it your life activities or your own personal development. I am grateful that I am able to this choice as my way of living. With the current situation that we are nowadays facing – many woods are consumed for industry that uses woods relentlessly. Its reserve is depleted. This is happen due to the difficulties in building a business that uses less materials but use more labour.

Sustainability as a new approach in economic activities is not a new consideration. It should be used as the blue print for our present and future, the new soul and spirit for our economic undertakings now and in the time to come. We cannot claim success if our economic pursuits produce big profit and yet are damaging the environment further.

Sustainability for me is a way of living where we are not just trying to avoid damaging nature. We should also take action in improving it. Profit cannot only be measured by the capital we gain but shall also be measured by how we can improve our environment. We must do more of this.



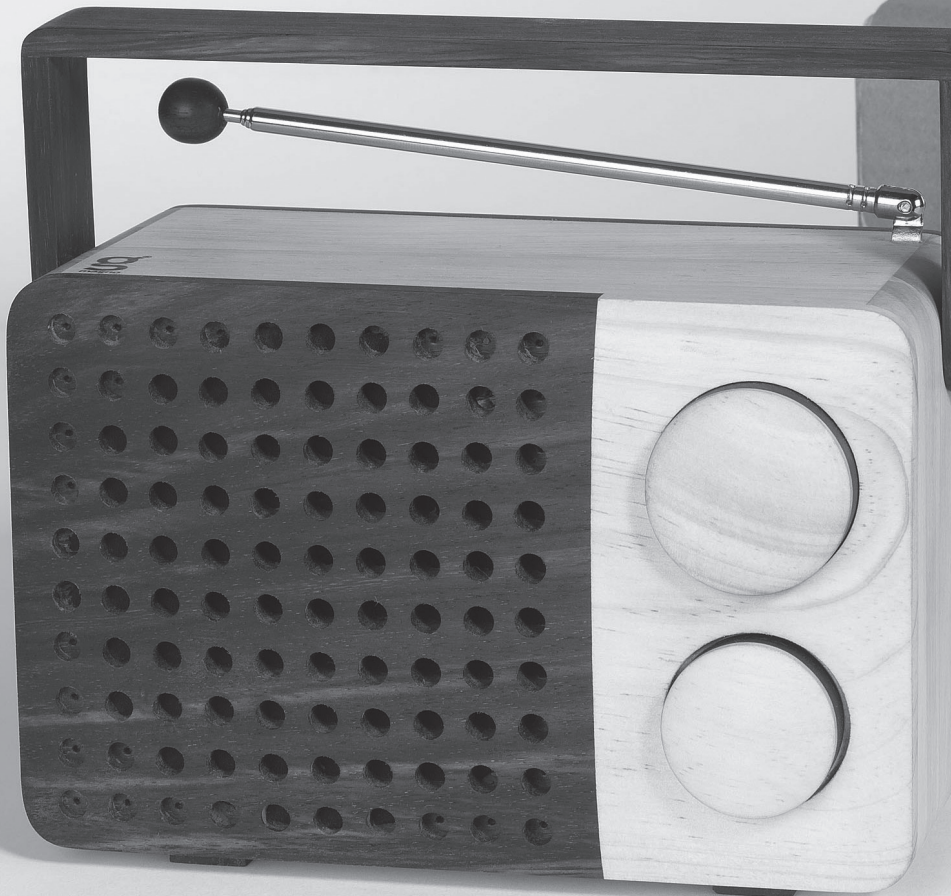
Singgih Susilo Kartono in his workshop, 2008.

Wooden Radio at a glance

Design Awards: International Design Resource Award,
Seattle USA, 1997

Indonesia Good Design Selection Awards
Good Design Award/G-Mark 2008, Japan

All Wooden Radios are hand-made within 16 hours. Magno items are manufactured in an environmentally sustainable production-process, which covers fair social standards in the company. Only plantation wood is used in the production. The profits support the development of a plantation surrounding the production facility, where about 30 youths receive a sound schooling in handicrafts.





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