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FROM ECODESIGN TO FOOTPRINT DESIGN

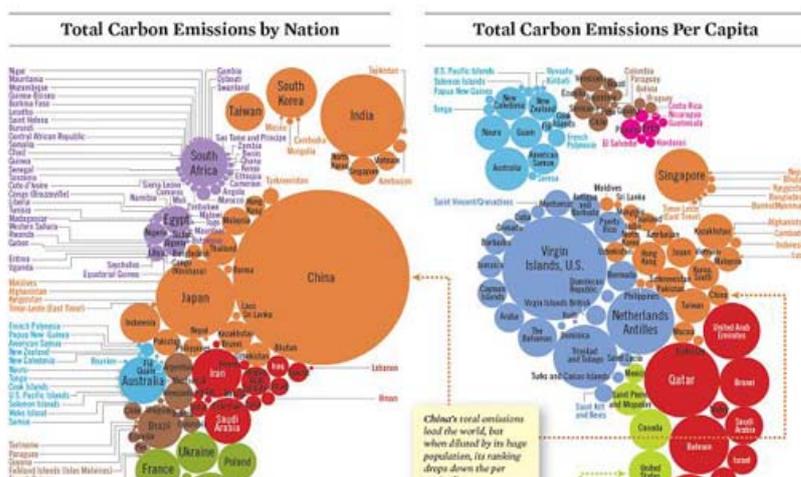
From the local to the global context

by *Marco Capellini, architect*

The eco-design strategies implemented so far at an international level to improve the environmental impact of products and services have pursued a variety of courses and solutions, whose outcomes are sometimes hardly comparable.

Life Cycle Assessment, Design for Disassembly, Design for Recycling, Design for Energy Efficiency, and Design for Reuse are just a few of the most popular international Ecodesign strategies. In most cases, the achieved results are expressed in terms of amount of emissions, type of damage caused, number or letter indexes, percent rates, measurement units, including kWh or Kg, and much more. All this, without prejudice to the environmental value of the interventions, resulted in most cases in a confused interpretation of the end results and, particularly, in a comparison of the benefits provided by the different ecodesign actions.

Moreover, while the application of the above-mentioned strategies to a product or service is going the right way, it does not always offer the opportunity to obtain a reliable feedback on the environmental improvements achieved with respect to a global issue. More specifically, stating that an intervention on a product ensures disassembly and recycling does not provide a feedback on actual environmental benefits with respect to the global issue.



[Image source](#)

Such global issue is mostly focused on a reduction of the carbon dioxide emissions produced by human activities. From the Kyoto targets to the 20-20-20 strategy of the EU, from Durban to Rio+20, the goal is to come to an agreement to reduce CO₂ emissions. The imperative is to decarbonize the planet! More and more initiatives are launched to introduce rules and tools to reduce the carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere produced by processes and products: the EU, Australia, the UK, and France are just a few of the countries that have started to pursue direct actions.



[Image source](#)

The direction seems to be the right one and the ecodesign interventions made on products and services through the use of a variety of design strategies can be "translated" and joined together into a single result for comparison.

Whether it is Carbon Footprint, Water Footprint, or Social Footprint, results are unique and comparable.

The possibility to disassemble or recycle a product, the improvement or networking of a service, the use of a new, recycled, natural material – all this can be translated into and referred to a single end result, such as kg CO₂ eq.

This is certainly not the final solution to all the problems, but rather a crucial step to understand how and to what extent a product impacts at regional, national, continental, and global level. It is a starting point to measure environmental project improvements, and to understand whether the choices pursued so far were right or wrong. Moreover, it helps appreciate the extent of the problem and measure our input.