



DO School Fellows Collaborate on a sustainable to-go coffee cup

THE **SAND**BOX BLOG

The Sustainable Coffee Cup Challenge

Michelle Han — March 31, 2014

What could be more “New York” than a cup of coffee – to go?

Yet the entire “to-go” experience – the millions and millions of paper cups, plastic lids, and cardboard sleeves being used once and thrown away, clogging our landfills – is questionable at best and perilous at worst, when viewed with an eye toward creating a sustainable future for our city and our world.

It is this question we are tackling this month and next through The **Sustainable Cup Challenge** at **The DO School**, an international education organization that prepares young, aspiring entrepreneurs to be leaders in social innovation.



The international program has a main campus in Hamburg, Germany, and is spending 10 weeks here in New York City focusing on a real-world Challenge. Based at the **Made In NY Media Center** – itself a partnership between the city and the **Independent Filmmaker Project** – The DO School collaborated with the city’s **Office of Long Term Planning and Sustainability** to develop the Sustainable Cup Challenge. – The solutions the programs’ 18 Fellows come up with will be tested in the city this spring.

The Challenge brings us full circle to the way Pilot Projects views design and its impact on the world. We see all design challenges as systems challenges – for a solution to truly work, it has to address the four major social systems: regulation, market, technology, and culture. These autonomous but interacting systems must be balanced and integrated. If you pass a law but the technology breaks down, you get nowhere. If you

[Ethical Corporation Magazine - article](#)

[Wall Street Journal - article](#)



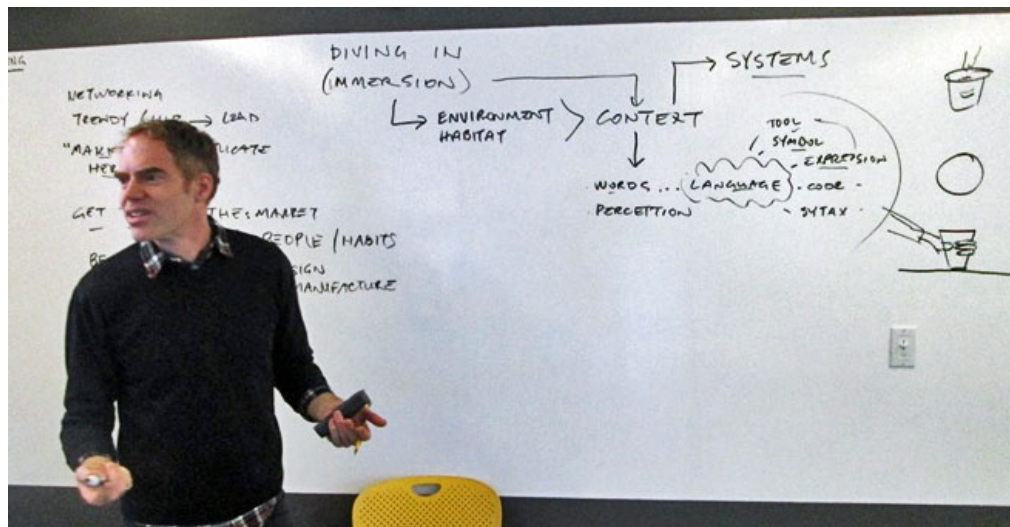
The daily ritual for millions of NYers



The dilemma: what to do with your paper cup. Can it be recycled? 7 Million are discarded daily in NYC!

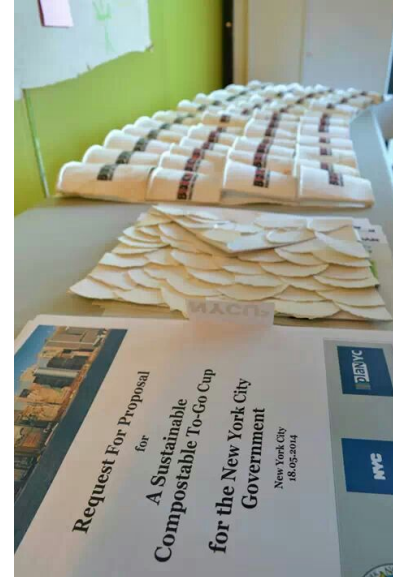
succeed in the market but there's a popular backlash, you've lost as well. For lasting change to occur all of these systems have to work independently and integratively.

At Pilot Projects, we lead with culture, because we see it as the most important system. We believe it's the place where human values and ideals live, with the other systems either supporting (or undermining) those values and ideals.



If culture should lead the way, what should New York City's coffee consumption look like in five years, if we want to address the problem of waste that we have? Last year alone, the city spent \$336 million exporting waste to out-of-state landfills. What would it take to have a New York culture where sipping coffee from a throwaway paper cup would be considered unspeakably uncool?

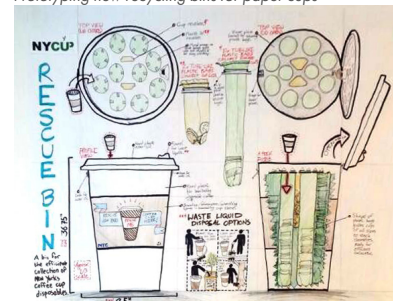
The Fellows at The DO School are looking at all angles. They're studying prototypes and materials for reusable or compostable cups. They're gathering market research -- interviewing dozens of coffee shop managers, as well as regular New Yorkers, to understand their needs and constraints -- and looking at regulatory conditions and new City procurement innovations. And they're thinking about how you create a culture where New Yorkers love using their sustainable cups.

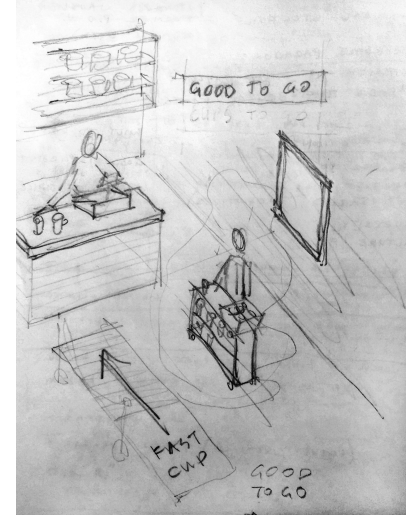
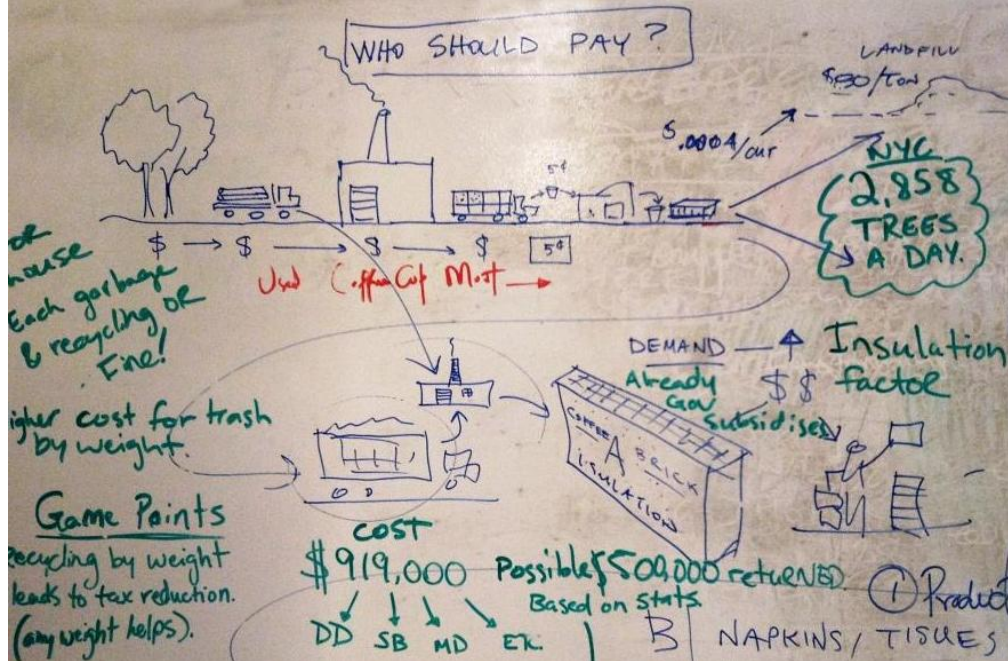


Can the cups be made into anything useful? How about an RFP for NYC to solicit innovations on a more sustainable cup?

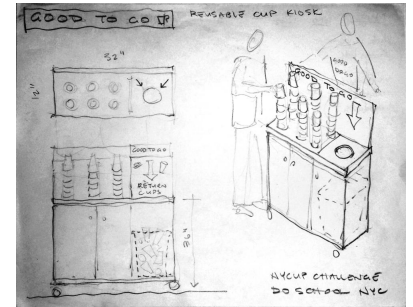


Prototyping new recycling bins for paper cups





Sketch exploring a "Fast Lane" for reusable cup customers



Beginning to think about a "cup sharing" system... a kiosk that would dispense clean reusable cups and accept used cups for washing

Sound like a daunting task? Yet another reason why we love this Challenge. We are drawn to resolving the seemingly intractable issues. As **Ron Gonen**, a passionate entrepreneur and the city's deputy commissioner of sanitation, put it, "When you solve problems in New York City it is replicable everywhere."

Can the New York coffee-on-the-run experience catch the wave of the sharing economy? What would it look like to create something good – good for the environment, good for the future of our city and world, good for every one of us – and still get to have it to-go?

Stay tuned for our "Good To Go" pilot in partnership with Brooklyn Roasting Company starting April 15th, and our launch party at The Hudson Company on April 22st at 6pm.

Check out the results as reported by Fast Company:



exploring a new city wide brand: GOOD TO GO



DO School Fellow, Dan Keilback at the Good To Go pilot launch, Brooklyn Roasting Company location

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