

Graphic designers Antonio Di Vico and Claudia Univazo, from the Electronic Publishing Unit of the United Nations in Vienna, developed the visual identity of UNOOSA, and several new outreach products leveraging it, such as logos, posters and flyers. We talked to them about the process of developing powerful visual elements that convey the work of UNOOSA, and about their work creating effective communication products for UN organisations.

Claudia Univazo:

My name is Claudia Univazo, I was born in Colombia and I am currently Senior Graphic Designer in the Electronic Publishing Unit (EPU) at the United Nations Office at Vienna.



Antonio Di Vico:

My name is Antonio Di Vico and I have been a Graphic Arts Assistant in the Electronic Publishing Unit (EPU) at the United Nations Office at Vienna for the past four years. I was born in Italy but have spent most of my working life abroad (Australia, Georgia, Austria, Thailand, Germany and Belgium).



How did you come to be a graphic designer for the United Nations / what has been your path to the current role?

Claudia:

Growing up I had many different interests: mathematics was one of them, but so was dancing. Above all I had a love for books. My hero was an Argentinian cartoon character named Mafalda who was very concerned about the war in Viet Nam, poverty, injustice, the role of women, you name it...Her dream was to become an interpreter at the United Nations to help solve the problems arising from the Cold War. In the eyes of a Colombian child, the UN seemed like a faraway, utopian institution I would only be in touch with through the news coverage of some peace talks. Yes, I was a child who followed the news.

When deciding what to study, graphic design seemed a good choice after my attempts to study textile design showed me that I was better suited to working with type, words and texts. By then I had moved to Vienna, and at the time I saw graphic design as an opportunity to work with interesting content in an artistic manner. I was able to put my new skills to work with the NGOs I was volunteering for at the time. NGOs are always incredibly happy when a volunteer graphic designer is available, especially those with limited funds. After some years working independently for the University of Vienna, NGOs, UNIDO and UNODC, I joined IAEA and soon after that moved to the United Nations Office in Vienna.

Antonio:

I can say it was certainly not a straight path and had, like most careers, a few detours and setbacks, but the journey was one I am happy to have been on. I started my career early, when I was still at university, with a major global media conglomerate, Endemol.

After getting my master's degree in media and communications and working for a few years in the private sector, I decided to make a professional shift and pursue a career in the humanitarian field, taking an unpaid internship with the UNDP in Georgia. At the time, taking an unpaid internship after a few years of having a "normal" career and earning a regular salary was a big bet. That experience, however, confirmed that my gut instinct was right, I did want to serve the UN, and it was the literal "foot in the door" that led me to the following experiences. Subsequently, I worked for the United Nations Regional Information Centre in Brussels and the UN University in Germany and was a visual communications consultant for dozens of UN agencies and intergovernmental organizations, including UNESCO, UNDP, the World Bank, WHO and UNICEF, to finally arrive here in Vienna as a Graphic Arts Assistant.



What aspects do you love most about your job?

Claudia:

The diversity of topics it covers and the many interesting people I encounter and work with. My team works for most of the Vienna-based organizations and this means that one day I am involved with wildlife crime, the next with protecting the rights of children

born to mothers while in prison. From drug treatment and prevention to environmental issues... the list of topics is long and diverse.

For many years, almost from the beginning of my career at the UN, I had a very soft spot for the work of UNOOSA. To be honest, most of us in my team did and still do. Basically, any topic of UNOOSA's work is fascinating for me, and would be exciting for any graphic designer lucky enough to work with their content and imagery, from space law to satellite technology and the Access to Space for All Initiative, just to name a few of their areas of work. And the time that I worked on a publication with a real (former) astronaut is something I have proudly talked about to the children in my family and will definitely be telling my grandchildren about.



Antonio:

One of the things I like most about my job is that EPU provides graphic design and multimedia services to several UN Vienna-based agencies and bodies which work on a wide range of issues (UNIDO, industrial development; UNOOSA, outer space affairs; UNODC, drugs and crime; etc). Designing for such diverse and heterogeneous organizations prevents my work from getting stagnant and keeps me challenged. In the past four years I have had the chance to design everything from commemorative stamps and logos to flyers and major publications that reached thousands of people. But probably the thing I love most is having the opportunity to put my creativity and skills to the service of causes close to my values within an organization I respect.



***What were the inspirations behind the visual identity you developed for UNOOSA?
Which priorities did you have in mind?***

Claudia:

Being presented with the chance to develop a new visual identity for OOSA was a fantastic challenge. We wanted to make sure that it would do justice to the importance of UNOOSA and its mandate, and that it would also win the acceptance of staff, who would ultimately be the ones working with it. A completely new colour palette meant moving away from what we understood as “space colours”: black, grey in all its shades, and dark blues. It was clear that this did not work so well any more in a bright digital environment. Antonio was entrusted with the task and he delivered a beautiful, colourful and comprehensive proposal. I think the style and colours we chose are full of optimism and I find the new UNOOSA visual identity very unique. We wanted their

content to be easily identifiable, despite having to rely on visual material available to other organizations; the duotone treatment is a wonderful way of achieving this.



The visual identity guidelines developed for UNOOSA.

My task lays mainly in making sure all of Antonio's ideas and proposals would be easy to follow if someone else (with some level of graphic skills) outside of EPU was working with the visual identity. This visual identity is a living document that will continue to grow and be updated as new applications or examples arise.

Antonio:

Designing the visual identity of a UN agency was a dream I had for a long time. When presented with the opportunity to do it for UNOOSA, whose mandate helping all countries access the benefits of space never ceases to amaze me, I had to take more than a deep breath before starting to work because I knew it would be a complex task that would have to be approved and liked by many people. When I started working on it, I studied how other institutions with a somewhat similar mandate communicated. I observed that they generally used a rather dark colour palette, so I wanted UNOOSA to stand out from this approach, while retaining its own identity, by widely using white space and a rich colour palette paired with a very clean typography.



A roll-up realised in the UNOOSA visual identity, summarising the focus of the organisation.

My priority was to create a visual identity that was fresh and recognizable and that would have longevity, and that would be especially good for digital use. One of the innovative elements I introduced was the use of images with a duotone treatment. Ultimately, I wanted to create a balance between a slightly nostalgic, retro vibe, which evokes the golden era of space exploration, and a contemporary feel.



The covers of two of the UNOOSA annual reports produced by EPU in the new visual identity so far.



A page from the UNOOSA annual report 2019.

The Access to Space 4 All logo you developed may one day be in space, as the Initiative provides, among other opportunities, the chance for developing countries to place a satellite in orbit. What does this achievement mean to you?

Antonio:

To a nerd, passionate about space and sci-fi, growing up consuming tons of comic books and movies about space exploration, this feels like an unbelievable achievement and milestone in my career. The 12-year-old me, who always dreamed of wearing a space suit and seeing Earth from outer space, is, no pun intended, over the moon and definitely patted the 39-year-old graphic designer me on the back for potentially getting our work into space.



A virtual representation of the logo for UNOOSA's Access to Space for All Initiative, that helps bridge the gap among countries in accessing the benefits of space.

How did the logo come to being, what inspirations drove its design?

Antonio:

I explored several ideas for this logo, but the one that seemed to work the best was the idea of creating a badge or a stamp, something which was self-contained. I also wanted it to work well in one colour and have a slightly retro vibe while retaining some elements (typography) in common with UNOOSA's overall visual identity.

Working with UNOOSA means conveying often complex scientific/technical topics into effective visual material, bridging science and design. How do you approach this complexity?

Claudia:

One of my first questions is always ‘who is the intended audience?’. If the answer is the general public, many more questions will follow until I – not coming from a scientific background – understand the message we need to convey. The first thing for me is to listen to the client officer and understand their goals. They know their subject best, and I see myself as someone helping them to develop the tools and materials they need to communicate it effectively, be it through a training manual, an announcement for a conference or workshop, a scientific poster, a flagship publication or something else.



A virtual representation of the [digital brochure on the KiboCUBE programme](#), that provides developing countries with the chance to develop and deploy a satellite from the International Space Station.

To give UNOOSA the best service, I also follow the work of other science and space organizations to keep up with the way they present themselves visually, and try to find visual answers to how we humans see ourselves in relation to the vast universe and how artists have approached the subject in the past and how they do so today.



A virtual representation of the logo developed for the [UNOOSA World Space Forum series](#).

What aspects of working with UNOOSA do you enjoy the most?

Antonio:

The relationship of trust we have established over the years and the daydreaming about outer space inspired by the imagery I work with both give me pleasure.

Graphic design can be art, but to me it is mostly a “functional” discipline that, in an ideal scenario, needs to support the message and help it reach its audience. To make complex concepts such as UNOOSA’s easier to process, I try to strip down the redundancies and simplify without altering the intrinsic scientific nature of the content, but most of all, I prioritize a clear information hierarchy and, through the design elements, dictate the pace and lay out the path for the viewer. If possible, this whole process needs to happen while making the content visually appealing; our aim is to not only help people understand the content but make them WANT to be exposed to that content. Sometimes, graphic design simply follows the content and gives a pretty shape to it, but in my experience the best results are achieved when the designer collaborates with the officer in charge of the project by providing suggestions on how to structure the information.



SPACE4SDGS

The Space4SDGs logo was developed by EPU to help UNOOSA convey how space contributes to each of the 17 SDGs.

The work of EPU helps the UN communicate effectively. Communication, at the UN and beyond, is moving more and more into digital formats. How do you see it evolving in the future?

Claudia:

The shift to digital formats will only increase and I see this as something very positive, especially for international organizations. Creativity is no longer limited to a certain paper size, the costs usually reserved for printing can be used for other purposes and a wider audience can be reached. The main thing now is a clear and well conveyed message that can be delivered in various forms, from an electronic publication to a series of Twitter posts, videos, microsites and augmented reality posters.



The flyer about the [Space4Women programme of UNOOSA](#), that helps young women succeed in careers in the space sector.

Antonio:

In the past few years, the UN has bridged a huge gap in the way it communicates compared to other institutions or even big private companies. As you mentioned, the UN is using more and more digital formats, with some agencies in particular leading the way. There is no doubt that the UN is speaking the same 'language' as the people it is serving. I think this shift has brought the UN closer to people. I see a rise in the use of video content, animation and digital information associated with a decline in the use of paper publications due to several reasons: environmental and financial concerns, ease and reach of digital distribution and the reduced shelf-life of printed communications products.



The logo designed by EPU for the UNOOSA Space4Women programme.

What advice would you give to young people thinking of a career in graphic design?

Claudia:

Graphic designers today need to be visual communicators. They need empathy and a genuine interest in the subjects they are working on. Besides the techniques you need to produce beautiful imagery and graphics, I recommend that you do not forget the foundation provided by the basics of typography, even if you then go on to bend or break some of these rules. There is some science in how we read and absorb information and you need to know that. Finally, my advice to anyone considering this career, is make sure you become proficient in understanding (and therefore presenting) statistical data. Many interesting jobs will be linked to data visualization and data is most likely what you will be working with. Also, I think Antonio has already mentioned the need to develop your own voice and your own signature/style. I couldn't agree more!

Antonio:

I would say it's okay to start by copying what you see on Facebook or Instagram but it's even better to find a personal style, and you can only do that by trying things, even if they don't work out, and by studying the reasons why some designs were created the way they were. Instagram and Facebook are great tools to get inspiration but they tend to propagate only whatever is trendy in that very moment, sometimes suffocating the designer's own voice and resulting in visuals that can all look the same. My advice is to expose yourself to and analyze with a critical eye all kinds of visual stimuli: comics, movies, photography, paintings, shop signs, album covers. Good graphic design is

everywhere and sometimes we don't perceive it because it is, most of the time, discrete and unobtrusive. By learning to recognize good design, you are already halfway towards being a designer. The other half is learning to use the tools needed to achieve the results you want to achieve, but this part is becoming easier thanks to the abundance of available resources.



The [UNOOSA annual report 2019](#).