

# BEDA

The Bureau of European  
Design Associations

## The BEDA Professional Design Practice Dossier

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## Introduction

This document – the BEDA Professional Design Practice Dossier (**BEDA PD<sup>2</sup>**) is an endeavour at drawing the most precise picture of current issues relating to professional design practice in Europe and globally, as a guide for design practitioners, people engaged in design promotion and support, and for those who influence the political framework in which design plays an increasingly pivotal role.

The methodology behind **BEDA PD<sup>2</sup>** is non-scientific, but is supported to a large extent by the most recent studies, articles and reports available through desk search and access to various design research networks and other web sources. The selection has been made to provide the most accurate yet balanced point of view relating to specific areas of interest, which are dealt with in each of the seven chapters of the dossier. These are

- *Design Practice – at large; General issues related to design practice development*
- *Design policy and promotion*
- *New materials and technologies*
- *Design processes and methodologies*
- *Service design*
- *Socially responsible and sustainable design*
- *Design management*

The fact that design education and research as an area in itself has been left out is quite deliberate - in part because the primary focus of this document is design practice and related issues, and in part because the inclusion of design research and education would require a more prudent scientific approach, and resources beyond those of BEDA. However, we thank the design research and education community for their contributions to this dossier and do not in any way whatsoever underestimate the contributions they make to design practice.

The overall editorial responsibility for **BEDA PD<sup>2</sup>** lies with the Professional Working Group within the BEDA board, while the actual screening and collection of material, as well as the writing of the topical articles making up the dossier itself, has been commissioned to the design management professional Steinar Valade-Amland of THREE POINT ZERO. This is based on his lengthy engagement in BEDA and the design practitioner communities throughout Europe, as well as on his current work, which, amongst other things, involves developing new methodologies for uptake of design practice and design management in the public sector.

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*Michal Stefanowski*  
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*Isabel Roig*  
*BEDA President 2013-2015*

# Design practice – at large

## **The name of the game is rapidly changing**

Over the last decade, design practice has changed quite dramatically. For some designers, things look pretty much the same as ever – they are rooted in their professional pursuits, offering well-known services to established markets. Others face changes on a daily basis – new demands for services previously not labelled design, from client groups who have never before demanded design services at all, and in fierce competition with consultants and practitioners with vastly different backgrounds than schools of architecture, art or design.

This new situation calls for a new conversation within the design community – between design practitioners, and between them and the many other stakeholders making up the design value chain.

## **From focus on design as a craft to design thinking**

One of the noticeable discussions during the past few years derives from the emergence of “design thinking” – a concept of which several design thinkers claim to be the original source. Many ascribe the concept – or at least the pervasiveness of it – to IDEO, as does its own CEO, Tim Brown:

*“Design thinking is a human-centered approach to innovation that draws from the designer's toolkit to integrate the needs of people, the possibilities of technology, and the requirements for business success.”*<sup>1</sup>

Bill Moggridge – one of IDEO’s co-founders - also had his say on its meaning, as seen in this statement this from 2010:

*“The “Design Thinking” label is not a myth. It is a description of the application of well-trying design process to new challenges and opportunities, used by people from both design and non-design backgrounds. I welcome the recognition of the term and hope that its use continues to expand and be more universally understood, so that eventually every leader knows how to use design and design thinking for innovation and better results.”*<sup>1</sup>

Regardless of who came up with the idea first, the concept has captured a wide audience and created a shift in how design is being discussed, both in the design community and among policy makers. The most common understanding of design thinking is “a human-centered, creative, iterative, and practical approach to finding the best ideas and ultimate solutions” – or in other words, an adoption of the way designers always went about addressing whatever challenge they were facing, now made accessible to managers with business training or other professional backgrounds.

The concept has now reigned for around five years and is slowly finding its place on the shelf together with other concepts which have proved their relevance, and have slowly faded to become natural parts of day-to-day lingo for people working in the creative industries. And yet, new insights and angles appear. Lucy Kimbell is an Oxford scholar who points at the weakness of design thinking as a concept as it detaches the thinking from the doing and from design’s embedded aesthetics. Besides, even though it appears scientific in its own peculiar way, design thinking as a concept is quite poorly documented in terms of actual research. What is even more interesting than her reservations, though, is her thoughts on how design thinking and design practice could actually co-exist as mutually beneficial approaches.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.ideo.com/images/uploads/thoughts/IDEO\\_HBR\\_Design\\_Thinking.pdf](http://www.ideo.com/images/uploads/thoughts/IDEO_HBR_Design_Thinking.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.lucykimbell.com/stuff/DesignPractices\\_Kimbell.pdf](http://www.lucykimbell.com/stuff/DesignPractices_Kimbell.pdf)

Cameron Tonkinwise from Parsons New School of Design discusses the abstraction of the design process into just another MBA tool in his article – it is more philosophical and theory-focused than Kimbell's, but still a good read.<sup>3</sup>

### **From craft to process, methodology and tools for change**

The focus on design thinking did not appear out of the dark. Design practice has gradually changed over a long period of time –since it found its own space as an independent professional identity. As such, design practice reflects developments in society, in business and in the search for innovation. Some of these changes have grown out of the design profession itself, others have been forced upon it by changes in the marketplace, and yet other changes stem from academic environments –increasingly so, as design has gained academic status in most European countries as an area worthy of educational pursuit. Every so often, design researchers meet to keep each other abreast of what's cooking in the design research community, as well as in the field they study - design practice. One of the most recent gatherings of design researchers took place in Gothenburg in Sweden in April 2013 under the alluring title 'Crafting the Future'.<sup>4</sup>

One of the interesting papers presented was called, "*Trust me, I am a designer', why is there a lack of trust in design expertise?*"<sup>5</sup> It discusses the interesting dilemma whereby designers are no longer necessarily experts in giving shape and form to products or graphics or spaces, but as a result of the changing role of design and designers, are often facilitators of creative processes and creative generalists, and that this change has caused confusion in the marketplace and among SMEs (small and medium sized enterprises) in particular. This could possibly be a welcome reminder that the community of design practitioners themselves need to work with their identity as a group and with how their expertise and its uniqueness is being communicated.

At large, the role of being a design professional has not only changed, but has also increased the demands on and expectations towards what a design service encompasses. A range of new terminologies have entered the design domain; a language originating in business school environments such as Harvard and Stanford, including words like strategy, innovation, business case, stakeholder engagement and stage gates, and in the human sciences like anthropology and ethnography, words like personas and participatory studies. The most common "buzzwords" were collated and explained by Bob Jacobson in a so-called "chapbook" for the Danish consultancy GEMBA, as part of a government funded innovation programme back in 2010. It is still a very useful guide to the most common newcomers in the design and innovation lingo.<sup>6</sup>

Later on in this document, some of the major phenomena changing the landscape of design practice will be addressed, such as the emergence of service design and design methodologies like co-creation, and focus on social responsibility and sustainability.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.dab.uts.edu.au/research/conferences/dtrs8/docs/DTRS8-Tonkinwise.pdf>

<sup>4</sup>

<http://www.trippus.se/web/presentation/web.aspx?evid=qTCRaT4TJ70WGtClyjpKRA==&ecid=vajn7H5hFUL31Hr+Q9enuw==&ln=eng&view=category&template=desktop>

<sup>5</sup> [http://meetagain.se/papers/ten/ead\\_2013gulariexpertisefinalfeb1.pdf](http://meetagain.se/papers/ten/ead_2013gulariexpertisefinalfeb1.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.gemba.dk/media/62115/chapbook2009.05.pdf>

# Design policy and promotion

## **The correlation between developments in design policy, promotion and practice**

The core of the design community is naturally made up of design practitioners – whether independent or in partnerships, organized in networks or formalized corporate structures. However, design and the design community wouldn't have enjoyed the attention and interest it currently does if it weren't for some strong and helpful forces in industry, in design education and research, and – not least – in design support, promotion and policy. BEDA and some of its loyal members have been among the most persistent actors on this playing field, elevating design to a hitherto unprecedented level on the European agenda, in parallel with its steadily increasing importance on national and regional levels throughout Europe.

Design policy initiatives have often underestimated the role and diversity of design practice as such, and have often lagged behind in recognizing the changes already discussed in the previous chapter. Some internationally renowned players, such as IDEO and d-school, the initiative it created in collaboration with the founder of one of the largest ITC companies in the world, SAS Institute<sup>7</sup> as well as a few other larger design firms throughout the world, have served as references for design policy makers; the role of the vast majority of individual and small scale design practitioners around the world as the actual drivers of change and progress has, however, been gravely underestimated. Some of the blame for this rests with the community of design practitioners themselves, while the major reason for the situation has been the challenge of bridging the language and perceptions of design as an art and craft based discipline with the prevailing political agendas of economic growth and social development. That bridge now seems to have been built, and it has – however frail it might appear – already proven its own right as a carrier of the necessary understanding on both sides of how design can play a vital role in supporting the same agendas. One of the most rewarding outcomes of this journey is the report presented by the European Design Leadership Board, which was established in 2011 by the European Commission. Their report, *Design for Growth and Prosperity*<sup>8</sup> recognizes not only the role, but also the need to support and develop the design community at large and design practice in particular.

Another project – also funded by the EU – has proven to be a very effective way of collating, discussing and sharing experiences related to design and innovation policies across the member states of the European Region.<sup>9</sup> Through the numerous publications issued by SEE from its start in 2006 through to today, it is actually possible to establish a coherent picture of the developments within the sector during the period in which design eventually had its breakthrough as an important pillar in building and enhancing both enterprises, public services and innovation capacity across sectors and across Europe.

Design support and promotion have been the two foremost tools for governments when deciding to embark on a journey toward better utilization of the design competences in the respective country or region. Some countries have established national design centres or design councils, such as the Design Council in the UK, Norwegian Design Council, Danish Design Centre and Slovak Design Centre. Some are funded or co-funded by ministries of culture, others by ministries of trade and industry, and yet others by a combination of the two and/or other government bodies. In some countries, the approach is regional rather than national, such as in Germany, France and Spain – consistent with other structures in the same countries. Regardless of roots and sources of funding, they have all chosen a strategy which

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<sup>7</sup> <http://dschool.stanford.edu/>

<sup>8</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/innovation/files/design/design-for-growth-and-prosperity-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/innovation/files/design/design-for-growth-and-prosperity-report_en.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.seeplatform.eu/publications>

balances two out of three elements in design policies – promotion and support, the third being education.<sup>10</sup> According to Gisela Raulik-Murphy and Gavin Cawood, the two elements are different by nature; design promotion schemes are usually targeted at the wider public with the objective of raising awareness of the benefits of design through many different ways (such as exhibitions, awards, conferences, seminars and publications), while design support programmes include schemes implemented to assist businesses in using design in order to improve their businesses.

What is quite interesting, though, is the marginal focus on design practice in such public schemes. One might often sense that the design community itself has left the agenda to well-meaning and by all means dedicated advocates of design from industry, from governmental organizations and from the business community as such – though without really claiming their own sovereign space around the table, which is also evident in the four examples shown in Raulik-Murphy and Cawood’s report, pp. 8 – 10, where the representative bodies for design practitioners are all detached from the structures actually defining the respective countries’ initiatives to strengthen design. This might be one of the most imminent challenges for the design professional community in the years to come and as a response to design’s changing role in various policy areas; to re-capture the design domain from – and to enter into a more meaningful and more levelled dialogue with - all the other players on the design policy playing field.

### **Where does design policy, support and promotion seem to head?**

Quite significant changes of direction have been seen during the past two years, such as in the UK (Design Council) focusing on corporate partnership programmes, Sweden (SVID) focusing on health services design, Denmark (Danish Design Centre) focusing on new materials, new technologies and big data. Elsewhere, changes are seen towards more focused strategies and more focus on ROI – return on investment. There seems to be a general trend in Europe away from investing in the promotion of the idea of design as a lever for competitiveness and innovation – at large – towards a much closer collaboration with specific industries or sectors, towards working with organisations which have already embraced design and towards partnerships based on co-funding by the recipient partner. Even though it has not been possible to substantiate this by reliable source statistics, one might suspect that the number of design exhibitions targeting a wider audience, design award schemes and design competitions is decreasing year by year.

Moreover, on a policy level, design is no longer – at least less often than before – an issue dealt with in isolation. The trend seems to be an integration of design into either innovation policies or policies for the cultural and creative industries (CCIs). On a European level design has been adopted quite recently, compared to many member states, and yet it plays a marginal role outside of the two most significant platforms it inhabits. The 1st Action Plan of the European Design Innovation Initiative<sup>11</sup>, under which six major development projects with quite massive participation from BEDA members have been funded, supports the innovation agenda, while ECIA – European Creative Industries Alliance<sup>12</sup>, which is also funded by DG Enterprise - supports design’s role as part of the CCI agenda

As such, the changes listed above seem like natural consequences of the changing role of design practice and the parallel changes in the marketplace’s perception of what design is and where it could potentially play a role. Hence, the more traditional “core attributes” of design as the craft of embodying arts into replicable and industrially manufactured products, into tools of communication and into physical spaces enjoy less and less attention both in regional, national

<sup>10</sup> [http://www3.uwic.ac.uk/English/IDPS/Documents/Raulik-Murphy\\_Cawood - National Design Systems.pdf](http://www3.uwic.ac.uk/English/IDPS/Documents/Raulik-Murphy_Cawood_-_National_Design_Systems.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newsroom/cf/itemdetail.cfm?item\\_id=5292](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newsroom/cf/itemdetail.cfm?item_id=5292)

<sup>12</sup> <http://creativebusiness.org/content/european-creative-industries-a>

and supra-national design strategies and in the design policies articulated by the design community – or communities – themselves. Actually, it seemed at one point, that even talking about aesthetics, the crafts or the personal expression that design also carries in it made design politicians frown, as if it were a historical and hopelessly old fashioned way of discussing design. We have seen, though, that the various platforms on which the future of design is discussed now seem to allow for advocacy of the need to balance the traditional hallmarks of design and designers with the needs of the future and the new contexts of which design is slowly becoming an integral element.<sup>13</sup>

For a valuable overview of recent developments, a quite recent publication issued by the DeEP consortium – one of the previously mentioned projects co-financed by the the 1st Action Plan of the European Design Innovation Initiative – gives a quite accessible introduction to some of the issues putting their marks on the current design and innovation policy discourse.<sup>14</sup>

Some of the more specific factors influencing design practice are dealt with in the next five chapters.

## New materials and technologies

### **As design moves into new domains, new demands for materials, material properties and material processing technologies are needed**

Most of the widely communicated initiatives to strengthen the role of design as a tool for innovation and competitiveness stem from the political domains of enterprise and industry, entrepreneurship and the cultural & creative industries. The focus seems to have been on building bridges between suppliers of design services and the marketplace, on measuring the effects of design and on integrating new design disciplines and design thinking more widely in private and public sectors. Less attention seems to have been given to the “product” itself – product as in design practice – and the rapid changes related to the materials, methodologies and manufacturing processes on which designers and design practice often depend. In 2010, an expert panel was gathered by EU’s DG Research & Innovation to discuss which initiatives were needed to address the possible technological and non-technological bottlenecks in materials research that still limit the success of creative industries – in this context primarily design and architecture – and what could be done to meet the new needs of the professions.<sup>15</sup>

During 2011 and 2012, a fairly significant amount of funding was given to research projects which could possibly point at new opportunities for the creative industries; these projects primarily focused on new material properties and applications, from intelligent textiles to self-generating polymers. After two rounds of such funding as part of FP7 – the 7<sup>th</sup> Research Framework Programme - a follow up expert panel was held in 2012 to evaluate the activities and to look at the role of possible new materials for the creative industries initiatives to be included in the next research programme in the EU – Horizon 2020.

*“In the 2010 workshop “New materials for the creative industries”, the objective was to identify possible priorities in the field of research in materials for the creative industry with realistic potential for industrial development and to gather ideas on how to progress on the successful design of materials with improved performance. A pivotal question emerged: how can we foster synergies and collaborations*

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.designpolicy.eu/>

<sup>14</sup> [http://issuu.com/deep\\_initiative/docs/deep\\_glossary/1?e=8568957/3523717](http://issuu.com/deep_initiative/docs/deep_glossary/1?e=8568957/3523717)

<sup>15</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/research/industrial\\_technologies/pdf/creative-industry-workshop-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/industrial_technologies/pdf/creative-industry-workshop-report_en.pdf)



between material scientists and engineers and the creative industries for the generation of growth and jobs in the EU?

To answer this question, a new round table meeting has been organised by the European Commission (DG Research and Innovation, Unit Materials) on October 5th 2012 in Brussels. The aim of the meeting was to hold an open discussion on the following specific points:

1. Can we identify "creative industries" that benefit from innovation materials?
2. Are there needs for materials research and innovation in common across different sectors?
3. How can we bring support to these needs via European Research and Innovation funding schemes?

Some quite encouraging conclusions in the report from this latest round table,<sup>16</sup> indicate a strengthened focus on actually taking the design industry (and architects) by the hand and building a more coherent value-chain of new knowledge and new opportunities, to enable practitioners to benefit from research-based innovation in which design plays an integral part and from which designers can develop new user-friendly and forward thinking solutions.

*"The participants of the round table discussion called for a continuation and reinforcement of material research and innovation support. There should be an increased presence of materials suppliers, manufacturers and final users of the resulting products in technological research and innovation projects. European support should address all bottlenecks found in creating new, better performing and sustainable products, among which: knowledge gaps, IPR issues, access to finance, regulations, and standards. Creativity-driven innovation benefits from richer human and professional skills. Projects and prizes, as well as dedicated events, have been identified as instruments that can spread awareness, stimulate new ideas and the conception of new products, connect players along the value chain, and speed up access to market."*

#### **As design moves into new domains, new demands for materials, material properties and material processing technologies are needed – cont'd**

Others have also done some thinking on the role of new materials and technologies – amongst others the Materials Community<sup>17</sup> and the Knowledge Transfer Network for the Creative Industries in the UK<sup>18</sup> - and it seems quite evident that the correlation between new materials and technologies, and the role of design and design practitioners in the years to come, plays an increasing role in the environments – both digital and physical – where the future of design is being discussed.

#### **New technologies – threat or opportunity**

As much as the development of new materials and new technologies opens up a wealth of new opportunities for the design industry, new challenges – or at least issues – also follow in their path. One, which has already made headlines both within and outside of the design press, relates to the emergence and rapidly increasing permeation of three-dimensional printing. A fast and easy introduction to the technology itself and the issues it raises can be found at a website managed by Christopher Barnatt, a futurist, author, videographer and Associate Professor of Computing and Future Studies in Nottingham University Business School<sup>19</sup>. An American research centre – Lux Research – has estimated the growth of the 3D printed parts market over the next decade, and it leaves no doubt that this new technology, and the material developments it will trigger, will play a quite significant role for product designers in the future. The question is to what extent this is disturbing news or not.

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<sup>16</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/research/industrial\\_technologies/pdf/materials-in-creative-industries-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/industrial_technologies/pdf/materials-in-creative-industries-report_en.pdf)

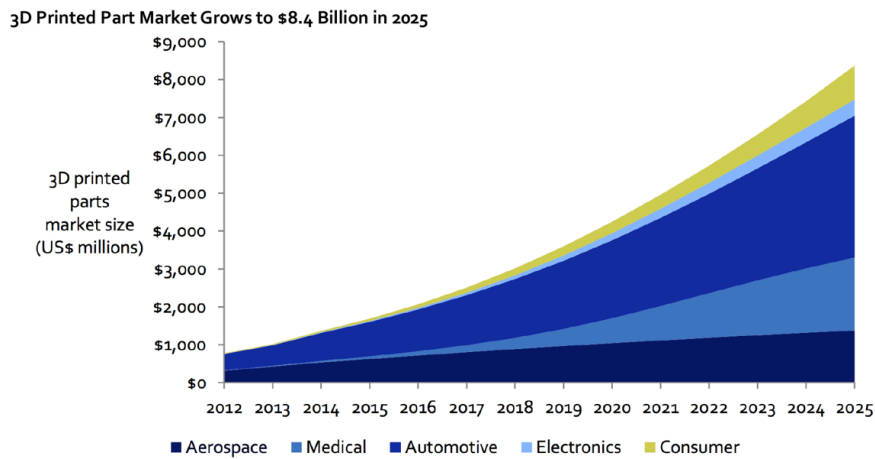
<sup>17</sup> <http://www.matuk.co.uk/docs/MaterialsUK-CreativeIndustries.pdf>

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<https://connect.innovateuk.org/documents/3220887/3676376/Five+Key+Themes+Theme+Champions+Executive+Summary.pdf/fe1e0720-d20d-4f5a-b5ec-c4cf5a1402f2>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.explainingthefuture.com/3dprinting.html>





One thing is beyond question, though – 3D printing has already raised numerous issues related to intellectual property rights and design protection (it was one of the main issues at ITA - International Trademark Association’s annual Design Protection Conference, which was held in Copenhagen in October 2012), to co-creation and collaborative design processes, to demands for new standards and levels of detailing in prototyping, and so on. On the other hand, as the new technologies are no longer simply regarded as helpful as part of the prototyping process, but as actual finished goods manufacturing technologies, it seems obvious that those designers who embark on the opportunities offered by the new technologies will have a clear advantage in the marketplace, as there have been no indications so far that the emergence of 3D printing is, or will become, an actual threat to professional design practice.

## Design processes and methodologies

### **Design is all it used to be, and then increasingly more than that by the day**

While the previous chapter focused on new materials and manufacturing technologies, and the challenges they might represent, the elements of design practice where the most ground breaking changes have taken place relate to the unique, yet diverse, and evermore appreciated processes and methodologies “owned” by design practitioners. Issues related to technology and materials may be of much greater interest to some parts of the community of design practitioners than to others, while issues relating to design processes and methodologies, on the other hand, ought to be of near-universal concern in the design community.

Over the last decade, design as a process has evolved from an intuitive and largely introvert process to an inclusive, participatory, and thus highly complex approach, running on equal portions of empirical and theoretical fuel. The Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design at the Royal College of Art has developed a useful overview of which methods designers currently apply to design of products and services as well as communication and physical spaces.<sup>20</sup>

These changes do not necessarily mean that the fundamental proposition of design practice – as opposed to other professional denominations – has changed. The hallmark of design practitioners is still to deliver new direction and meaningfulness through interpretation and materialization of solutions that cater for user needs, consider contextual parameters and can

<sup>20</sup> <http://designingwithpeople.rca.ac.uk/methods>

be realized within the restrictions of available means. During the first half of the last decade, there was such a “one-eyed” focus on methodology and new design disciplines that the core value of design – that of enhancing the attractiveness of solutions by proposing more aesthetic, more functional and more meaningful propositions than others could – almost drowned in the pool of design discourse. Interestingly, the last four or five years have allowed for a renaissance of these vital elements of design practice, in part because of stubbornness on the part of the professional design community itself - thus making space for a more balanced and faceted discussion about what design has to offer.<sup>21</sup>

Resting assured that the original qualities of design practice are still valid, it makes sense to look at some of the new trends dominating the scene. One of them is the much more structured and documented approach to user analysis and engagement. Engaging users in the design process is nothing new per se – it was strongly both advocated and practiced by the Bauhaus movement and design pioneers throughout the world, from Ray and Charles Eames to the icons of the Danish Modern era. However, the methodologies were individual and somewhat random. What makes up the novelty is how the users are engaged. There are numerous good guides to doing so – in addition to the already cited one from Helen Hamlyn – e.g. the Swedish “The Weave”<sup>22</sup> and the infamous IDEO “Human-centered Toolkit” which is a very useful (and free) downloadable resource.<sup>23</sup> They all share the same DNA, which is a further development of the design core values previously referred to, merged with anthropological and ethnographical methodologies and sensitivity to the complexity of the digital era, issues of sustainability and social responsibility and – finally – a much more articulated awareness both in user communities and among providers of products, services and communication that users not only expect to be engaged in, but which willingly contribute to creative processes which may in one way or another influence their own lives.

Another overriding factor of contemporary design practice is the acknowledgment that design does not exist in isolation. Design serves a purpose – this is not new, but it also depends on and acts to support a number of other processes and strategies in an organisation. This, in turn means, that designers are expected to know and understand the language and thinking of people, whose success criteria are much more easily measured than the designers’ own. Clients hire designers to enhance their bottom line – sometimes only their financial bottom-line, and other times their triple bottom-line.

This fact on one hand seems obvious, and yet on the other has proved so difficult to cope with. Designers are rarely trained to think, talk or act as economists – as is true for most creative professionals. This is only one out of many conclusions in a comprehensive study of “The Entrepreneurial Dimension of the Cultural and Creative Industries” made by the University of Utrecht for EU’s DG Education and Culture in 2010:<sup>24</sup>

*“Essential training, from writing business plans to relating product ideas to a market situation, is required to remain informed and to reflect on new developments.”*

An issue which in response to this and many other observations of design practitioners’ often limited ability to live up to the marketplace’s expectations, in terms of fully understanding the commercial perimeters of the project or value-chain in which they play a vital part, is cross-disciplinarity or multi-disciplinarity. A project is more often than not dependent on input from more than one professional discipline – i.e. multi-disciplinary. It becomes cross-disciplinary when one professional discipline is pursued as an integrated reflection of another – e.g. when the design service is delivered as an integrated function of a market strategy. Recently,

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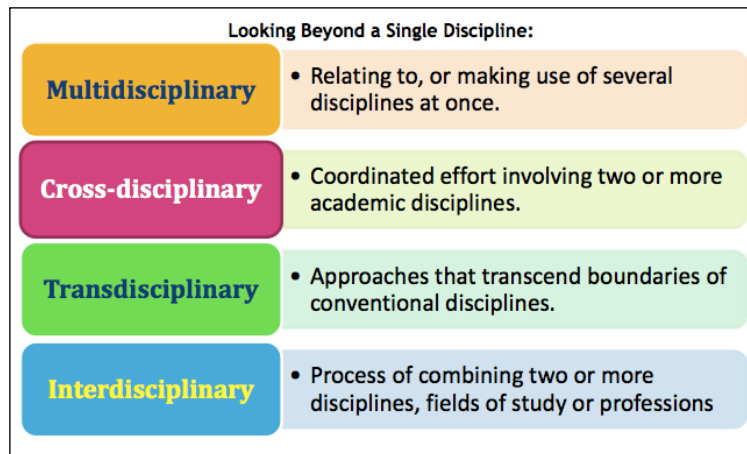
<sup>21</sup> <http://www.arthistory.upenn.edu/vlst/2010-studentsites/em/content/form-function>

<sup>22</sup> <http://womensplace.osu.edu/assets/files/TheWeave-July2011.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.ideo.com/work/human-centered-design-toolkit/>

<sup>24</sup> [http://www.intracen.org/uploadedFiles/intracenorg/Content/About\\_ITC/Where\\_are\\_we\\_working/Multi-country\\_programmes/CARIFORUM/EDCCI\\_report-by-European-Commission.pdf](http://www.intracen.org/uploadedFiles/intracenorg/Content/About_ITC/Where_are_we_working/Multi-country_programmes/CARIFORUM/EDCCI_report-by-European-Commission.pdf)

discussions on design education and development of professional design practice have focused on the need for designers to work “strategically”. However, this would imply that each individual designer would have to become multi-disciplinary in him – or herself, as business strategy is an area of equal complexity to design itself. Thus, cross-disciplinarity is probably a more viable approach – implying that designers acquire a basic understanding of business related issues, but link up with business strategy professionals when needed and when the requested service stretches beyond the core metier of design practice as we know it.



source: [www.vision2lead.com](http://www.vision2lead.com)

This might seem like a diversion from where we started, but the balance between focusing on core methodological issues like how to engage stakeholders and benefit from their contribution, how to “read the weak signals”, as Krister Ahlström once said, and how to transform knowledge of needs, dreams and aspirations on one hand, and materials and manufacturing processes on the other, into meaningful output needs to be at the very centre of the design professional discourse in the time to come.

## Service design

### **Managing the process of integrating existing design practices into systemic services is currently the most acute challenge for the design industry**

Besides “design thinking”, “service design” has been the hottest concept related to the development of design practice during the last four or five years. Just like other concepts suddenly capturing the attention of both design researches, practitioners and the design attentive parts of industry and the political environment, service design is still rather loosely defined, and is being used quite freely by many different players who, each for their own good reasons, see a potential in capitalizing on the concept. A good mirror of how a relatively new term is most commonly interpreted is how it reads in the oracle of modern times; Wikipedia;

*“Service design is the activity of planning and organizing people, infrastructure, communication and material components of a service in order to improve its quality and the interaction between service provider and customers. The purpose of service design methodologies is to design according to the needs of customers or participants, so that the service is user-friendly, competitive and relevant to the customers.”*

The most provocative question, which seems to be asked more and more often, is whether designers – at large – are capable of delivering good service design. More often than we seem

to admit, the answer unfortunately seems to be no. The reason for this might be that service design, as indicated in the heading, is a systemic discipline – an approach, as it reads in the above excerpt from Wikipedia, to “plan and organize” a multitude of components into a coherent relation between two or more parties. Of course, planning and organizing goes into most design operations, but more as a means to create a new component than as a goal in itself. Service design is possibly the most process-dependent design discipline of all, and adding to that, its core is not a tangible outcome, but a new way of doing something. Why should designers be better at this than anyone else? Well, quite a few scholars claim that the traditional skills and competencies of designers could potentially be not only relevant but key to developing new and improving existing services in both the public and private sectors. One of the sources already referred to, Lucy Kimbell of Oxford University, writes in her article “The turn to Service Design”<sup>25</sup>, that:

*“The most relevant actors in the further development of service design are likely to be the designers themselves, managers and entrepreneurs in organizations offering services, especially those involved in service management, operations, marketing and innovation, institutions, such as design departments in education, government bodies and policymakers, academics studying services – especially those with an interest in design and innovation, service users and technologies which may support new arrangements of services and the involvement of users, for example in open innovation.”*

Despite its length, the one sentence above cuts it quite sharply. Designers can and will play a significant role in developing service design as a concept and field of practice, but not on their own. More than ever, those designers who decide to pursue the field of service design as their specialty, will have to depend on their contribution being only that – a contribution to a complex delivery – and on an army of other contributors from a wide range of professional backgrounds. Some designers have already worked in such ways before and are trained in dealing with the collaborative nature of this kind of work. Others suffer from giving up the sovereignty of being “the” designer behind a solution. In any case, it calls for careful consideration for designers coming from industrial design or visual communication to embark on the service design train. There are many indications that designers have a lot to contribute to service design processes, and yet a question remains as to whether more than a handful of designers and/or design agencies have yet nurtured their new design discipline to a degree that they are able to champion a design service process of a certain complexity. Perhaps service design will only be as natural a part of design practice as the more “traditional” design disciplines when service design has established itself as an educational direction alongside industrial design and visual communication. Fortunately, there are already some well-tested sources for how to work with service design both in public and private sectors, e.g. an online resource developed by Design Vlaanders and Yellow Window<sup>26</sup>, the UK Government Design Service Manual<sup>27</sup> and – on a more overruling level, the EU “Smart Guide to Service Innovation”<sup>28</sup> – all valuable tools for those design practitioners who want to investigate whether service design should be part of their own future proposition.

A unique feature of service design is that – as a design discipline – it is equally relevant for public as it is for private sectors. One might say that so is communication design and design of a wide range of industrially manufactured products, but there is no doubt that as service design matures and its effects are documented, a quite overwhelming new market opens up for design practitioners, namely that connected to the largest client community in modern societies, the public sector – whether the services are procured directly by a public authority or by a private enterprise as part of a public-private-partnership model. And as government bodies start embracing the concept, as many have already done, at least in principle – like the UK

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<sup>25</sup> [http://www.lucykimbell.com/stuff/ServiceDesignKimbell\\_final.pdf](http://www.lucykimbell.com/stuff/ServiceDesignKimbell_final.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.servicedesigntoolkit.org/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/service-manual>

<sup>28</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/regional-sme-policies/documents/no.4\\_service\\_innovation\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/regional-sme-policies/documents/no.4_service_innovation_en.pdf)

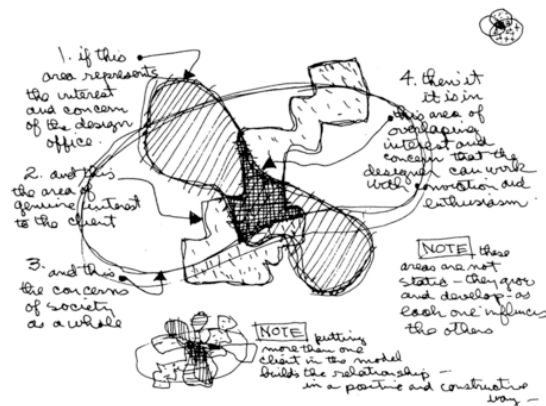
government<sup>29</sup> – the serving right will gradually be left to the design community itself to deliver design for better public services as well as the documentation of how it benefits both the public sector and those that it serves.

That being said, service design is, as already mentioned, also a new opportunity for those design practitioners who target private sector clients. Not only do more and more companies build their business models on service propositions only – thus creating a new need for service design services, so to speak, and useful tools to deliver “customer journeys”.<sup>30</sup> – but manufacturers of tangible products will also spend an increasing part of their innovation resources on developing services and business models to support and enhance their core product or products – a phenomenon for which there is already a more and more commonly used term, at least in academic circles: *servitization*.<sup>31</sup>

## Socially responsible and sustainable design

### From niche to universally integrated considerations

For more than a generation, pioneers in advocating and practising socially responsible and sustainable design – based on varying degrees of solid facts, intuition and indignation, and always with the best possible intentions – have managed to grasp the attention of at least parts of the design community. Among these pioneers, it would feel wrong not to mention Victor Papanek as possibly the most influential.<sup>32</sup> But Ray and Charles Eames, also previously mentioned, were very clear about their design taking into consideration not only the needs of their clients and their own aspirations as designers, but also an overall consideration for society as a whole, as their famous model shows.



Over the last decade or so, these issues have become commonplace elements of design practice, insofar as design practitioners have access to the knowledge they need to actually deliver the optimal solution from a sustainability point of view. The challenge for most designers, however, is to source sufficient and reliable data to do so. In part, there might be issues over which the experts battle, and in part, the complexity of a product or service might present the designer with such an overwhelming amount of data to process and assess that this part of the job might seem unreasonably time consuming in light of the resources allocated to the project.

<sup>29</sup>

[http://www.policyconnect.org.uk/apdig/sites/site\\_apdig/files/report/164/fieldreportdownload/designcommissionreport-restartingbritain2-designpublicservices.pdf](http://www.policyconnect.org.uk/apdig/sites/site_apdig/files/report/164/fieldreportdownload/designcommissionreport-restartingbritain2-designpublicservices.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.innovateuk.org/documents/1524978/1814792/Keeping+Connected+-+Design+methods+for+developing+services+%28Archive%29/d358586d-80b3-4f1e-b753-16750434829d>

<sup>31</sup> [http://www.cambridgeservicealliance.org/uploads/downloadfiles/Can a Product Manufacturer be a Successful Service Provider.pdf](http://www.cambridgeservicealliance.org/uploads/downloadfiles/Can+a+Product+Manufacturer+be+a+Successful+Service+Provider.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> <http://papanek.org/about/victor-j-papanek/>



This may not be a problem when working for organizations with sufficient resources to guide and supply the design team with the data they need, but it poses a great challenge for designers where this is not the case.

One of the most dominant “schools” or directions influencing design practice during the last five-six years has been C2C – Cradle to Cradle – developed by the designer William McDonough and chemist Michael Braungart, and published in their book “*Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things*” back in 2002. Bram van der Grinten, who is an action researcher developing methodology for Nature Inspired Design (NID) at TU Delft, has written a “how to” guide which makes the principles of C2C more easily accessible.<sup>33</sup> Even though it dates back half a decade, the guide could, for some, — be a useful companion if or when a client expects the design delivery to be assessed according to this “school”.

Another approach, which does not appear as a business concept to the same extent as C2C, is LCA – life cycle assessment. The European Platform on Life Cycle Assessment has made a very short yet quite useful introduction to the LCA concept<sup>34</sup>, which, in contrast to C2C, raises very few controversies.

The two approaches specifically mentioned above are certainly not the only ones, but they deserve a mention because of the impact they have had on design practice at large. Other approaches, which may also be worth acquainting oneself with as a designer, are SLOW design<sup>35</sup>, biomimicry (the idea of learning from nature itself)<sup>36</sup>, emotional durability<sup>37</sup> and upcycling<sup>38</sup> - a concept which quite recently seems to have caught on, and which stems from the same McDonough and Braungart who introduced C2C. At the end of the day, practicing sustainable design will most often be a combination of bits and pieces from all of the above, combined with the individual designer’s own aspirations to reduce the “footprint” from his or her own professional practice.

Sustainable design requires responsiveness to issues of environmental responsibility, but also requires knowledge of, and the ability to assess issues of social responsibility as well as financial responsibility – in line with triple bottom line thinking – or even quadruple, as is the core idea of AIGA’s “the Living Principles”<sup>39</sup> – adding cultural vitality to the three other elements.

Additionally, a specific responsibility rests with the designer – the responsibility, which comes with user advocacy and the power vested in the design practitioners’ influence on the products, services, spaces and communication they develop for others. This does not imply that all products or services should necessarily be available to or accessible by all, but it does impose on all in possession of such influence the responsibility to assess issues of diversity and accessibility – for which principles like design-for-all and universal design are valuable guides.<sup>40</sup>

All these concerns are currently day-to-day considerations for many design practitioners, as knowledge of and the ability to advise clients with regard to such issues as an integrated part of the design service is expected. However, they also pose designers with additional demands for keeping abreast with new knowledge, new methodologies and new ideas. This, in turn, raises issues of how the design community, design support organizations and design political measures can contribute to making new insights and methodologies to deliver socially responsible and sustainable design that is more accessible to the individual practitioner – at a

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.bluehaired.com/corner/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/Cradle-to-Cradle-in-a-nutshell-Bram-van-der-Grinten-2008.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> <http://eplca.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>

<sup>35</sup> [http://www.slowlab.net/CtC\\_SlowDesignPrinciples.pdf](http://www.slowlab.net/CtC_SlowDesignPrinciples.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.designboom.com/contemporary/biomimicry.html>

<sup>37</sup> <http://claudelarguin.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/claudels-thesis.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> [http://www.floriesalnot.com/images/Press/P70-73\\_Upcycling-131.pdf](http://www.floriesalnot.com/images/Press/P70-73_Upcycling-131.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> [http://www.indesignusergroup.com/chapters/baltimore/files/1417/AIGA\\_The\\_Living\\_Principles\\_Framework.pdf](http://www.indesignusergroup.com/chapters/baltimore/files/1417/AIGA_The_Living_Principles_Framework.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.designforall.org/en/downloads/dossier-DfA-Fd-ang.pdf>

reasonable cost, both financially and in terms of time invested.

## Design management

### **Design is only of significant commercial value if it is properly managed**

While the use of design is proven to be valuable to private as well as public organisations, research also shows quite clearly that there is a direct correlation between the strategic importance and application of design and the bottom line effect. Moreover, design processes, which are not being managed as integral to overall corporate strategies, are not likely to give the client organisation return on investment.<sup>41</sup> This relation between the application of design management and the value of either procuring external or using internal design resources is quite significant – both for design practitioners and their services, for design managers and for organisations investing in design.

A valuable source of information about how design management is being used in real life is to be found in the DME Survey from 2009. The overall picture has most probably not changed significantly since then.<sup>42</sup> It concludes that there is little structural focus on design in management courses and that there also appears to be a lack of specific training options for experienced designers with sufficient management skills who want targeted design management training. It also concludes that this situation can only be turned around, and the necessary progress can only be sustained, through common efforts by broad groups: the design sector itself, the training/education sector, trade associations, business and design support organisations and governments. What might have changed over the last three or four years, however, is the appreciation of the need to see design as an integral part of corporate and public strategies in order to benefit fully from design – at least on a policy level. What remains is the need for more research, more training opportunities and increased awareness among design-dependent organisations of how design management can co-exist with and actually enhance existing processes for the development of new products and services. Some researchers, amongst others Claudia Acklin from Switzerland, have focused on how to lower the barriers for uptake of design management in the corporate sector.<sup>43</sup> One of the projects co-financed by the 1<sup>st</sup> Action Plan of the European Design Innovation Initiative, European House of Design Management, aims at doing the same in the public sector, based on the knowledge and experiences already gathered from the private sector.

A question, which will be addressed again and again, is whether design management is a role or a function, whether it can or should be part of the design practitioner's proposition or if it takes dedicated design managers – with or without design backgrounds – to manage design processes successfully and profitably. One of the most renowned researchers on design management, Brigitte Borja de Mozota, advocates design management as a management function at the highest possible level, and emphasises the need for designers to optimise their existing core professional skills: *"Managers have to integrate design theories into their organizational theories, and see "design science", design methods, and conceptual models as skills for designing their organizational platforms, structures, and systems. This is a challenge for design education. Designers have to reinvent the guilds, and to become more effective entrepreneurs in order to help society at large to face the changes in this transitional period between two sociotechnical systems. They also have to*

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<sup>41</sup> <http://www.ibrarian.net/navon/page.jsp?paperid=17302608&searchTerm=conference+1st>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/18027135/download-pdf-design-management-survey-2009-beda>

<sup>43</sup> [http://www.hslu.ch/d-paper\\_design\\_management\\_absorption\\_modelacklin\\_11\\_\\_2\\_.pdf](http://www.hslu.ch/d-paper_design_management_absorption_modelacklin_11__2_.pdf)



*design their profession as a part of the creative industries.*"<sup>44</sup> But then, on the other hand, we have seen some first class examples of professional designers moving into and becoming champions of design management, so there is probably no fixed formula – except from the quite likely precondition that to perform design management at a high level, one needs to have both deep respect for and deep understanding of both design and management as complementary disciplines.

## Epilogue

### **The future of design practice is a function of complexity and higher expectations**

Design practice as an independent professional discipline – at least as we know it today – is still rather young, even though early references to “designer” as a job title had emerged before World War Two. Since then, the role of design and designers has evolved and thoroughly changed decade by decade. Part of this change relates to the increasing complexity of design application – from singular objects in one or few materials to complex systems of integral technologies and functionalities. Another axis of change is the increasing focus on measurable effects in terms of ROI – return on investment. There is no reason to believe that these two parallel trends will not also continue to challenge design practice in the future.<sup>45</sup>

The question is how the design community and the individual design practitioner responds to these new challenges. On an individual basis, the challenge might be that of limiting one’s scope in terms of service proposition – as a means to become as pointed and competitive as possible. For design firms, the challenge might be to develop a portfolio of competences and methodological resources to match a specific market segment. And for the design profession at large, the challenge might be to retain the right of serve in the field of giving form and meaning to the development of products, services and communication – without closing in on itself, slowly creating an open space for other professional communities integrating their own version of design into their propositions, and thus eventually leaving the design profession obsolete.

This might sound like a dismal scenario, but it is not necessarily all that far-fetched. In its publication “what matters – social innovation; can fresh thinking solve the world’s most intractable problems?” McKinsey, one of the world’s most successful management consultancies adopts ideas of both design thinking and social design as ways to solve some of the big challenges we face.<sup>46</sup> Which, of course is good news. However, it could potentially also be one very clear signal that the “mckinseys” of this world are slowly adopting not only design thinking, but design doing as part of their offer to demanding clients in the market for change. Some close observers of the design community and the rapid development in design practice are just waiting for the large, multi-national consultancies to embrace design for real. This will certainly present both design practitioners and design businesses throughout the world with some hitherto unknown challenges. For this, and for so many other good reasons, amongst others the growing political awareness of design’s potential, the design community – and design practitioners and the professional design community in particular – needs to ensure that the design discourse and the playing field for designers and professional design practice do not slip and slide away from under them. The design community –on national, regional and

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<sup>44</sup> <http://www.designresearchsociety.org/docs-procs/paris11/paris-procs11.pdf>

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.designresearchsociety.org/docs-procs/DRS2010/PDF/121.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> <http://publicinnovation.org/pdf/McKinsey - What Matters Social Innovation.pdf>

international levels – will be even more vulnerable and fragile than what we see today if the “ownership” of design slowly changes hands. Thus, it is crucial that designers across disciplines and across national and regional borders, unite to recapture the domain of professional design from the multi-nationals, from the MBA community and from all the other forces which are needed to support and promote design as a powerful source of innovation and quality of life, but which might not have the same sensitivity to the core values of design as the community of professional designers itself. At the European Design Innovation Summit in Helsinki in 2011, Commission Vice President Antonio Tajani said that:

*“European corporations and the public sector need desperately quality design innovations. There are 23 million private businesses, for them, design could be the answer for a sustainable growth.”*

That must be the most direct challenge, and yet the most intriguing opportunity and invitation, European designers have faced in many years. It’s now up to the European design community to rise to the occasion.

**Please note:** All links referred to were active and corresponding with the text at the time of publication. As references change rapidly, some of the texts links referred to might thus have been moved or deleted from their original locations.