BEDA Survey of Membership Benefits offered by Professional Designers' Associations

Executive Summary

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The **BEDA MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS SURVEY** was developed for BEDA by the “Cluster on Membership Benefits” to map the existing benefits and services delivered by professional designers’ associations as well as other organisations representing and supporting design practitioners in Europe. The objective was to better understand the expectations of, as well as the services delivered to, the members of both BEDA members and other associations delivering such services throughout Europe.

For the purpose of being able to follow up on particularly interesting data, the survey was not conducted anonymously. However, discretion with regard to direct reference to individuals or organisations in the subsequent report was promised.

The survey was sent to approximately 75 identified organisations representing design practitioners around Europe. Furthermore, links to the survey was shared through the BEDA Newsletter.

After the initial deployment of the survey, two bulk reminder mails as well as a dozen “private” reminders were sent to respondents, who would have been expected to possess valuable information.

As a result of the combined efforts, the number of responses in total ended at 28 – whereof 26 are valid and complete responses from representative bodies across 19 European countries.

The assumption is that the knowledge gathered through the survey will enable BEDA to share best practices of how the practice of design is promoted and supported in Europe, as well as to inform the development of policies or other relevant initiatives in a **Design Europe 2021** context.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The survey results to a certain degree dismantle a myth that has grown to be something, we seem to accept without questioning; that membership organisations at large struggle and slowly slide towards extinction. That does not seem to be the case. Among the 21 organisations responding to the question of whether they have experienced growth or decline during the time period 2000 – 2015, two organisations - 10% were stable – a surprising 52% - 11 organisations had growth, and a modest 38% - 8 experienced decline. This may also explain a rather optimistic outlook on the future, as a vast majority foresees either growth or stability, while less than a third foresee decline in membership and revenue. Having said that, there is no doubt that some associations struggle, and some have survived despite dramatic decline – as much as 90% over the last 15 years – or 70%, 53% or 33% – all significant numbers, which – assuming that the services offered did not change first – reflect a severe change in the demand for the services of a professional design association, caused by either new competition, new needs or new structural conditions. As part of the follow-up of the survey, the five associations with the highest growth as well as the five with the most dramatic decline have been asked to elaborate on what they assess to be the determining factors for either.

More than half of the respondent associations depend – to varying degrees – on public funding, and more than three out of four depend on other sources of income than membership fees. There seems to be very little correlation between the extent of non-member revenue and the extent of growth or decline, and there are no definite trends among the associations receiving public funding as to whether they will depend more or less on such funding in the future – other than around half of them assessing the support to remain steady.

The associations deliver a wide range of services – material as well as immaterial – with a distinct focus on the one-to-one experience. Networking events and various forms of counsel and advice top the lists of both what is being offered and which services are the most valued. This is quite important, as the justification of associations like many of the BEDA members rests in the ability to facilitate meetings, conversations and exchange of knowledge and inspiration in real life, as there are countless sources of parallel, digitally delivered services – paid for as well as free. This does not mean that the internet and all its offerings does not compete with and have an influence on the demand for “traditional” associations, but it shows that there is still a need for and an appreciation of what can only be shared in a physical environment.

The overall picture is that of a landscape of predominantly small membership dependent organisations, rarely reflecting the importance and magnitude of the value created by professional designers, but which – for the most part – are kicking and alive, believing in the future and fulfilling an important need.

Some figures to observe while reading this report: The total annual operating budgets of the 26 respondents add up to an estimated € 10-15 millions. If we believe that these figures mirror the overall picture – hence including non-responding organisations, the total revenue of the associations representing professional designers in Europe would be around € 30-45 millions, which does not come across as a lot in light of EUIPO's assessment that there are approximately 410.000 design professionals in Europe, generating an annual value of € 36 billions. It means that out of the € 87.000 that each professional designer creates of value, less than € 100 is spent on supporting the activities taking place within the realm of the professional design associations – inclusive of funding provided by public authorities, sponsors and private partners.