

BEDA International Design Policy Conference: Creating next generation design policy for Europe

The time for design to serve, is now

Europe's future industrial policy should be 'green for all' and based on fair competition. Social policies should stimulate greater cohesion and shared European values. In these ambitious tasks, design is certainly needed to help with the sustainable transformation of our societies and businesses. Many at the European Commission, and a diversity of experts across many different fields, increasingly welcome design as an integral and important player in this necessary if not urgent shift in values.

And yet, many politicians and policy-makers have still to understand its full potential. The complex global challenges we face of climate change, digitalisation and the challenge to European values can benefit from design. Last week on 5th December in Helsinki, during BEDA's first international design policy conference, 'Successful Europe – How can design serve?', these three challenges were interrogated and discussed with a group of 100 experts from the fields of business, environment, government, policy-making, technology and design.

Through framing the simple question, 'How can design serve?', delegates sought to support the development of next generation design policy for Europe – a Europe that can successfully transition in the face of multiple challenges.

Design plays a strong role

Moderated by BEDA's President **Päivi Tahkokallio**, the intensive and collaborative one-day conference held at Oodi, (Helsinki's award-winning and co-designed central library), created a much-needed dialogue between the design sector, policy makers and relevant stakeholders in Europe.

Päivi Tahkokallio explained the thinking behind the conference by saying, "*BEDA sees the role of design as elementary to Europe's success and the success of Europe will depend on our ability to solve systemic, complicated challenges. We decided to focus on three of these - climate change, digitalisation and values — and design will and needs to play a strong role.*"

During her opening speech, Finland's Minister of science and culture, **Hanna Kosonen**, highlighted the role of design in our everyday life. As a politician, she emphasised that politicians need a much better understanding of how to support the creative sector with legislation in Europe and how to enable greater co-working with citizens. She also reminded the audience that design has a role in creating immaterial value, necessary for sustainable growth.

The view from the European Commission

A very promising message for European design was delivered by our keynote speaker **Anna Athanasopoulou**, Head of Tourism, Emerging and Creative Industries at the European Commission. Anna Athanasopoulou acknowledged the pervasive issue of funding and invited the creative industries to look to a variety of different funding instruments including, for example, [COSME](#).

In the face of the changing realities of Europe, due in part to forthcoming legislation, **Anna Athanasopoulou** foresees that design can create solutions in fields such as green transition,

the shift towards circularity, sustainable production and consumption, the bringing of solutions closer to local communities and the development of human-centric technologies.

The EU supports the creative industries through ensuring a favorable policy environment. This is achieved through policy coordination and cooperation in the fields of culture policy - for example, audiovisual and media, and industrial & international trade. Legislation also has a powerful role to play, for example, through protecting the rights of the creative industries including through robust and effective intellectual property rights.

Immediately following the conference, on 11th of December, the Commission proposed its [European Green Deal](#) an ambitious attempt to make Europe the first carbon-neutral continent by 2050. This includes climate neutrality, strong clean industry and social equality. The complementary [New Circular Economy Action Plan](#) focuses on sustainable resource use, especially in resource-intensive and high-impact sectors such as textiles and construction.

Supporting small and medium-size business, finding a European solution for ethical questions related to technical innovations (5G, AI), and the need to make Europe globally stronger, were also highlighted as areas of focus for the Commission.

Finally, Anna Athanasopoulou also raised the need for all to be aware of the [new political guidelines](#) of the incoming European Commission.

The future is in inclusion and collaboration

Professor of Practice in Contemporary Design, **Julia Lohman** from Aalto University presented her experimental work with seaweed demonstrating, through that vehicle of activity, an

expansive and strategic overview of the need for design-infused approaches to our future on earth. She emphasised that design needs to come up with options other than human-centric framing. She made a compelling argument for the need to build empathy and knowledge not only between different groups of people, but also between people and other species living on our precious planet.

The values of openness and equality were also handled in **Tommi Laitio's** presentation on how values were, from the very outset – as a design intent - built into the foundations of the design of public space, as exemplified through the Oodi library. As Executive Director, Culture and Leisure for the City of Helsinki, Tommi Laitio brought forward evidence of the beneficial impact on wider society through increased inclusiveness, achieved by purposeful co-collaboration with thousands of citizens.

Design has a special place in productivity and research

Chairman of IFRSI and previous EU Commissioner of Finland, **Erkki Liikanen**, foresaw promising times for designers to enhance the productivity of companies. Liikanen also highlighted the clear fact that the true potential of digitalisation has not yet been reached.

“If you don't change your taste or habits, you're an ideal candidate for AI design. However, when the world or your lifestyle changes, human designers are needed. Only human designers understand the human experience and that is something AI is not able to replace”, Liikanen told the audience.

Following BEDA's intensive insights workshop on next generation design policy for Europe, the audience had a chance to hear, in the conference's closing presentation, an example of design methods integrated with science.

Industry 2030 and the need for sustainable science

Antti Vasara, President and CEO of VTT, the Technical Research Centre of Finland and President of EARTO, the European Association of Research and Technology Organisations, presented his organisations goals in building a sustainable yet competitive Europe.

“How we are to invest in research and innovation is really at the heart of the new Commission. It is important to explain to decision-makers why it makes sense to fund research.”, he claimed.

Vasara’s participation in ‘Industry 2030’, the EU Commission’s High Level Working Group on Europe’s industrial future was also presented. The work of the roundtable concluded earlier in 2019 and Vasara was able to outline the [list of actions for the new Commission](#).

BEDA’s on-going policy work

The conference closed with the commitment from BEDA to continue the collaborative process, with both existing and new stakeholders and partners, of developing next generation design policy for Europe. This work will build upon the key outputs of the day.

As BEDA President and conference moderator, **Päivi Tahkokallio** thanked all attendees for their contributions to supporting a Successful Europe through design.

Image: Emmi Korhonen (STT Lehtikuva)

Text: Elina Perttula with Kaskasmedia (conference rapporteur)