



SEE DESIGN
Sharing Experience
on Design Support
for SMEs

SEEdesign Bulletin

Sharing experience on design support

Issue 4 March 2007

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2007 is a promising year. In December SEEdesign will conclude its activities, but before then we will start planning for the future. We want to establish where our focus should be with a view to continuing to contribute to the development of networks and the sharing of knowledge about design support and promotion in Europe.

Any analysis of design support has to integrate disciplines as diverse as business strategy, regional development policy, management and of course design itself (in the broadest sense). For this reason the professionals operating in this field come from very diverse backgrounds -- from business to anthropology. Relatively speaking, they are designers themselves only occasionally! This broad range of disciplines and mixture of professions probably contributes to the lack of focus and it may be one of the reasons why there is so little conveniently-located material published on this topic.

At the recent APCI Conference in Paris this January, the issue was raised of the lack of shared information on design support. A request was repeated for more useful research, more efficient sharing of information and a vehicle for the continuous exchange of experiences. This was encouraging for the work that we have already established over the last 24 months within the SEEdesign partnership.

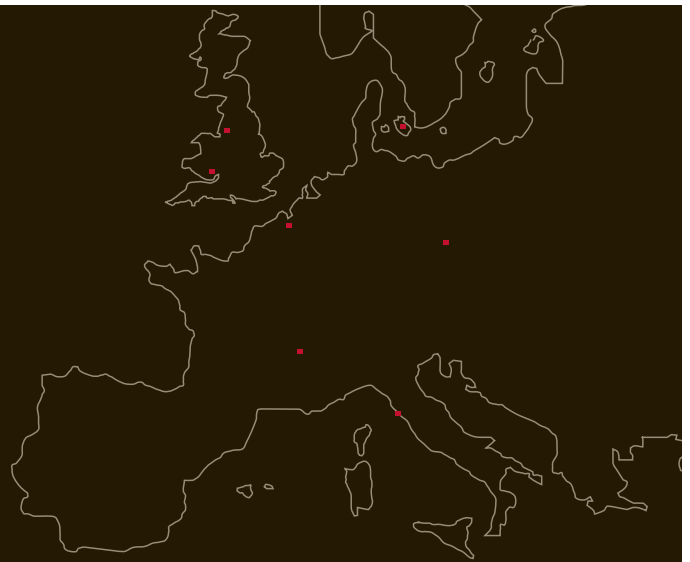
SEEdesign has been tackling this problem since 2005. The generation and sharing of knowledge on design support and co-operation between seven European institutions has been made possible by the INTERREG IIIC fund. Besides the meetings that have given the partners the chance to learn about each others' projects, this Bulletin and the SEEdesign Library form a rich source of freely available information.

We have recently added podcasts to the list of project outputs. They can be downloaded from the website. This is a more immediate way to share the content that is presented and discussed during our various meetings and presentations. At the same time, it is a new venture and we are still learning how to develop this kind of material in the most accessible way for everyone.

This 4th issue of the SEEdesign Bulletin presents research from Dr Philippa Ashton from Bath University (UK). To give us an insight into current and future issues for design support in their countries, the Bulletin features interviews with Geraldo Pougy from Brazil and Judit Várhelyi from Hungary. The 'Design Support in Practice' session brings examples of design support from Portugal and France. The first shows a programme that backed Portuguese companies in targeting foreign European markets and the second, '4 Tuesdays on Ecodesign', is the story of seminars to raise awareness of ecodesign among designers and project managers in the French region of Rhone-Alps. The theme of Ecodesign continues in an article from Dr Frank O'Connor from the EcoDesign Centre, Wales.

The SEEdesign Library now contains 20 interesting stories about the practice of design support around the world. Please access www.seedesign.org to find out more. We are still looking for further contributions from people who can share examples of effective regional design policy and the practice of design support. We look forward to hearing from you.

Gavin Cawood and Gisele Raulik
Design Wales



THE SEE DESIGN PARTNERSHIP

The SEEdesign Bulletin is produced by Design Wales as part of the activities of SEEdesign -- a project part-financed by the European Union (ERDF) within the INTERREG IIIC Programme.

SEEdesign provides a unique opportunity for seven partners from around Europe to share their experiences of delivering design support programmes. As a consequence of developing constructive working relationships over the three years of the programme, the outcome will be the realisation of best practice models and the development of tools to measure the effectiveness of current and future projects.

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Design Innovators and Design Laggards

Dr Philippa Ashton



Those who have been involved in schemes to develop regional design capability will recognise the difficulty of trying to sell design to SMEs apparently impervious to its advantages – even though they know that others are already reaping the benefits. Here we describe a research project which identified relevant differences between design innovators and design laggards in the UK's West Midlands region in order to develop new strategies to help both parties.

By 2004, the date of the research, a number of design development schemes supported by local Universities and the RDA in the West Midlands were already in place. The Design Advantage project was an opportunity to take stock of these activities and develop new strategies that would link and build on this expertise. Supported by Advantage West Midlands Innovative Action programme, a team of local design academics mapped existing projects and developed insights into new needs to inform future planning. An important aim was to make recommendations for effective networks and methods of business intervention which would promote the awareness and embedding of design knowledge, skills and values. The Design Innovators and Laggards research was part of this larger project.

The West Midlands Region

The West Midlands region is in the heart of England. It contains the large cities of Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Coventry and Stoke-on-Trent, and has a large rural hinterland. It has a broad and varied economy and contributes £68.8 billion to the UK's Gross Value Added. The largest sector continues to be manufacturing with 24.9% of the region's GVA (UK average 18.8%), the biggest share of any region in the UK. The region holds significant clusters where design plays an important part. These include Stoke-on-Trent's ceramics industry and car design (based around a dwindling manufacturing resource) in Coventry and Birmingham. The rate of economic growth was broadly in line with the UK national average during the three years up to 2001. There are however, wide variations between different parts of the region from Warwickshire – 102% of the UK average to Shropshire with 72% of the UK average GVA.

About Design Advantage

Design Advantage aimed to develop insights about the future business design needs compared to existing support and to devise ways to promote design to audiences inside and outside the region. One goal was an increased collaboration between existing providers to ensure less duplication, to focus on provision of strength and encourage networking and inter-organisational learning.

The Design Advantage core project team comprised three academics from Staffordshire University Faculty of Arts Media and Design, while the wider team comprised a range of academics, consultants and designers spread throughout the region. During the first stage of the project existing design initiatives were discovered and mapped. In total, more than 65 regional and national initiatives, groups and individuals were identified as being part of the existing pattern of support. Of these, over 40 appearing to cover design issues most closely, were investigated fully. A database was established to provide lists of initiatives in a sub-region or with particular beneficiaries or which have similar aims, methods or any combination of these features.

This was followed by research into key characteristics of some of the region's design innovators to assess their use of the environment in fuelling and sustaining

innovation. This study is more fully described below. Finally, there was a period for the development of strategies for key elements of future provision, led by teams from different parts of the region and using both mapping and innovator data.

Context and Research Method

To put the results of the mapping into context, there was a need to understand what mechanisms companies might use to fuel design innovation and an assessment of the conditions required for receptiveness to intervention. In the past, major postal questionnaires had been used to establish design needs. However, the response rate had been low, particularly among the non-aware SMEs which made up the bulk of the population. Instead, a study of carefully selected design innovators in the region was undertaken to discover why they valued design and how they maintained design innovativeness. To provide a comparison, a similar study was undertaken amongst non-design aware companies to see whether we could determine differences of approach to development.

It was decided to focus the investigation on the relationship that companies have with their external environment and to look for 'natural' learning conduits and motivators for innovation which might then be used to drive home the design message. Extensive consideration was given to defining a 'design innovator' and identifying key criteria that highlighted a company as a design innovator within the West Midlands. Given a limited range of existing design or industry specific benchmarks for determining design innovators, design based awards were used to provide a suitable sampling frame. The final sample contained medium sized and micro organisations across a range of industry sectors from different locations within the West Midlands region. The follow up 'laggards' sample matched innovators with companies of the same size, the same industry sectors and sub-region, but who had no external qualities which suggested design innovation. The sample selection in this case was more difficult to achieve. The fact that an organisation had not won an award would not necessarily mean that they were not innovators. However, candidates were selected using expert opinion and there was a certain amount of sifting possible at early contact stage where the researcher could ascertain attitudes to design.

In all 14 companies were selected – seven innovators and seven laggards - and a design responsible manager was interviewed. The questions asked of innovators focussed on three key areas: motivation for being a design innovator, forces for the maintenance of design innovation and potential barriers. A questionnaire was sent in advance of the interview so that the manager had time to consider responses. For each of the three areas, a list of possible factors was presented. Respondents were asked to select the five most important factors and to talk further about the relevance of their choices and those they did not choose. The process for the laggards was the same, as was the list of possible responses presented, but the questions were slightly different, focussing on product development rather than design specifically. The response choices and recorded discussion were scrutinised for significant differences between the groups as well as possible regional and industry differences.

Findings and discussion

Analysis of the findings from the innovators identified a number of similar characteristics between the companies. Importantly, interviewees commented on the need to differentiate between competitive offerings and in the majority of

cases were operating in highly competitive sectors resulting in a need to “innovate or die”. The need to differentiate themselves from competitors had resulted in design being an essential capability. A consequence of this was the strategic use of design being embedded into mission and strategic planning. A majority considered the use of design as a strategic tool had resulted in a more effective way of satisfying customer needs. Regardless of the industry sector, the three key methods for maintaining design innovativeness were improving product development processes, keeping up to date with technology and identifying customer needs. The development of employee skills, involvement in regional initiatives and working with local universities were seen as less important in maintaining design innovativeness. It was believed that the specialised nature of products and processes meant local universities did not have the relevant high level skills. These perceptions of higher education institutions mostly could not be justified and did not reflect direct experience with a particular university.

When considering the factors that may limit a company’s ability to maintain design innovation, there appear to be a number of linked drivers. Access to venture or outside capital funding was seen as a major issue, particularly among the product and engineering design companies. Concerns were also expressed about access to training and technology. Respondents rated highly the need to access appropriately trained design staff. This factor was also rated as being on of the most important potential barriers to continuing design innovation.

There was an indication that design innovators were also innovators in other aspects of their business and appeared to be generally well managed organisations. The idea that using design effectively is not an isolated characteristic but rather is typical in organisations that are all round good performers presents both problems and opportunities for design development agencies. To maximise the effectiveness of design interventions, one approach might be only to work with those companies that exhibit characteristics that suggest they are already innovative. Working with companies that are already receptive would seem to be more likely to achieve lasting benefits. However, it will be remembered that the innovators were sceptical that local resources held the expertise they needed. Clearly there was a need to ensure consultants and academics had not only relevant knowledge but also promoted their services in an appropriate way. Neglecting the companies that were not receptive to intervention and were ‘laggards’, would mean that potential innovators were not given the chance to develop. There has been some interest in the idea that the introduction of design into an organisation can act as an agent for more widespread change. A good example of this might be where the adoption of a new logo or corporate livery requires a company to examine its strengths, mission and identity. In the case of laggards, the likelihood of lasting change was reduced, but where it did happen there was potential for radical transformation.

A further characteristic that suggested the all round competence of the design innovators was their knowledge of their international competitive environment. For many it was the actions of competitors that drove them to continue to innovate in their products or communications. The kind of competitive activity that often stimulated an innovative reaction was low priced copies rather than superior products. The companies questioned felt their only response was to create a better product and this meant searching for new technologies and processes that would enable product improvement. Innovators were all concerned with their global reach and did not attach importance to local networks. They showed very few relationships with local universities, design initiatives and other businesses. Despite the wealth of literature which claims otherwise, suppliers and collaborators were not rated as particularly important in our sample’s processes of design innovation. The importance placed on markets and competitors as a motivation for design innovation appears significant and one of the final outcomes of this research was that raising awareness of markets should precede or go hand in hand with design interventions.

The laggards research outcomes were less clear and this may be because of the problems in drawing an appropriate sample. However, while the innovators responses were relatively homogenous, the scattered opinion of the laggards could be seen as significant. The general picture suggests businesses that are reactive and who innovate do so mainly at the request of existing customers. A high

percentage of the sample said they placed importance on product development to retain or gain new customers, and the importance of the ‘bottom-line’ was mentioned considerably more than for the innovators. The majority of respondents did not employ designers and did not mention design within their top five resources for product innovation. When asked what factors might limit their product innovation processes, a high number mentioned inappropriate premises and lack of new customers. The response to the role of design in the organisation was mixed, but the majority regarded it as an operational activity with a significant number confessing that they did not understand the term strategic resource and neither did they have strategic plans. They were no more or less likely to access support for design via their local university than the innovators. Interestingly, several had very negative views about working with design consultancies.

Conclusions

This research provided rich information from a small but representative sample of SMEs in the West Midlands. The differences between the innovators and laggards provided some important insights into the environment for design learning in the region. Once data collecting from both the mapping and innovators research was complete it was possible to compare the findings of one with the other. This gave us a chance to assess the methods used to fuel and maintain innovation against provision of support in the region and to develop some key initiatives for further attention.

In the last stage of Design Advantage we were able to focus on three key areas for further strategy development and it can be seen that these topics bear a strong relationship to the innovator and laggard findings. These, briefly, were:

- To build on existing expertise and develop means to refer companies to appropriate resources. To differentiate intervention activities to recognise levels of need and receptiveness. There had to be an improvement in promotion and referral activities to maintain links between providers, to share good practice and improve communication.
- To develop ways in which market awareness could be used to prepare companies for design intervention. This would include better linking of companies in the same industrial areas and encouragement for innovators to interact regionally through local and industry based networks, trade fairs and visits.
- To improve and increase advisory services for small design based businesses and in particular those emerging from the local design schools. This would keep more design talent in the region and provide stimulation. ■



Philippa Ashton MBA, PhD is currently Head of Research and Post-graduate Studies at Bath School of Art and Design and an Associate Research Fellow at Staffordshire University. She has considerable teaching and research experience in the areas of design innovation and design learning. This has involved running post-graduate programmes in design enterprise and design management and major studies of a variety of design communities in the UK.

For further information about Design Advantage please contact: dpf.ashton@btinternet.com

Judit Várhelyi



Judit Várhelyi is currently Director of the Hungarian Design Council. She is also a member of the ICSID Executive Board for the 2005-2007 period. Here, Judit talks about the recent challenges and promises of design support for her country and also for other areas in central and eastern Europe.

Judit, how did you become the director of the Hungarian Design Council?

I became Director of the Hungarian Design Council (HDC) in 2002. I am an architect by training, but I have worked in many fields – as a designer, a free-lance consultant, a lecturer and a journalist.

I am a graduate of the Department of Architecture at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics. Strangely enough, I never worked as a designer in Hungary, as I moved to Tokyo a few weeks after I graduated. What was originally intended as a short study-tour became a 10-year long stay in Japan. I worked there at Nikken Sekkei, one of the largest architectural offices in the world, as well as at smaller studios.

I came back to live in Budapest in 2000 and worked as a consultant and as a journalist. One of my interviewees was connected to the HDC, and I was asked to come on board.

It is interesting how life mirrors itself – as a student, I was keen on networking and served as the national contact of EASA (European Architecture Students Assembly) between 1986-88. Now I work in design promotion, not as a designer but I am a Board Member of ICSID, the international design organisation.

How is design organised in Hungary?

The Hungarian Design Council is a governmental advisory body with a promotional office attached. Our main task is to influence policy issues, but we also promote the awareness of design as a powerful tool for progress, and the role of designers in society and industry. Our main annual projects are the Hungarian Design Award and the Moholy-Nagy László Design Grant for young professionals.

The HDC has been operating for more than 20 years, and was completely re-organised in 2002.

Our Council has lobbied the government to set up a design centre in Budapest. The Design Terminal, the new organisation intended to fill this role, is scheduled to open in 2007. It should become a strong link in the national design network, both as an event organiser and as a bridge between designers and clients.

Design professionals in Hungary are organised in an art association, together with painters, writers, musicians and so on. This is a relic of the Communist years and a prevalent pattern throughout our region. This system makes it difficult for the associations to lobby for the distinct, individual needs of each profession.

In terms of education, the Moholy-Nagy Art University is over 100 years old. The courses are based on the classical division of disciplines.

There are also several design courses in engineering schools, based on the model of the Dutch TU Delft.

We know about Eastern Europe's strong tradition in design (with names like Moholy-Nagy and Marcel Breuer). Design is not new in Hungary. However, the fall of the Iron Curtain and the opening of markets certainly had a significant impact on design in eastern Europe. What kind of new challenges have arisen with this change?

More than 15 years have passed now since the collapse of the Iron Curtain opened up central and eastern Europe to the world. For 50 years, following the Second World War, these countries shared a similar fate under Communist regimes, albeit with widely varying degrees of freedom. The post-Communist years were also

similar – rapid capitalisation, waves of painful economic reforms, dramatic changes in government, the bewildering suddenness of change.

Yet, despite the common legacy of the Communist era, the region is far from homogeneous. Historical development before the 20th century, languages, religion, size and population, all differ widely from country to country (at the two extremes, Poland has over 38 million people, while Estonia has 1.4 million.)

Contrary to expectations, designers have not all benefited from the market economy. Product design is an example. During the Communist era, social programmes, such as housing development, and large, centralised industrial enterprises provided good employment for industrial designers. Following the political and economic changes, the previous large, centralised industrial conglomerates were chopped up into smaller companies, which were sold or closed. The in-house design teams were thus disbanded. As most large manufacturing operations are now owned by foreign investors, who commission design talent at home, there are few in-house jobs for designers.

On the other hand, a large number of private enterprises, mostly SMEs, have started up in our region since the 1990s. Improving living standards and growing businesses created a market for interior design, advertising, graphics and web design. However, these first-generation SMEs, many of them tiny and family-owned, are still often cautious about commissioning design. At this stage, government policies, dedicated organisations and financial incentives would be needed to help SMEs to benefit from design.

Nonetheless, there are promising signs of improvement. As local manufacturers and service providers start to compete on an international level, they soon realise the benefits of design.

How does the new design centre in Hungary fit into this context?

The new design centre, called the Design Terminal, will be an independent, non-profit organisation and will work on several levels. It will promote design to the general public through exhibitions and events, such as the Budapest Design Week. It will also offer services to industry – a database of designers, customised advisory service, seminars and workshops.

I should also explain that the centre will be housed in a listed building dating from the 1940s, an abandoned bus terminal (hence the name). Merely by virtue of its location in the heart of Budapest, housed in a well-known building in a popular square, the Design Terminal is expected to gain instant recognition and popularity as soon as it opens.



Erzsébet tér Bus Station built in 1949 in Budapest. Designer: István Nyíri (renovated in 2006 by János Golda and Attila Madzin)

What has been the process for developing this design centre? Did you study other design centres in the world? Are you adopting another country's centre as a model or it is more like a combination of the best practices that you know from your experience?

The idea of a design centre is not new in Hungary. In fact, the Chamber of Commerce used to support an earlier model. The Design Terminal will open under the guidance of the same Director, Mr. Mihály POHÁRNOK, who worked as a consultant and educator for many years.

I believe that even best practices should be adapted to local needs and realities. The HDC commissioned research in 2001 on design in Hungary and best practices abroad. The ensuing report formed the basis of our own work as well as for the programme of the design centre. The programme of any design centre should follow the needs and realities of each country. But if a model is to be singled out, perhaps the Danish Design Centre in Copenhagen should be mentioned as an inspiration.

How is the current relationship between design and government in Hungary? Is there any financial or political support from the government side for SMEs to use design?

The HDC was originally established by the government to serve as an advisory body. Our budget comes from the Treasury, and the Design Terminal will also receive substantial government funding at the beginning.

The Ministry of Economy also runs the Hungarian Design Award as a means of finding and showcasing successful designers and companies.

All the same, in spite of several initiatives, there is still no support programme for SMEs in Hungary to use design. As far as I know, the only such functioning support programme in our whole region is in the Czech Republic.

This is one of our main challenges, and the HDC will work closely with the Design Terminal to coordinate efforts in this area.

You just used the phrase 'our region'. We often see strong links among countries in central and eastern Europe. How has this relationship helped design support?

A strong network used to exist among these countries during the Communist era, but when I initiated a regional meeting in 2004, I found that the connections had all but disappeared. Yet we have similar goals and face similar challenges when we work to promote design or to promote our countries through design. We should work closely together and also learn from each other.

I am proud to say that the first Regional Meeting was a landmark event - we have held two more since, in Cieszyn and in Ljubljana. Professionals from design associations, schools and centres are in regular contact now.

Another by-product of our network is a large database of design-related organisations in our region. Available online on the HDC website in English, the database covers 20 countries. <http://www.hpo.hu/English/hivatalrol/testuletek/mft/europe/index.html>. The aim is to connect – to facilitate regional interchange and to open up channels of communication to the World.

What is the main challenge that Hungary and the countries in your region face in developing and promoting design?

99 per cent of all companies in Hungary are SMEs and 96 per cent have fewer than 10 employees. Most of these are first-generation SMEs, facing a lot of challenges. In the long run, they would perhaps be better off developing their own products and services, but the path of least resistance leads them to produce parts or no-name products for multinationals. And that path usually does not lead them to engage with design professionals.

Thank you very much for your time and good luck with your work in Hungary. We look forward to hearing news about the Design Terminal opening in Budapest. ■

For further information about the Hungarian Design Council please visit: <http://www.hpo.hu/English/hivatalrol/testuletek/mft/>

Geraldo Pougy

Geraldo Pougy is the director of Centro de Design Paraná, a design organisation from the Southern Brazilian State of Paraná. Here he tells us about challenges, successes, lessons learned and plans for the future of design support programmes in the country at large.



Let me ask you to look at how design programmes are organised in Brazil. Given its size, are regional initiatives the norm? And are these initiatives integrated into a national plan?

Yes, a national programme has existed since 1995, but there are many important local initiatives. The national initiative is called 'Programa Brasileiro de Design' (PBD). Originally, it consisted of five sub-programmes coordinated by national institutions. These were education, promotion, standards and legal protection, infrastructure and funding. This model was to be followed by the state programmes but it didn't work out that way. Among the 26 member states, Bahia, in the North East of Brazil, is an exception thanks to the personal efforts of the local team. Bahia Design was established in 1996.

In 2002 the national service for SMEs (SEBRAE) called for proposals for design centres all over the country. They offered R\$20million (in local currency) in grants and supported the opening of 100 design centres, 27 of them working only with crafts.

Some of those units closed down when the grant finished two years later.

In general, I would say that the Brazilian experience is more about design centres than design programmes, and that may be the problem. In any event, I should mention some positive initiatives. One is the Pernambuco Design Centre in the North East of the country. They have a good support scheme with the local SEBRAE office and are doing a good job. Another is the Ceramic Design Development Agency in the Southern state of Santa Catarina that evolved from one of the SEBRAE units.

The Design Centre Paraná, São Paulo Design Centre and Design Centre of Rio de Janeiro are also important and have very good, active teams.

How is the Brazilian Design Programme currently operating? Does this institution set a national policy or plan for the design initiatives in Brazil?

In recent years, PBD has been operating as part of the Brazilian Ministry of Development. It has limited resources – a team of five people. In order to cope,

PBD has been trying to operate in a decentralised way, transferring some of the initiatives to regional design organisations. The Design Excellence Brazil Programme and the website www.DesignBrasil.org (the Brazilian web portal for design) are examples of activities implemented by other institutions with the support of PBD.

In 2006 the programme was restructured with the assistance of the Brazilian Agency for Industrial Development (ABDI). The objective was to attract more partners, not only from the public sector but also from private institutions. As a result, a development bank (BNDES) and a group of large national companies (MBC) have all shown an interest in co-operating with design-promoting initiatives.

Another objective of this restructuring was to facilitate the dialogue between the various initiatives in place all over the country, aiming to align objectives and optimise efforts and resources. Moreover, this network intends to facilitate the decentralisation of projects and activities.

What steps have been planned to realize these objectives?

The Ministry hosted a meeting last October to share the planning details with the country's main design stakeholders. The occasion generated a lot of opportunities for co-operation. Another meeting is planned for the first half of 2007 to discuss project implementation.

It seems that each state works quite independently. Is this freedom an advantage or a sign of lack of integration between them?

Both. It is an advantage as Brazilian states are very different from each other. On the other hand, the lack of exchange makes it difficult for good work in some states to be exploited elsewhere.

What were the achievements of the SEBRAE programme that you mentioned above?

The main achievement was to open 100 design units all across the country. Even if some of them are not operating any more, the programme raised design awareness everywhere. In some states the design unit worked as a catalyst for the beginning of a local design movement.

I would say that in the last five years SEBRAE has been the most important sponsor for design initiatives in Brazil.

Brazil is well known as being a very creative country and also for very often working in adverse circumstances. Does this have an impact on how the design programmes are developed? Could you cite perhaps two examples of design mechanisms from Brazil?

Yes, Brazil is a very creative country and that is why so many Brazilian designers are doing well here and abroad.

However, as I said, the Brazilian experience is more about design centres than design programmes. From my point of view, this is a problem. I think it's more important to implement a valuable mechanism to encourage the use of design by companies than simply establishing a design centre. Past experience, both in Brazil and elsewhere, proves that the most effective design initiatives are based on well conceived models of integration with industry. It seems to me that this is the core advantage for initiatives such as the Glasgow Collection in Scotland, the Paraná Creation in Brazil, the Icebreaker Programme from Denmark and many others.

Good examples of design programmes:

- The Design Excellence Brazil: This was organised with the support of the Ministry of Development and the Trade and Investment Promotion Agency in Brazil. The aim was to improve the image of Brazilian products and services for the international market. This initiative helped Brazilian designers to make the German IF Awards list. In 2006, Brazilian contestants won 25 awards.
- The Paraná Creation: This short-term programme was organised by the Paraná Design Centre. The first time round, in 2002, it received financial support from the local government and Bank for Regional Development, allowing the initiative to focus on the region's industry. National funds were required for the second

programme as the political scenario in the State changed. It was then opened to entries from other Brazilian States. The programme helped 41 companies to develop new products in 2002 and 40 companies in 2005.

Unfortunately the country is still quite immature in terms of public sector policies. Most politicians prefer to invest in short term solutions; they want immediate and positive results. There's very little patience for long term programmes. Still, progress is noticeable. Brazil is gradually learning that in general good solutions only come with time.

How do you see the future of design promotion programmes in Brazil? Are you optimistic?

I see that Brazilian society is becoming more aware of the importance of design. This is reflected in the number of new design courses around the country, increasing interest from the press, and from conversations with business people and company owners.

This means that design initiatives tend to increase in number and presence. The proof: a new award is being developed that will apparently have an impact on industry. Unfortunately, it seems that there will still be little connection between the different regional programmes.

What would you change and improve to reach the ideal scenario?

The ideal scenario would be similar to the current position in terms of stakeholders, human resources, academic activity, press coverage and even in the number of new initiatives. Obviously financial backing, both public and private, would be welcome. The most important missing element is leadership at national level that could establish directions and common goals.

Today, many Brazilian companies are aggressively targeting international markets. Many of them are investing heavily in this strategy. It's a shame to not use this opportunity to develop national brands and to improve the image of our country as the base of innovative and high quality companies. ■

Personal reflections on the ecodesign journey in Wales



Dr Frank O'Connor

Support research: Simon O'Rafferty

Introduction

Following our sustained programme of ecodesign activity in the last 10 years the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) has provided funding, through the Materials Action Programme, to establish Ecodesign Centre Wales (EDC). EDC focuses on capacity building¹ for ecodesign and the development of environmentally superior products and services in Wales.

The first core activity of EDC is phase II of the Ecodesign Initiative which began in September 2006. The initiative will promote creative approaches to resource efficiency through enabling and facilitating the required cultural change in industry, education, the Business and Environment (B&E) support network and other key stakeholders. The initiative will lay the foundations for any future capacity building activities of EDC.

This article outlines our ecodesign journey to date. It presents the basis for a joined up multi-stakeholder approach to establishing the business and policy case for ecodesign. It concludes with a brief overview of where EDC would like Wales to be by 2020.

Context

My ecodesign journey started in the late '80s in Ireland when I undertook two research projects into waste recycling and design for assembly while I had a short stint recycling electronic waste. In the early '90s, while working for Alps Electric Ltd. as part of a multi-disciplinary design team developing computer devices, I began to investigate how environmental decisions could be integrated into the design and development process through taking a life cycle thinking approach. This ecodesign approach seems obvious now but at the time it was not part of mainstream discussion or thinking. Fascinated, I decided to undertake a PhD in ecodesign at the University of Glamorgan (Wales) in the mid '90s. My findings stressed the need to take a multi-stakeholder approach to ecodesign. During a short-term employment at Swansea University in 2000/01 I began to conceptualise how we could start mainstreaming ecodesign in Wales. To support this I undertook case studies of two Small and Medium Sized Enterprise (SMEs) from the electronics sector. I found that with the exception of a few multinationals (e.g. Panasonic and Sony) and a few niche producers' ecodesign thinking and practice was relatively non-existent in Wales.

In 2001, Gavin Cawood of Design Wales² introduced ecodesign to the service. Along with working full-time as part of the core Design Wales team to achieve their targets, my aim from the outset was to take a long-term strategic approach to ecodesign in Wales through raising awareness and changing behaviour. The core message was, and still is, 'ecodesign is simply good design and simply good business practice'. This was against a backdrop of a lack of a formal Welsh product oriented policy, ever diminishing landfill space, a dominant 'end-of-pipe' culture and SMEs accounting for more than 95% of all firms. Following an initial focus on industry, I began to recognise that the real keys to moving forward are stakeholder engagement, partnership building and capacity building focusing on five key groups:

- government
- business and environment support
- industry
- education & research
- NGOs and general public

In 2003 the WAG launched the Welsh Business and Environment Action Plan (BEAP). The plan sought to stimulate economic growth through innovation and environmental best practice. The focus was predominantly on 'end-of-pipe' clean up, but the plan gave some initial recognition to ecodesign. It called for Design Wales and Arena Network to undertake a Welsh pilot study. I drafted an initial proposal for a feasibility study into a Welsh ecodesign initiative in late 2003. This was supported with strategic advice to the WAG. In parallel a pan-Wales University student ecodesign competition was launched and numerous projects were undertaken with industry (through my role as a design advisor). This included the award winning TinyLab™ developed by Riochem™ Ltd (www.riochem.com). This case study clearly demonstrates that small companies can rise to the ecodesign challenge.

Ecodesign Initiative Phase I

In 2005 WAG and the Welsh Development Agency (WDA)³, agreed to fund the feasibility study (Phase I). With an ecodesign team of two (Simon O'Rafferty, an ecodesign researcher, joined) we moved from the service approach (offered by Design Wales) to an initiative. This proved to be a significant step forward. To support this phase of the initiative a small advisory team made up of members from the WAG and the WDA was established. The input of the panel, in particular from Chris Hale and Aled Davies, proved crucial over the next 18 months.

As part of this study we undertook a number of key activities between February 2005 and September 2006. This included mapping the existing B&E support network against a product life cycle and undertaking an international best practice study. Around this time and in partnership with the WAG, we widened the remit of a public/private partnership⁴ to include all new and impending EEE legislation.

International best practice study

Over the last decade there have been a number of public sector initiatives and regional interventions seeking to encourage the application of ecodesign by SMEs. It is clear from the low levels of long-term application of ecodesign that these forms of interventions failed to filter through to companies outside the initial scope of the initiatives. Through undertaking an international best-practice study we identified reasons for these failures by analysing the initiatives and interventions. It became clear that to overcome previous shortcomings in public sector interventions we would have to take a far more integrated approach.

Our ecodesign vision

In late 2005 we set a clear ecodesign vision (Table 1). We believe that an ecodesign led nation would have a number of characteristics including:

- internationally recognised ecodesign exemplars
- clusters of design led 'growth' companies
- 'sustainable' public/private partnerships
- sustainable public procurement
- upskilled business and environment support network and design community
- sustainable industry-based 'business to business' mentor network

Vision

An internationally renowned ecodesign led nation within the next 15 years

Ecodesign embedded as a sustainable competitive core value within all relevant government strategies and support services, Welsh industry, the Welsh design community, education and academia

Table 1: Vision

This vision was supported by an ecodesign initiative model fit for Wales and two core strategy documents. Ministerial buy-in followed and was a key milestone for ecodesign in Wales. From the outset our belief has been that funding would have to come directly from the WAG if ecodesign is to really become part of the long-term mainstream agenda.

Ecodesign Centre Wales

With a core team of four (Iain Cox and Bibiana Estrada Bonilla joined in autumn 2006) and initial funding for two years, EDC is separate from Design Wales and the other key stakeholders⁵ with a clear affiliation to 'Team Wales'⁶. EDC is not a new business support service. Boundaries have been outlined through a transparent brand and communication strategy and through clearly defining our core propositions.

Our aim is to deliver an initiative that focuses on capacity building for effective ecodesign to happen across Wales. To achieve this aim EDC must perform the following functions:

- Continue to establish the business and policy case
- Support the development of environmentally superior products and services
- Continue to work with key stakeholders to deliver the ecodesign initiative
- Generate research to inspire wider industry / educational establishments and influence future WAG policy
- Offer new approaches to intervention by offering creative approaches to resource efficiency
- Offer new holistic ways of project tracking that include both quantitative and qualitative measures

To establish the business case we believe that you need to start on a small scale, understand your market, build the right team and develop relevant sector specific approaches. We recognise that it will be a slow and challenging journey but we firmly believe that an inclusive, partnership approach can achieve the desired cultural change.

Ecodesign Initiative Phase II

The initiative has four main elements:

- 1) Demonstration:** EDC will encourage the development of environmentally conscious products and/or services. It began with a study which identified Welsh SMEs whose growth potential could be enhanced through implementing ecodesign.
- 2) Education:** EDC will provide specialist support to Welsh universities currently offering product design degrees.
- 3) Research / international best practice:** To maintain the relevance and competence of EDC a programme of continuous research has been embedded in our activities.
- 4) Promotion:** EDC will communicate the benefits of ecodesign to Welsh industry and other key stakeholders and raise the profile of our ecodesign activities to international stakeholders. We will not focus on promoting EDC.

Tracking

EDC is developing key performance indicators (KPIs) to track the demonstration element. These will be a mix of qualitative and quantitative measures. The quantitative measures will reflect the sector specific priorities, for example legislative requirements. The qualitative measures will reflect "soft" issues in terms of growth potential and managerial attitudes to design-led environmental best practice. EDC will also be tracking the success of other aspects of the initiative through longitudinal analysis and detailed evaluations.

The immediate future

We are confident that ecodesign thinking will be embedded in the next phase of strategy documents following the BEAP. We are also confident that other policy documents such as the WAG waste strategy will begin to take a more holistic life cycle perspective. We recognise that while our vision is mix of idealism and passion we firmly believe that it can be achieved if a partnership approach is taken, from policy through to developing practical sustainable solutions. Everyone must take individual responsibility to achieve the desired change. Phase II of the ecodesign initiative is clearly about putting the initial foundations in place for embedding ecodesign as a sustainable competitive core value. We believe that we have the right internal and external team to do this. We recognise that while it is a huge challenge the opportunities are great. Through working in partnership we believe Wales can lead the way.

Conclusion

EDC believes that ecodesign has a critical role to play in Wales' long-term vision for sustainability. Government and all other key stakeholders need to take a long-term approach if we are to achieve the desired change. We recognise that we need a lot more practical SME case studies (particularly from small companies) to clearly demonstrate the business case for sustainability. We also recognise that for every success there will also be failures. You cannot change everyone. There is no obvious 'silver bullet' for engagement in ecodesign. The key message is to take time to reflect and learn from these journeys, bringing the key lessons forward to other situations, but also always continue to believe that anything is possible! We need appropriate intervention, 'fit for purpose', that focuses on qualitative as well as quantitative indicators. Our ecodesign achievements to date have been built on a shared belief that we can make a real difference. This is the start of the next phase of our ecodesign journey! Let's enjoy it. ■

Acknowledgement

The people and organisations we should acknowledge are numerous. We have mentioned some already, but we are especially grateful to WAG for their ongoing support and belief in our novel complementary approaches to intervention and capacity building.

¹ Capacity building aims to develop and enhance institutional and individual capabilities, in this case, to effectively address ecodesign and life cycle thinking.

² Funded by the WAG Design Wales provides free and independent design advice to Welsh industry. Design Wales is based at the National Centre for Product Design & Development Research (PDR) at the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC).

³ The Welsh Development Agency is now part of the WAG.

⁴ To prepare for WEEE and RoHS legislation the WAG set-up a multi-stakeholder focus group in 2004.

⁵ Research has indicated that the success of EDC relies on it being perceived as independent by those stakeholders it seeks to work alongside.

⁶ "Team Wales" seeks to involve the public, private, academic and voluntary sectors in economic development activities.

4 Tuesdays on Ecodesign

(Design Centre Rhone-Alps, France)

The '4 Tuesdays on Ecodesign' are four-day seminars which aim to raise awareness of ecodesign among designers and project managers by introducing them to ecodesign and the main tools for ecodesigning products. This programme started in 2005, was repeated in 2006 and will run again in 2007.

The main objective of each seminar is to stimulate and help the development of ecodesigned products by designers. Seminars are targeted mainly at designers, but product development managers from local companies also attend. The seminars are organised by a project manager from the Design Centre Rhone-Alps, working with a PhD student in ecodesign.

The process took 20 days. It has a budget of 15,000 Euros and is sponsored by the regional government and the French Ministry of Industry. For each seminar, there is a budget of 12,000 Euros, which is covered by the registration fee (500–700 euros per participant, for the four days). Updating and organising each seminar takes 9–10 days. The seminars form part of the ecodesign activities of the Design Centre Rhone-Alps – ecodesign being one of the strategic themes of the Design Centre. They are considered to be an important part of the Design Centre's work, as they educate designers to undertake an ecodesign approach to their projects.

Each seminar is split into several modules, with a total of 10 different instructors (including specialists in ecodesign and marketing, engineers, life-cycle analysis specialists) responsible for each module. The themes of the four days are as follows:

- Day 1:** Ecodesign and company strategies, facts to integrate from the start of the analysis. Definition and principles, context (impact, market, etc).
- Day 2:** Ecodesign, the new questions and the new opportunities to innovate. Design for disassembly, design for recycling, eco-material selector.
- Day 3:** Evaluation of the environmental impacts from the very beginning of a project. Tools.
- Day 4:** From legal obligation to the communication opportunities. Testimonies.

The first two seminars, held in 2005 and 2006, were attended by 56 delegates, including 15 industrial design businesses and 35 companies, along with people from public institutions and teachers. The seminars allow designers and those involved in product development to discover and learn more about ecodesign, tools required, specific vocabulary and methods, giving them the necessary knowledge to start ecodesigning products. An evaluation is carried out at the end of each seminar, related to the instructors and the themes they cover, the booklets and information distributed and the organisation of the four days.

Results achieved include new skills in the region (ecodesigners) and the creation of an ecodesign club. More ecodesign projects are under way and a collective project, 'Cradle to Cradle', is now starting up. Key factors which contribute to the success of this programme include a pragmatic approach and practice, specialised instructors, and operational positioning. One difficulty that the Design Centre highlights is that of finding appropriate examples of ecodesign projects and testimonies from companies but the more designers participate in the seminars, the more ecodesign projects are undertaken with companies in the region.

For further information about this programme please contact Franck Bercegeay at the Design Centre Rhone-Alps: bercegeay@centredudesign.fr



Des+gn mais

(Portuguese Design Centre, Portugal)

Des+gn
mais

The Des+gn Mais programme began in 2004, when the Centro Português de Design (CPD) coordinated the funds and a team to get it underway. It was originally called "Plan for Design in Productive Sectors". The aim was to use design to enhance competitiveness and economic development. The programme was planned to run for 24 months under the auspices of the CPD. The programme is now drawing towards its close in the first half of 2007 and results are already being evaluated.

The aim of Des+gn Mais is the internationalisation of Portuguese economy. This is to be achieved in four separate ways: by penetrating external markets; by promoting a design culture; by improving companies' capabilities and by developing products, images and brands. The programme was aimed at graduate designers looking for their first job, or unemployed young designers and Portuguese companies and businesses. In total 76 professionals, 66 companies and 10 associations were involved in the programme.

Des+gn Mais brought together companies and associations from Portugal who were willing to work to promote the country abroad through design. The aim: to conquer or to reinforce European markets. In total, eight people from CPD were involved in developing and implementing the programme along with 50 external consultants who were commissioned to support the programme tasks.

The programme began with prospective studies concerning trends, lifestyles and productive sectors. It covered a variety of areas of the productive sector and in so doing a variety of development cycles too. It was a challenge to bring them all together and build a coherent and solid project. For the purposes of project management the sectors were divided into three areas: People Universe (footwear, apparel, textiles, jewellery); Home Universe (ceramics, textiles, glass, furniture and equipments, lighting, metal-working); and City Universe (urban furniture and equipments, lighting, metal-working, textiles, ceramics).

The choice of companies to take part marked another critical step. It was important to pick companies who might benefit from the scheme. This meant that their ability to benefit from design intervention had to be evaluated on the basis of their technical and technological capabilities. A special commission was formed to handle this part of the programme. Likewise, the choice of designers was also a crucial stage in the project.

With these elements in place, a two-pronged Training Plan was set up: 1) a 12 month training course for companies with theoretical classes at CPD; 2) a work placement for designers, including the development of a new product targeting international markets. In parallel, short seminars were running for the corporate workforces to create a common language among the teams. The underlying aim was to target the development of products for foreign markets.

Apart from this project, the most important activity in the lifespan of Des+gn Mais was to mount four exhibitions, as envisaged in the original plan. They explored three target markets: Spain, Italy and UK.

Different curators and designers separately produced each one of the foreign markets' initiatives. This was important, since the objective of the programme was to target each of these markets with a comprehensive strategy. On top of all that, a business mission and a media campaign ran in conjunction with each of the exhibitions.

Two exhibitions took place in Spain, both in **Barcelona**: September 2005 and January 2007. The first exhibition showed more than 200 products from 35 companies taking part. All products were designed by Portuguese designers or by the companies. At this first show Des+gn Mais wanted to highlight the productive capabilities of the companies, especially those related to design as a tool for innovation and product differentiation.

Together with the exhibition, the programme took a business mission and study visitors formed by 18 companies and 28 designers from Portugal, both to make direct contacts and to visit places of cultural and professional interest.

In Italy, the Des+gn Mais event took place in **Milan** during the Design Week in April 2006. Elements included an exhibition at Zona Tortona's Superstudio 13 in Milan, an entrepreneurial mission with participating companies, a study visit for designers of the Project and a media campaign based on advertising and reports on Des+gn Mais. 22 companies took part in the Design Week exhibition, displaying new products developed by 25 designers. The estimated number of visitors was 58,000. 19 companies and 26 designers involved in the project also took part in the business mission.

Des+gn Mais went to **London** in September 2006, taking a stand at the 100% Design Fair and also with an exclusive exhibition in the Old Truman Brewery Show. The stand at 100% Design offered audio-visual information on almost every company involved in the project. The Show at The Well of the Old Truman Brewery presented 50 new products from 36 companies, and designed by 38 project's designers, all displayed for the first time. The business mission included 22 company representatives and the study visit, 12 designers.

In total, the Des+gn Mais budget ran to 4.5 million euros, with 2.8 million spent on training and education and the remaining 1.7 million for the international elements. 75% of this budget came from European and national sources. Participating companies came up with the 25% of the investment that ran the programme.

According to Maria José Nogueira, one of the coordinators of the Programme at CPD, one of the main challenges was to coordinate designers (who were young professionals), and companies, in line with the project's timescale. There was a difficulty in managing timescales so that products were ready in time for the exhibitions for the good reason that each company had its own production cycles.

For all that Des+gn Mais has a very short lifespan and a very ambitious target, it's already managed to show results. A partial evaluation in September 2006 showed that the programme has generated 145 new products aimed at the international target markets along with another 400 products that had also benefited from the project. 75 per cent of the new products were already in the market-place. The business missions had accumulated 225 connections with commercial potential. And 60 per cent of the work placements have already resulted in longer relationships between the young designer and the company.

The positive results are encouraging CPD to look to extend the project of boosting the national economy on the international scene through the medium of design. The aim is to upgrade Des+gn Mais to consolidate existing results and help Portuguese companies to gain a sustainable foothold in foreign markets. ■

For more information about Des+gn Mais, please contact Maria José Nogueira: mnogueira@cpd.pt



Des+gn Mais exhibition in London (The Old Truman Brewery, 20-25 September 2006).

SEEdesign partners meet in Tuscany

CSM (Centro Sperimentale Del Mobile e Dell'arredamento) has become the fourth partner to host a European Workshop on Design Support. These meetings are part of the activities of the SEEdesign project and take place every six months.

The Italian partner hosted the meetings in Florence in October 2006. The first day was dedicated to the Steering Committee meeting and the European Workshop took place on the second morning. It featured presentations from regional policy-makers and local government representatives, as well as speakers from design centres in Slovakia and Denmark. In the afternoon, 40 representatives of local companies joined the group for a meeting on the topic 'Design, Identity/Image of a Territory' (among the speakers, Giuliano Simonelli - Milan Polytechnic Institute, Marco Bettiol - International University, Venice).

On the third day, the SEEdesign partners went to a village in Tuscany to learn about the results of another INTERREG IIC project that CSM has been developing. Conceived in the framework of EDDT project www.eddt.org, the project run by CSM is DESTER: Design and Territory - The Case of Stone Materials. The project brings together students from three universities from Portugal, Italy and France, to develop a common brief: finding new scenarios for the use of the 70 per cent of wasted raw material of the local travertine stone producers. The SEEdesign partners visited a travertine quarry, one of the companies involved in the project and also attended the students' final presentations. ■



Listen to SEEdesign events in the original!

Highlights of some SEEdesign events are now available as podcasts. The SEEdesign Podcast Library contains three programmes to date. This initiative is in line with the project aim of sharing design support information and experiences.

The first podcast features the International Workshop on Design Support (IWDS 2006), held in Cardiff, Wales/UK in May 2006. The 60-minute programme brings to you the main points made by the speakers – in their own voices – along with the sometimes tough questions from members of the audience.

Podcasts 2 and 3 present the highlights of the European Workshop on Design Support, which was held in Florence, Italy in October 2006. They offer a brief introduction to the event (about three minutes) and a more detailed version (25 minutes). Presentations from the Slovak Design Centre, the Danish Design Centre and representatives from the Italian regional government are also included. ■

For further information, and to access the Podcast Library, please visit the SEEdesign website or email: info@seedesign.org.

The SEEdesign Bulletin is the communication platform of the SEEdesign partnership and is devoted to publishing material – articles, interviews, case studies – related to the practice of design support in different countries.

The opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the SEEdesign partners.

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Designing Design Support

"Designing design support" was the theme for the Conference "Challenges of design promotion in Europe" which took place on the 8th and 9th January in Paris. This was the 4th edition of this annual meeting that has been promoted by APCI – Agence pour la Promotion de la Création Industrielle since 2004. It gathers design practitioners and professionals with a special interest in issues related to support programmes and policies in design. For this year's conference, APCI chose three topics for debate: 1) Design support: stakeholders, objectives, means and futures; 2) Connecting design and innovation support: challenges; and 3) Supporting specifically design managers and design management. The conference was attended by 120 people in total over the two days. ■

For more information please contact jeanschneider@free.fr or info@apci.asso.fr.

Launch of the ADMIRE project and the European Design Management Award

ADMIRE (Awarding Design Management Innovation and Reinforcing Enterprises), a key project in the new PRO-INNO Europe initiative by the European Commission Directorate General of Enterprise and Industry, started on the 1st January 2007. It consists of 18 partners from 14 European countries. The project will initially run for two years under the co-ordination of the City of Eindhoven in the Netherlands.

The overall objective of the ADMIRE project is to stimulate innovation and competitiveness in businesses (especially SMEs) in their regional economies and thus Europe's economy in general, by the implementation of good design management.

To achieve this ambition, the ADMIRE partnership has identified the following objectives:

- Stimulate innovation among European SMEs by raising awareness and promoting the opportunities of good design management.
- Establish a sustainable platform for sharing and developing knowledge at a European level, involving design centres, authorities, knowledge institutes and industry.
- Enhance the quality of design management implemented by SMEs through exchange of good practices of design management and identification of strengths and weaknesses (e.g. by sector or geography).
- Lay the foundation of an annual European Design Management Award scheme that celebrates and promotes good design management practices by European businesses.

These objectives are in line with the Lisbon and Gothenburg Strategies. Design and the proper management of design in enterprises are of great importance to the competitiveness, innovation power and growing abilities of SMEs. They are of strategic economic value, adding to the success of European enterprises and the creation of new jobs. ■

For more information about the ADMIRE project please contact Ingrid van der Wacht (Project Leader, City of Eindhoven):
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