The Barcelona Design System: Understanding the Past from the Present and Gathering Opinions Concerning the Future. Outcomes from a Research to Inspire a Catalan Regional Policy for Design

ANNA CALVERA PhD (F)
Professor at University of Barcelona (Spain) on Design History and Design Studies.
JOSEP M. MONGUET PhD (M)
Professor at the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya (UPC) in Barcelona (Spain) Researcher at i2cat
http://disseny_cat.net

ABSTRACT. Following the nowadays trend of planning from local or national basis a policy to support and promote design harder within economy, the local and autonomous Government of Catalonia in Spain started a research to understand the real scope and potential of design infrastructure in the area. It aimed to understand the structure and dynamics of local design industry. It has been developed using the Italian model and methodology of Design System. To visualize the system and identify the main functions and roles of its actors has been very useful to select relevant people to be asked about the present situation, to foresee the future and propose specific measures to intensify the use of design by companies and institutions. The whole work allows a diagnostic of the situation and to understand the real position of Barcelona as a town of reference in the international design scene.

The decision of using a model more or less proved by other researches abroad has been taken to allow and facilitate comparisons in the future. Then, a new methodology to interact with interviewed people has been created using a specific intranet to develop a public poll, see results and evaluate proposals in order to get a wide consensus both by actors and participants. As far as research's aim was to catch the state of opinion about present situation, it has also been interesting the organizing of a poll, where questions were selected either by comparison with some policies adopted recently by other countries and looking at the changes arrived to design idea and practice through its adaptation to contemporary economy.

The paper will present the outcomes of that research, the structure and methodology used to model present Barcelona Design System and reflect the influence that local history had in its present structure.

Profile and Aims of the Inquiry:

>> *disseny_cat* (1) is a research set up by CIDEM, an Office of the Industry Department of the Autonomous Government of Catalonia in charge of the innovation policy, and conducted by a joint research group of UB and UPC, and directed by the authors of the paper. The inquiry had two main goals:

1st) To model Catalan Design System identifying the main actors, their roles and the existing different fluxes linking them. It has to be used to identify its strengths and weaknesses in the context of the new economy and its perspectives for future development.

2nd) To establish an integrated plan of actions to be performed by the County Council to encourage and expedite design sector in the globalised economy context and the innovation culture linking it with the Catalan System of Innovation. These actions were directed to amend weaknesses taking advantage of the already existing strengths of the system by pushing them.

At that point, research defined its work establishing some previous jobs: to grasp the state of opinion existing among Catalan design sector about current situation, understanding its ability to strengthen the use of design strategic potential, and to check what the Administration should do to push and promote a better and wider use of design by local companies.

The strong collaboration and good response given by designers, research centres managers, manufacturers and design entities whose opinion has been asked through interviews or rather polls, has been very supporting for the research.

Methodology and Research Process.

We used a methodology build *ad hoc* to suit better research scope and main goals. It pursued through the following several stages:

1st. a diagnosis stage, where the main job was to identify and group the actors to map the system. It had to answer the questions "Where are we now?" and "How do we get there?"

At that early moment, it has been selected a model to grasp and visualize Barcelona design world as a whole and thus, we adopted the Design System concept as defined in Milan some years ago, to adapt it to our local situation (2). It is a useful model for many reasons. It allows reflecting a whole and very complex sector in only one image, and gives information about its impact on the economy of the region. It also proposes a methodology to collect relevant information concerning dynamics and ways of performing in the design area. Then, it is set out acknowledging design's strategic potential for innovation and so, it brings about the multiplicity of characters design industry has nowadays. It includes either the practice of design as it was defined traditionally, and the emergent practices that current times asks for, such as design management or design research for instance. For that reason, the model of Design System seemed suited perfectly to reflect how complex and rich is the Barcelona Design world due to its own history.

To start the job and confirm our first outline, we have been interviewing a group of experts, representatives of different approaches to design, highly esteemed on the area and having a long experience on the subject.

2nd. The stage of diagnostic was devoted to identify weaknesses and strengths of the system. What was actually searched here was the state of opinion and awareness of actors about the system, inviting them to evaluate its state as a whole. The informing question here was "how right is our system?"

To hint participants about the issues to discuss, we compared local diagnostic with the current situation in some other countries which have recently develop public policies for design that overpass the usual promotion of design plans. At the turning of the century many countries considered design a strategic tool, key to increase competitiveness of their economies in globalised markets where it is not possible to compete upon price anymore. With the horizon of using the added value focused on the cultural plus added through design, most countries had decided to direct their economies towards design led activities addressing a mature and sophisticated customer. Some policies texts include surveys about their economic situation including interesting information such as, for example, maturity achieved by industries in the use of design, and ways to measure it. Comparison served to understand how adjusted and up-to-date diagnose was, but also, to establish the general frame in which to set in the whole research (3).

3rd. As a result of the previous stage, now it was necessary to define future scenarios, to show clearly the goals to achieve by a regional policy, and propose actions to achieve them. The question to answer at that point was "Where ought we to go," and "How can we get there?" Its aim was to foresee what kind of actions were needed and how to perform them, and along with who and what entities.

To complete these three stages, get results from each and cross them, we worked on them mostly in parallel and so, we have been able to verify explanatory hypothesis structured from the very beginning by feedback. Thus, we prepared a long poll that has to be answered by 45 people chosen because its representative character of the different groups mapped by the model. 15 are active design practitioners, 15 are manufactures or managers, design customers at least, and 15 are people working on institutions and entities related with design and its culture making.

Of course, to know the local history of design was very useful to model the system and to identify relevant actors, the roles they actually play and what they may play in the next future. The poll itself was arranged grouping questions in sets related to four stages. Afterwards, when an integrated plan of actions was finally derived, it was proposed for validation again to participants through a second poll, that time fully answered on-line in an intranet created expressly for the inquiry. In fact, at that moment participants could consult the

results of the poll and check their own answers confronted with the resulted average, and then, when weighing the program of actions, average arrived immediately. Therefore, both the model of the system and identified weaknesses were validated collectively as well than the definition of future scenarios and measures selected to change trends and impulse new ones.

4th. The last stage consisted exclusively on the arrangements of the different measures to be adopted. The inspiring question to conclude was "What must we do, and when?" There resulted an integrated plan of actions that gave way to almost 45 programs. The second poll served to check the existing rate of agreement about the proposed actions, its opportunity and its pressure to apply, and so, ruled the final disposition.

Modelling Barcelona's Design System.

Design System concept is a theoretical model used to visualize in only one map the different agents and actors that, within a land well delimited both economically and geographically, act, interact and establish relationships between them related with the professional practice of design and so, have an economic impact. A Design System whether belonging to a town, a region or a country, shows peculiarities and main features of the design made in that area, marks the elements that best identify its approach and characters, and defines conditions for its growing process and evolution in the next future.

Barcelona's Design is nowadays well known abroad. The town fills a place by its own in the international scene of Design and still asserts to be an international reference. It is known mainly for the use of Design as an active factor of urban landscape, but also because the town used design to enter the new economy. Public and private design made inhabitants feel glad of their town, and agree with the new image spread through it, attracted visitors, immigrants and talented people and so, also investments and companies. Guy Julier explained such as Barcelona's paradigm, and Viviana Narotzky analysed designers' achievements and its public reception (4).

To map Barcelona Design System, we observed the evolution experienced by the demand of design since 1985, when a fist white book was published about the subject; we also looked at the structure of design supply agencies and the kind of companies designers usually manage, the ensemble of companies and jobs that supply services to designers and the different entities and bodies, including high education centres, that works promoting, defending, representing, spreading or pushing design culture. So, we build this structural schema to place different actors in the whole system:
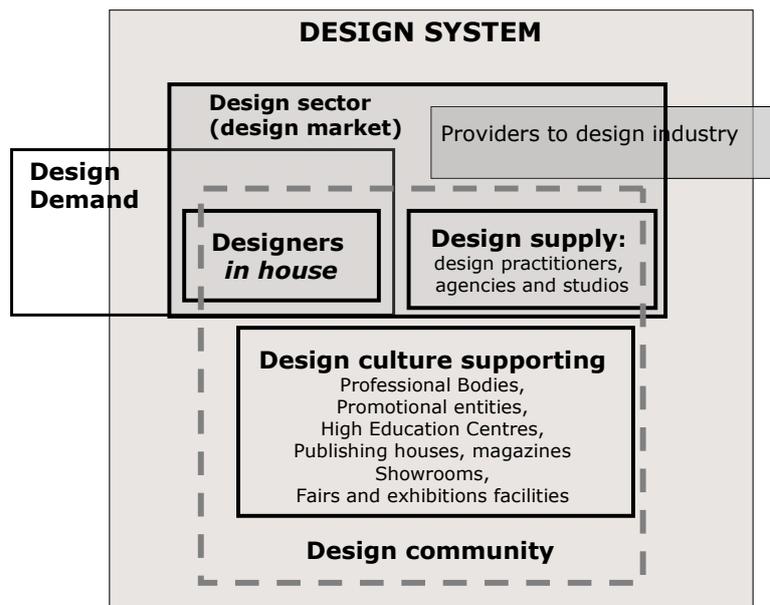
Design System = Design Sector + design infrastructure for design culture promotion

Design Sector =	Design industry: agencies, design practitioners supplying design services either being integrated in companies' design departments or as companies themselves. It includes also all suppliers of services for designers
Design Culture =	Entities, bodies and people whose work is related with design and the creation, sustenance and promotion of its culture.
Design Community =	Design practitioners + people working within design culture promotion and production.

Diagnostic: Peculiarities of the Barcelona Design System

- Barcelona Design System has a strong identity of its own.
- It is formed by a multiplicity of actors and functions
- It includes a big variety of activities related to design that go beyond the simple economic relationship of demand/supply of design services. It is wider than a mere market because it has endowed itself with many bodies, entities and tools which had played different roles: promoting design among general public and companies, providing an integrated body of knowledge and arousing a constant debate about design, and so, helping and leading a constant up-to-date process of design both as discipline and practice. It also takes care of designers' education, and the protection of their professional rights.
- Barcelona Design System goes beyond design industry mainly because historically designers wanted to play a cultural role.
- Peculiarities of the sector and its management characters should be found in the multiplicity and variety of interactions existing between different actors.
- Barcelona Design Industry is characterised by a high degree of flexibility, and so, it can adapt quickly to new and different situations when arrived.
- Strongly based on international trends and movements, it is still a system well rooted in its local reality that wants to find answers peculiar to local characteristic of the land, country and economic region where it is actually placed.
- The model don't show what is or should be the connection between both systems, that of design and that of innovation in the way encouraged and set up either by local administrations or the Spanish Government. This is one of its main weaknesses.

To resume it in few words, the main characters of Barcelona Design System are the variety and atomisation of the many agents involved in it; then, the strong and continual prevalence of private enterprise while public sector had a scarce contribution, just in special moments and for specific questions. Public sector's contribution has been overriding when acting as a design customer, a role resolutely adopted by the Town Council to stimulate sophisticated demand of design services.

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(1) See http://disseny_cat.net

(2) See BERTOLA, Paola; SANGIORGI, Daniela; SIMONELLI, Giuliano (eds): *Milano distretto del design: Un sistema di luoghi, attori e relazioni al servizio dell'innovazione.* Milà: Il Sole 24 ore, 2002; POLITECNICO DI MILANO. *Milan Design System*. Milan: Abitare Segesta, 1999.

(3) The French association APCI has organised almost 3 conferences dedicated to design promotion policies in Paris, January 2005, 2006 and 2007. There is in UK an international network organising seminars. Designium in Finland acts as an observatory publishing periodically a report about these policies. See: HYTÖNEN, Jaana & HEIKKINEN, Hanna: *Design Policy and Promotion Programmes in Selected Countries and Regions*. Designium World Design Series. Helsinki, October 2003; and SORVALI, Katja, HYTÖNEN, Jaana & HEIKKINEN, Hanna: *Global Design Watch April 2006. Update to the 2003 report.* Designium World Design Series. Helsinki: Designium, 2006.There is also a non published report done by BCD, the Barcelona design Centre, on the perspective proper to a Design Centre's policy.

(4) See JULIER, Guy: *The Culture of Design*. London- New Delhi: Sage, 2000. Viviana Narotzky: *La Barcelona del diseño*. Barcelona: Santa & Cole, 2008.