

Changing the change

Design Visions, Proposals and Tools

An international conference on the role and potential of design research in the transition towards sustainability

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DESIGN DIRECTORY [ITALIA]

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DESIGN DIRECTORY [ITALIA]

A strategic web-tool for italian design system *

In the present *knowledge society*, design represents one of the distinguishing features of Italy. In the last years the designer as a professional figure is evolving. In Italy, the “hero” stage has passed, giving way to a new “spread” stage. This caused a sensible rise in the number of people involved in the design system, meaning abundance of design schools, associations, magazines, exhibitions, companies opened to design and even the increasing number of relationships between Italy (especially Milan) and the main cities involved in the improvement of the design culture (Bertola, Sangiorgi, Simonelli, 2002). Those changes have given the designer a strategic role in the industrial system. Therefore he/she is not anymore a single unit, but a junction, the director of the *project network* that cooperates with all the other players. (Manzini in Maffei, Simonelli, 2002) “Being a system” is one of the main features in the Italian design scene. Here the most relevant strength is its foundation, numerically strong, but weak because not mapped, not shared, therefore unaware (Bonomi, 2007). For all of the players involved in the system there has never been a guide, a systemic orientation, a codified structure. Therefore it needs to be constantly monitored and studied to understand its mutations, its transformation in progress, both endogenous and exogenous, and sort out the elements of renewed vitality from those of impoverishment. This underlines a certain inadequacy of the Italian system compared to the international context, where it is possible to find many examples of tools aiming at increasing the value in the design system. This role is played for example by the *design centre* (Arquilla, 2004), a sort of *body-institution* aiming at design promotion, which manages information, organizes events and other things to spread the design culture among enterprises and people.

This is the task of the The Design Directory [Italy] (Design Directory [Lombardia], Design Focus, 2006, <http://www.designfocus.it/directory> and Design Directory [Italia], Dipartimento Indaco, Politecnico di Milano and Triennale di Milano, 2007), as a first step towards building a broader information and service system to facilitate dialogue and exchange with a host of mutual benefits, both on national and international level.

Design Directory [Italy] is a tool for the acknowledgement of the system and its evolving process through a model for representation, a platform shared by the players of the system, but not a design centre or a window for Italian design, as it has been done in other countries until now. The attempt has “suggested” a system bottom-up (meaning shared) to self-represent and incorporate since the phases of conception and creation, all of the players in the system. The platform tries to bond all of them, giving a common identity and especially making them aware of their relationship. The strength of the system is exactly this subtle woof, able to establish a network of relationships within the territory among all of the players involved, integrating one another competences and skills to develop design projects.

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Design Directory is a tool for *mapping the system* and from where, using an *information visualization method*, we can represent, visualize and interpret the system as shown on the map produced by Left Loft using the 2006 data present in the system.

Design Directory is a “mechanism” that from being a simple instrument belonging to service design, aims at becoming an action, a cultural operation that wants to win endurances in the system, using the “web 2.0” approach and stimulating the social networking, the participation of all the actors and the co-creation of contents (O’Reilly, 2006). This new way of working should make the process explicit and not anymore tacit, creating value that can possibly be shared by different players. The Design Directory therefore becomes a founding act to represent the system, a census of the professionals involved, well explained through the following claim: “*count yourself to matter*”. The Design Directory represents an example of *mass collaboration*, where new communication technologies are democratizing the creation of value. (Tapscoff D., Williams D. A., *Wikinomics*, 2007).

World Wide Web has been the first tool to induce awareness among the involved players, since it is nowadays one of the best ways to share information. The decisions taken to present and represent the system online gave this project the opportunity to cross the cultural and territorial line set, making the system accessible to anyone.

* Design Directory [Italia] is the net result of the research project developed with Dipartimento Indaco, Politecnico di Milano and Triennale di Milano in the year 2007.

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