

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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CONCEIVING THE DESIGN CENTRE OF THE FUTURE

Transforming the economical and social landscape through integrated user-centred design research in multidisciplinary projects

Context

Within the last twenty years, the Belgian Province of Limburg has had to deal with radical changes in its economical and social tissue. One of the major economic setbacks for the region was the closure of the local coalmining industry. With larger locally situated companies such as Ford increasingly relocating their activities to foreign countries, the region is suffering from relatively high unemployment rates, problems in integrating a large immigrant population and a relatively low schooling level. In addition to that, it will soon have to face the economical and social consequences of a rapidly ageing population.

As many other places, Limburg has to evolve towards a knowledge economy as soon as possible. The public and private sector are slowly starting to acknowledge the importance and value of innovation with an emphasis on creativity and multidisciplinary. Reinforcement of the region's development is needed in order to create new processes, services and products to address current and future needs and meet the demands of future national and international markets.

Since July 2007, Experientia has been working with the Belgian City of Genk, the Belgian Province of Limburg and the Media & Design Academy in helping them to define a **future design centre** to be located at C-Mine, a former mining area.

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Research

Experientia applied a user-centred research approach in the development of the design centre concept. Stakeholders and end-users were actively involved during both the research phase and the vision and concept development phase, which included:

- A benchmark study of 70 design centres from around the world
- Twenty in-depth interviews with various stakeholders about the region's social and economical characteristics, current and future needs and their vision on what the design centre should be. The interviewees are key figures in the fields of politics, industry, design and the social sector from within and outside the region
- An analysis of existing studies about design centres, exploring developments and current and future trends
- A co-creative workshop with a selection of key stakeholders

User-centred design research has also been integrated into the functioning of the design centre itself. Putting user needs and the way people interact with products or services at the very centre of the design process will be the central working method according to which the design centre will handle all its projects.

Final proposal for a future design centre: Transformation Factory

Vision: creating value for the region

Starting from an understanding of the current needs and future development of the region, the design centre has to generate concrete economic and social value for companies, government entities, semi-public organisations, educational institutions, and designers.

Mission

A dynamical structure of the highest international level that develops scalable and multidisciplinary design innovation projects for (clusters of) regional companies and public organisations, to generate diversification and renewal within product and service development.

Implementation

This centre will engage in large-scale projects with local partners, related to specific themes, which change every two years. The first three themes are mobility, wellbeing and social change. The projects will be contract-based and executed with a multidisciplinary team of local, regional and international professionals.

Basic principles

The activities of the centre are based upon six core principles:

1. Project based
2. Thematic structure
3. Multidisciplinary approach
4. Radical choice for the end-user
5. Company oriented
6. Research based

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Activities

1. **Experience prototyping**
The design centre will integrate experience prototyping, to allow testing of the user experiences generated by products and services.
2. **Mentorship**
Projects will be run in multidisciplinary teams where experts from business, government, public organisations and education will work with students, young designers and young companies.
3. **Creative incubator**
A creative incubator will host starting businesses of various disciplines and backgrounds, which will be integrated in the project work.

Examples

During the conference we will present several examples of concrete projects that companies and organisations could engage in and how they could derive benefits from them.

Scope

The design centre's activity will stretch out over the Province of Limburg and neighbouring areas of the Euregion, also aiming to establish further international collaborations.

References

Project research reports:

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Project interim reports:

- Experientia s.r.l., Results co-creative workshop, 17 December 2007, MS Word (9 blz.) en MS Powerpoint (47 slides)
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