

Design culture:from product to process. Building a network to develop design processes in Latin countries

Original

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Edited by

Carla Cipolla

Pier Paolo Peruccio

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Design culture: from Product to Process

Building a network to develop design processes in Latin countries

Flaviano Celaschi¹, Angela De Marco², Elena Formia³, Claudio Germak⁴, Alessandro Deserti⁵, Eduardo Staszowski⁶, Ilaria Bedeschi⁷, Giuseppe Lotti⁸, Sebastián García Garrido⁹, Nuria Rodríguez Ortega¹⁰, Vasco Branco¹¹, Rui Roda¹², Diego Speroni¹³, Claudio Barozzi¹⁴, Paulo Belo Reyes¹⁵, Gustavo Severo de Borba¹⁶, Roberto Galisai¹⁷, Dijon De Moraes¹⁸, Luis Arnal¹⁹, Luis Rodriguez²⁰

Abstract: The essay presents the results of a 2 years survey within 7 European and Latin American countries (Italy, Portugal, Spain, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico), focusing on the scientific and professional initiatives accomplished by universities and research centres in the field of design-driven innovation.

The survey shows a growing interest towards the methodological aspects of design by the observed actors and urges the formation of a “Latin network” aimed at experimenting proper design processes for Latin countries’ socio-cultural and productive systems. The basic idea is that design culture, considered as a process culture, has relevant advantages in the actual relationship between production and consumption:

- Offering design a mediator’s role between the crucial knowledge for sustainable development: economy, art/creativity, technology and humanities;
- Producing a “phantasmagoric” capacity (the possibility to visualize and share what is immaterial and upcoming);
- Mediating between the productive and consumption systems’ interests.

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1. Origins

Design culture is originating and developing in Latin countries around the problems concerning artistic design for industry, in a context featured by the relevant and systematic use by the industrial sector of practices and skills provided by the system of professional techniques and arts, commonly inclined to develop a project vision as a result of the product culture. The contribution of the academies of fine arts, as well as the schools of architecture, and the morphological, spatial and perceptive research has prevailed and conditioned great part of this culture, outlining the profile of an artist-designer oriented to a design approach traditionally linked to the productive and industrial realities that, in turn, have frustrated a progressive and continuing permeability.

Tracing the origin of design education in Latin America, Silvia Fernández establishes a strong connection between the rapid economical growth of the 1960s and the development of training experiences: “during the 1960s and 1970s, the economies of Latin American countries, whether socialist, liberal, or conservative, generally reoriented themselves towards a policy of import substitutions and industrial development. Design was placed within this overall industry policy. The creation of the first institutions for design education proliferated” (Fernández 2005, 3). According to the author, the process of institutionalization of the discipline, closely related to the influence exercised on the local culture by the Hochschule für Gestaltung (HfG) in Ulm that “offered in this context an operative, concrete answer to the challenges of industrialization” and “championed the insertion of design into the industrial process” (Fernández 2005, 4), knew a new season in the 1990s, still active nowadays. On the other hand, the origin of the first design degree courses in Latin Europe is even younger and dates back to the last decade of the XX century.

2. Breaking elements of the historical unity

Starting from those days, the development of high level training for design in the universities of these countries has been associated to the need to rearrange, adapt to the local cultural and productive system and develop a more systematic and precise knowledge about the design-driven innovation procedures. At the same time, industrial production, primarily focused on raw material extraction and commodities production, has been influenced by the risk resulting from the development of Eastern countries (above all Russia, India and China). This obliges us to reconnect design practices to industrial and economy management, starting from the development and the possibility to share innovation models that can mainly focus on cultural diversity and on the different kinds of local production procedures.

Signs of this change emerge from the analysis of the initiatives that characterised the recent activity of the universities and professional design systems in the Latin countries. The birth of institutions that wilfully integrate research-education word with productive-experience one and the rise of scientific contributions and specialist training programs that focus on this topic are only two among other elements clearly connected with the transit of the institutional, professional and social attention from the product to the process culture. A process that takes advantage of the possibility of valorisation and comparison permitted by the growing diffusion of intellectual exchanges between training realities, all over the world. The rise of professional associations, networks and institutions assembling subjects in charge of making quantitative/qualitative analysis and researches connected with the productive reality represents another important sign to value this evolutionary process. At the same time, the diffusion of European programs for the international cooperation towards innovation is an important element for the examination of the process: they have recently been and are a way to legitimate an international step towards the design process culture, but also a methodological practise for the subjects involved. The nature itself of the co-financed programs as a matter of fact imposes a high concentration on the organizational, control, and coordination

process; a strong attention to the temporal and the hierarchical articulation of the output; and finally a tension towards the documentation of the process for the diffusion of best-practices.

In addition to these “breaking” topics, we can say that today there is a global awareness of the fact that design cannot be pushed by big corporations anymore (such as the historical model of Olivetti factory in Ivrea, Italy), neither by top-down politics for organically oriented economical interventions. The actors involved have to recognize themselves as a bottom-up system in which the power of design and designer has to be auto-created.

The “breaking point” of the original state emerges from the following scheme, result of the survey that has been carried out for the last 24 months of the initiatives pinpointed by many universities and research centres from several European and Latin American countries, here by us represented. The scheme summarizes the development actions and points out possible opportunities of collaboration and real instruments put to use to create a system of shared values and practises.

MAP OF THE DEVELOPMENT ACTIONS OF PROCESS CULTURE, PINPOINTED IN THE LAST 24 MONTHS AND DEVELOPMENT IDEAS OF THE NETWORK AS AN ACTION TO SUPPORT AND STRENGTHEN THE CURRENT PROCESS.

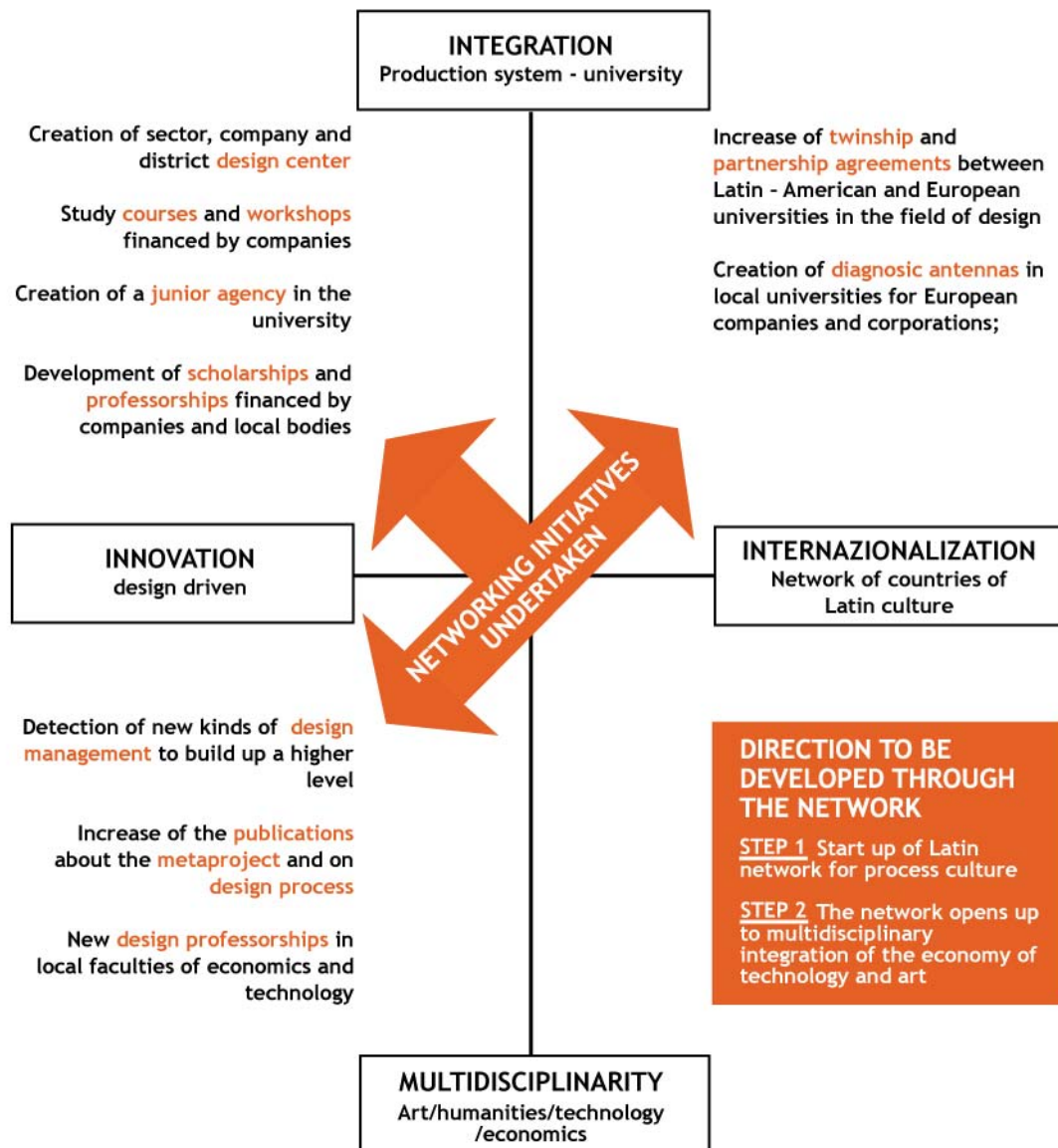


Fig. 1: Map of the development actions of process culture, pinpointed in the last 24 months and development ideas of the network as an action to support and strengthen the current process

The study implied a general overview of the main initiatives that have been divided in thematic areas based on the directions of their development. Some of the case studies have been selected as a necessary exemplification and documentation of the state-of-the-art of the research in the field of design and its future directions.

3. Integration – innovation area

Includes initiatives in which design has had a mediator role between research-university realities and the productive system. Thanks to its capabilities of transforming general knowledge into “applied research”, design has contributed to the innovation of products, services and communication instruments for businesses and agencies, helping connecting the world of research and professional consulting.

The comprehension of such ability by the productive system has favoured the birth of entities linked to universities inside businesses, production districts and associations involved in the fields of research, formation and promotion. In such environments services and laboratories are offered, in a complementary or alternative way, to implement the formation of the students, promote a design-driven process of innovation, support activities for the design-culture consolidation through exhibitions, publications, conferences and the encouraging of cultural exchanges.

Regarding Italy, we can approach the cases of POLI.design, consortium of the Politecnico di Milano that has been promoting the birth of business design centres since 1999 through the union of university and companies (Milan’s Creative Academy - Post-graduate studies school of the Swiss luxury group Richemont -, L’Oreal’s Corporate University in Rome and Gardesa research centre, a company specialized in doors and security systems), and that of the pioneer CSM (Centro Sperimentale del Mobile e dell’Arredamento), founded in Poggibonsi (Siena) in 1982 with the aim of providing the sector with a support in terms of research, innovation and professional education.

In these two cases, the design centres play a fundamental role in two directions:

- to organize activities connected with company businesses;
- to serve an homogeneous type of enterprises in terms of district capabilities.

Further exemplifications that clarify the ways of interaction between product system and university through the birth of different kinds of design centres could also be found in the Latin American context: Porto Alegre’s Escola de Design Unisinos, born from the partnership between the Universidade de Vale do Rio Sinos and POLI.design, can count upon a business consulting branch, joined with those of education and research; this academic institution, in collaboration with POLI.design, has then promoted the birth of the Cini Design Center, a research and development centre working inside the Madesa group that operates in the furniture field. Always in Brazil, the fashion and textile district in the region of Rio de Janeiro can count on the collaboration of the Cetiqt (Centro de Tecnologia da Indústria Química e Têxtil) that, in a singular structure, offers a Faculty and a Design institute, whose objectives are of satisfying the emerging needs of the textile chain production through the use of high technology.

In addition to the abilities mentioned above, design centres can also have the function of promoting design culture publicly; a model well represented by the CMD (Centro Metropolitano de Diseño, Buenos Aires). This institution assists the city’s enterprises, designers and entrepreneurs with the aim of improving their competitiveness through innovation-oriented initiatives, the application of strategic-design processes and the integration of the project in the production reality, activities well documented by publications and international conferences, among which it would be worth remembering the 2005 edition named “Diseño estratégico pyme”.

Portugal’s case study, that in 2007 saw the birth of ID+ (Instituto de Investigação em Design, Media e Cultura), represents a paradigm of the way different typologies of research and innovation centres can finally converge into a single platform of common strategic objectives.

Forces operating in the design sector in Porto’s and Aveiro’s universities have joined the CPD (Centro Português de Design) in the establishment of ID+, whose principal aim consists in the research and creation of instruments useful to the weakening of the concept of “symbolic deficit” of Portuguese artefacts (the entire range of products, systems, and services), assuming a sustainability logic as ethical reference. The structure involves actors of different nature, in the attempt of establishing a strong link between the world of experience (design practice) and that of

research (university). Appealing to the problem solving, communication and design dimension, the project tries to find the major number of alternatives for the actuation and the symbolic reinvention of Portuguese products through the creation of project groups organized on a multidisciplinary platform.

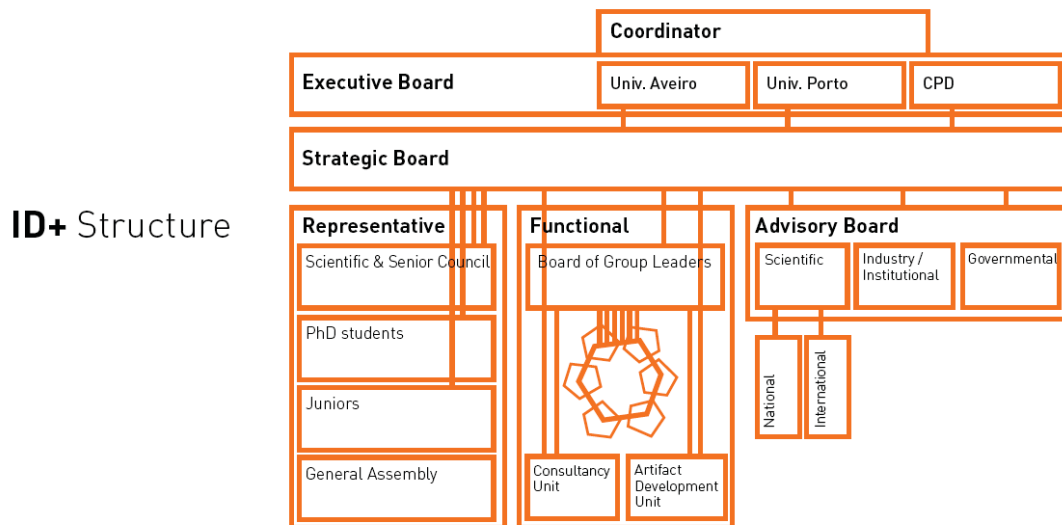


Fig. 2: ID+ Formal structure (ID+ 2007)

Along with the birth of design centres, the constructive synergy between the world of production and the academic reality has implemented projects and laboratorial activities inside the universities financed by private enterprises and public agencies. These enterprises operate in both service production and distribution sector. As examples we could mention (limiting ourselves to the co-authors of the following paper):

- Coza, home furnishing company, or Cave Gaisse, in the wine sector, which have collaborated in the 2007 and 2008 editions of the Design Atelier (second year) of the Escola de Design Unisinos, Porto Alegre;
- Cean spa, operating in the conception, project, commercialization and administration of supermarkets, has an active role in the Industrial Design Laboratory (2008) in the Eco-compatible Product Design Degree Course of the I Faculty of Architecture of the Politecnico di Torino;
- The housing chain store Emmelunga, which in 2006, also through a contest, established a synergy with the Degree Course in Industrial Design of the Faculty of Architecture of the Università degli Studi di Firenze.

In other cases, the synergy between universities and productive system has ultimately given start to the development of scholarships and professorships financed by enterprises and local agencies.

4. Innovation - multidisciplinary area

Design, being a young and academic history-lacking discipline settles itself between four traditionally hardly-interacting knowledge systems: humanities, technology/engineering, art/creativity, economy and management.

Its attitude in catalyzing contents and synthesizing their effects in terms of form, function, value and meaning for the final user represents an essential component and constitutes the object of a growing number of studies focalizing on the so-called “metaprojectual” phase of the design process.

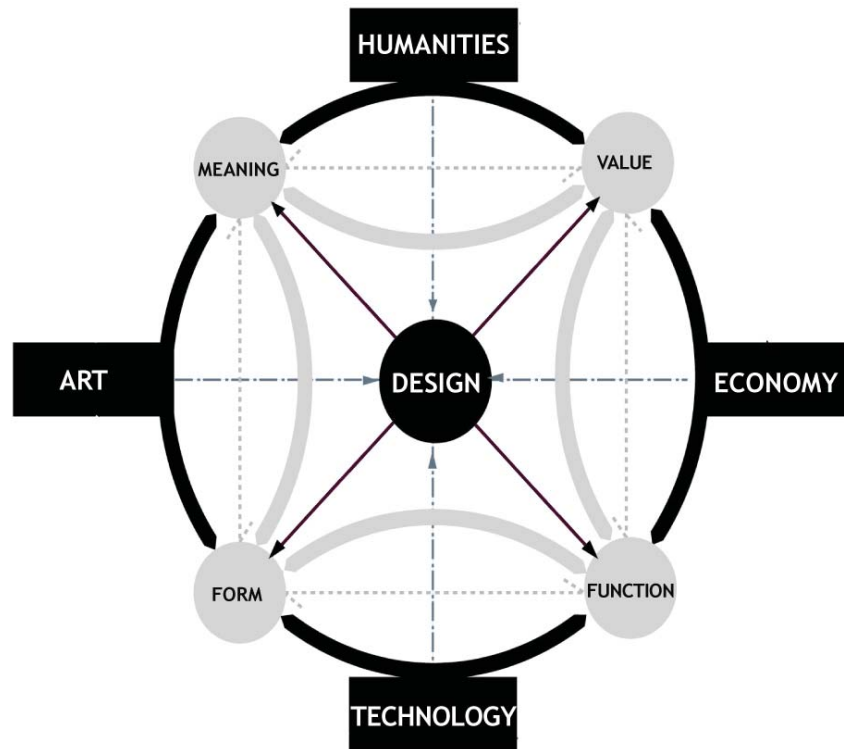


Fig. 3: Design as mediator between knowledge systems

“The metadesign is a place for reflection and elaboration of the project’s content. It originates from the necessity of multidisciplinary knowledge which will maintain and guide the activity of the project within scenery in constant mutation” writes Dijon De Moraes in his text “Limites do design” (De Moraes 1997/2008). It could be considered “the design of the design”, the phase during which we shift from a wide range observation of reality to a model of it on which it could be possible to operate projectually.

Starting its development in the 1990s, with market’s globalization and the turbulence of the context in which production and innovation processes were born and breed, the reflection on metadesign has produced a great number of publications. Other than the De Moraes’ text mentioned above (always limiting us to the co-authors of this paper and the years 2007-2008), it seems significant for us to point out the almost contemporary publication of:

- “Design e innovazione” (Celaschi, Deserti 2007), which elaborates the articulation in phases of the design project, giving particular attention to the phases of observation of the reality and the constitution of a model;
- “L’uomo al centro del progetto” (Germak in course of publication), which gathers different essays centered on the role of the designer during the process of innovation.

Metadesign is also subject of study in all of the observed countries. The survey has in fact detected the existence of courses specifically dedicated to metadesign (for example the “Metadesign Laboratory” of the Degree Course in Industrial Design of the Design Faculty of the Politecnico di Milano, the module of “Innovation, Management, Communication” of the Eco-compatible Product Design Degree Course of the I Faculty of Architecture of the Politecnico di Torino...), but also the

great emphasis given to the “design of the design”, in the field of degree courses and didactic modules in industrial design (for example the Industrial Design Course of the Universidad Empresarial Siglo 21, Cordoba, Argentina...). In some cases, the articulation of the plan of studies retraces the phases of the metadesign, progressively focusing on the methodological setting, on the “investigation” techniques, information modelling, the project and its representation, with the aim of conferring the student an “autonomía frente a un problema de diseño, siendo capaz de coordinar y tomar decisiones, un estrategia que domina integralmente las variables de un proceso de diseño. Capaz de reconocer e integrar conocimientos y a otras disciplinas, aportando con desarrollo concreto a los desafíos de comunicación, gestión, forma y producción” (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. Formative objectives of the “Licenciatura del Diseño”. <http://www.puc.cl/dno>).

In the laboratory-oriented subjects, it is easy to find a particular and shared setting of the initial phase: the starting point of the project that is presented to the students is not a structured and circumscribed brief but rather a “problematic field” of vast entity. The initial “problematic field” is therefore broadened and enriched (a humanistic approach in opposition to the “elaboration” proper of a more rationalistic approach) to be simplified afterwards through a progressive re-modelling of knowledge: the prevision of intermediate project steps such as the “tema general”, the “concepto general” or the “scenario” is commonly used.

This attitude to the initial problematisation (which is generally dedicated the 50% of the design time) and to the self-individuation of the design theme, legacy of a historical gap in the link between design industry/world, is to be considered as a particularly significant attitude in the actual market’s context that shows a business world always more oriented into the externalization of the “research for a sense” to external consultants.

The holistic vision of the profession of the designer that derives from these reflections sets the problem of a redefinition of the denomination of some degree courses and titles of the polytechnic matrix. The “titulación” of “Ingeniero técnico en Diseño Industrial” had for example acted on the perception of the student (as detected by Malaga University’s board for Innovative Education), putting in perspective its commitment and interest towards the disciplines of aesthetical-critical, graphic and artistic-expressive matrix. The board, in observance of its denomination, has activated a series of innovative education measures with the purpose of encouraging student’s motivation through the construction of an interactive *disenoteca*.

The valorisation of design’s multidisciplinary and capacity to aggregate and that of the designer’s strategic mission develop in a much more advanced way in the field of high education, where the promoting institutions are more autonomous and the orientation towards the market is stronger. The very own Universidad de Málaga is taking care of the module of “Identidad, Marca e Imagen Corporativa” of the Master Internacional en Dirección de Comunicación organized by the Universidad Católica de Murcia, which has students coming from all the principal Latin American countries.

For example the Master in Design of the Università degli Studi di Firenze, the Master in Strategic Design of the Universidade de Aveiro, the Master in Design Strategico of the Escola de Design Unisinos of Porto Alegre, the Curso de Pós-graduação em Gestão do Design nas Micro e Pequenas Empresas of the Universidade do Estado de Minas Gerais, the Maestría en Diseño Estratégico e Innovación of the Universidad Iberoamericana of Mexico City all have a management and strategical orientation.

Designers’ capacity of assuming the role of link between the business dynamics, the socio-cultural processes and the client’s desires has made possible for them to be recognized by agencies and research structures in the technological and economical fields, which have opened their very own design courses and teachings.

Representative examples of this fact are the courses instituted by the Università Bocconi of Milan (for example the masters in Fashion, Experience & Design Management, now at its eighth edition) or the program of the Gestão do Design held by the Senai (a Brazilian industrial association) in 14 states of the Federation, counting over 40 “Núcleos de Apoio ao Design” (NAD), and in 13 different industrial sectors, from the production of furniture to the industrial automation of chemical industry. The presence of a design area in a business-oriented university such as the Universidad Empresarial Siglo 21 which general objective is “Formar líderes emprendedores, capaces de asumir posiciones de responsabilidad en la creación y distribución de la riqueza. Líderes que

contribuyan a aumentar la eficiencia y competitividad de las organizaciones, y que aporten a lograr que el país sea cada vez más desarrollado, ético, solidario y equitativo” and “Desarrollar la capacidad de resolver con investigación, los problemas que el país demande a la Universidad” (Universidad Empresarial Siglo 21. Mision de la Universidad. <http://www.uesiglo21.edu.ar/Canal>) is also of significative relevance.

5. Integration - internationalization area

The exchange of experiences, contents and competences between universities, professors, researchers and enterprises belonging to different national settings of the Latin area has favoured reflections on the states identities, geographical areas and actions in favour of the local development.

The increasing number of partnerships between Latin American universities and European ones can be seen as a first signal of such trend: it is significant the example of the Escola de Design Porto Alegre, born by the partnership between the Universidade da Vale do Rio Sinos and the consortium POLI.design (Politecnico di Milano) in 2005.

The progressive process of internationalization and the creation of partnerships between the Latin countries is therefore confirmed by the increasing mobility of students, researchers and professors; a process that encourages the sharing of academic models, research themes, cultural activities and professional careers. Exchange programs active at different levels of the students' career are available in all of the universities involved.

Design's role of cultural mediation in the creation of partnerships is finally evident in the constitution of associative agreements between universities, local agencies and productive systems in the pursuit of local development and valorisation of the single realities.

A shared desire to compare “las dimensiones de lo local y lo global provejéndole al diseño un espeso y fértil campo de validación: ser vehículo cultural en el mundo virtualmente uniformado por la tecnología y compulsivamente regido por el consumo” (Cervini, Kayser 2004) is getting increasingly noticeable.

With this in mind, it seems useful to mention a few cases witnessing how integration systems at a supranational scale can contribute in providing incentives for valorisation projects at a local scale. The first example is linked to the growing associative phenomenon that represents one of the most crucial and distinctive topics of the contemporary debate in regard to the recognition of the design's world professionalism. The ALADI (Asociación Latinoamericana de Diseno) is the only supranational design association in South America: it reunites representatives of training institutions and of professional, business, promotional and cultural associations, both of the private and public sectors. It was born in 1980 as “entidad que agrupa y representa a los diseñadores Latinoamericanos que promueven la insitucionalización do Diseño Industrial Como disciplina tecnologica necesaria para el desarrollo social económico y cultural de la región” (ALADI. Acta de Constitución. <http://www.aladi-design.org/Historia>) with crossing objectives developing at a political but also institutional, formative and communicational level. As years went by Uruguay, Paraguay, Dominican Republic, Porto Rico, and Bolivia (as last in 2007) joined the original group formed by delegates from Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, and Venezuela in the composition of a complex map of territorial realities. Today it promotes a great number of initiatives including conferences, exhibitions, contests and even teaching programs and research projects.

To the strength which is implicit in the associative action, international research projects are joined demonstrating the extent of the synergies in design culture. We could name two examples taken from the activity of an institution that has historically developed a particular competence in the creation of communitarian and, in general, international projects. Between 2004 and 2007 the Degree Course in Industrial Design held by the Università degli Studi di Firenze, together with Florence's Isia, the II Università degli Studi di Napoli, the Ecole des Beaux Arts de Marseille and the Institute des Beaux Arts de Sousse has started the project “Abitare Maditerraneo I e II” with the

aim of contributing to the creation of an added value for the local manufactures in terms of competitiveness and starting from the definition of a specific identity. The project has counted the collaboration of institutional agencies (European Union and different Regions) and business enterprises located between Italy, Spain, France, and Tunisia, joined by didactical structures. The project has implied two kinds of relapses:

- direct (the definition of a “Manifesto dell’Abitare Mediterraneo”; the realization of about 30 prototypes developed by the joint of enterprises and designers from the two sides of the Mediterranean; the publication of a market study about the potentials of a Mediterranean trademark and products);
- indirect (the work on an alternative concept of Mediterranean based on the desire of a confrontation of people, cultures, development models; the creation of lasting relationships between the students involved; the confrontation between the project schools).

The same Graduate Course, in collaboration with San Paolo’s Universidade Presbiteriana MacKenzie and Brazilian ONGs operating in the waste recycling sector (Aldeia do Futuro, Monte Azul, Ricicla-Florescer, Arrasto), has therefore activated in 2004 the “Design Possibile” project (actually in development). The objective was reached through a complex methodological procedure that started from the creation of mixed Italian-Brazilian groups of students and made it to the realization of prototypes even contemplating the hypothesis of a distribution of these products. Finally it consisted in the helping of Brazilians ONGs operating in the sector of the recycling of production waste (jeans, tissues, wood, PVC, marketing banners) to widen their market through design.

6. Internationalization - multidisciplinary area

Considering the documented and increasing intensity of exchanges and collaborations between the cited organizations, the formation and consolidation of a cultural bridge between the main Latin European and Latin American countries appears to be highly appropriate: a Latin net could afford in a systematic and conjoint way the topic of *design process culture*.

Despite the existence of studies and formation/conference practices promoted in the last 20 years by universities and design centres of the considered countries, these came undeniably late when compared to analogous initiatives held in the Anglo-Saxon world.

The different socio-political and economic history of the UK and of many Anglo-Saxon countries in respect to Latin countries have stimulated a much more precocious maturation of the methodological culture and a diffusion of it on a global scale, as the only available tool. The manufacturing boom of the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century put into motion modern benefits and constraints for living and working. Disciplines such as architecture, town planning, engineering and product design, whose growth has always taken place alongside the industrial development, began to tackle new types of problem-solving past traditional artefact making.

The first well known public evidence of the “design methods” studies dates back over 40 years (“The Conference on Systematic and Intuitive Methods in Engineering, Industrial Design, Architecture and Communications” organized in 1962 by John Chris Jones and Peter Slain). Since then, the number of studies has increased and expanded, giving origin to a multiplicity of approaches and methodologies that share the belief in a pragmatic and rigorous method to solve problems through design, and that are commonly embodied in the generic definition of *Anglo-Saxon design process culture* (also considering the common linguistic substrate of the proposed definitions and practices).

The cited approach has generally been applied also within Latin American countries, due to the strong US influence and according to the rationalist design education of Ulmian derivation.

In the absence of autonomous and codified methodologies, the design process has absorbed, also in the European Latin countries (characterized, as Latin American countries, by a late industrial development in respect to the UK), an Anglo-Saxon setting.

The relationship strengthening between the Latin countries of the European and American area seems to be a vital opportunity for a *choral confrontation* with the “English speaking” design process culture, to understand the different theoretical and practical strands and common guidelines and characteristics and, alternatively:

- to verify the possibility of an aware adhesion of the Latin countries to the already diffuse methodologies;
- to distil, from the analysis of the studies realized up to now and of the empirical experiences accomplished by the different actors of the net in an independent or aggregated way, the characteristics of a possible common formulation of the Latin design process.

This unifying objective is extremely topical if considered as a singular case of “post-colonial study”, prospecting a progressive moving closer and “familiarisation” of countries historically playing the role of colonizers and colonized and their “coalition” in the presence of a transversal cultural *colonization* by the design process culture of Anglo-Saxon setting.

The hypothesis that supports the formation of the network (and is partially supported by the observation of the cited cases) is that it is possible to find some common elements in the design process approach shown by design professional and researchers of the Latin American and European countries. Constitutive and originative components of the mentioned approach could be inferred by some peculiar characteristics of the observed countries, such as:

- the attitude to syncretism, particularly showed by “young” multiethnic countries, such as Brazil (or Cuba and most of the Caribbean countries);
- the culture of industrial symbiosis and collective identity of the industrial clusters and local productive systems, particularly developed in Italy;
- the prevalence of a humanistic approach to the project and the emphasis on the initial stage of the design process: the “critical problematisation” (already highlighted in this paper with reference to Latin American cases) that considers the so-called “brief” as a cue for the opening of an enlarged problematic field.

The ideal scenery to which the proposed network project tends is the joint construction, in the long term, of a peculiar design process culture of Latin setting.

Possible instruments for the realization of the scenario are:

- the creation of a virtual expandable network for the exchange of information/experiences by researchers from the European and Latin American countries;
- the foundation of a magazine (printed and online) to collect the researchers’ contributions;
- the establishment of a programme of meetings/conferences to allow the frequent relationship between people and keep alive the debate on common issues through periodic deadlines for the delivery of the research advances and the celebration of the results.

First concrete result of the systemic and transnational knowledge-sharing is the birth of the Design Process Latin Network, to testimony the high relevance of the proposed issues.

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