

Event Report: ERA World Design Congress

Copenhagen, Icograda, Icsid, IFI
26-28th September 2005

1. **Type of Event**

World Design Congress

2. **Duration**

Three days

3. **Participants**

The congress garnered a huge cross-section of international delegates and speakers from a varying range of professions, all connected by the broad topic of 'design'.

4. **Aim/Angle of Event**

The aim of the event was to provide a new perspective as to "the changing role and challenges of design", in a rapidly changing environment. Separate sessions were held in Oslo, Gothenberg and Helsinki to introduce thematic issues that were elaborated in Copenhagen.

The Congress was commissioned by the international design membership organizations Icograda (International Council of Graphic Design Associations), Icsid (International Council of Societies of Industrial Design) and IFI (International Federation of Interior Architects/Designers).

5. **Speeches/Presentations**

Session 1: Setting the scene

This opening plenary session aims at establishing a common point of departure for congress delegates by drafting a picture of the current state of design as a powerful driver of innovation and economical growth, and by introducing the programme committee's and the three international design organizations' ambitions for the outcome of the congress; a valuable source of inspiration and knowledge of the changing role and challenges of architecture, design and designers.

Speeches/Presentations

- **Innovation and design as political instruments**, Brian Mikkelsen, Minister of Culture (Denmark)

- **Striving for a more creative approach to infrastructural challenges**, Mayor Mads Lebech, Chairman of the HUR Council (Denmark)
- **Keynote Speaker**, Dr. Krister Ahlström, Chairman of Finnish-Swedish Design Council (Finland)
- **Closing**, Steffen Gulmann, Chairman of Danish Design Center (Denmark)

Session 2: ICSID, Stories from around the world

In keeping with the theme of era 05—the changing roles and challenges of design and the interplay of culture, business, politics and science, the Icsid program will present innovative practices and ideas from around the world that re-write the boundaries of design. Within Icsid's global network, presentations will focus on uniquely regional issues and practices appreciating the Danish and Nordic influences that have worldwide impact.

Speeches/Presentations

- Gcina Mhlophe, Design Institute South African Bureau of Standards (South Africa)
- **From marketing nation to changemaking nation: How Denmark can spearhead Massive Change**, Tobias Lau, Design Strategist, Bruce Mau Design (Denmark)
- **The Impact of Asia's Economic Growth: new challenges for design**, Leimei Julia Chiu, Director of Global Communications, International Design Center Nagoya (Japan)
- **Tradition and Culture in the Emerging Scenario**, Pradyumna Vyas, Principal Designer, National Institute of Design (India)
- **The Future Scenarios Project**, Bruce Sterling, Writer, Visionary in Residence, Art Center College of Design (USA)

Session 4: Icoagrada, Communicating in a four-dimensional environment

Communications design is becoming increasingly dependent on an understanding of a fourth dimension - be it emotional, cultural, political - transcending the traditional 2D designs of the past and the 3D designs of today. This symposium raises the question of what this fourth dimension actually is or could be, and how visual communicators can enhance their practice by understanding and by processing their own conception of the fourth dimension.

Speeches/Presentations

- **Branding Ethics**, David Bermann, Communications and Graphics Designer (Canada)

- **Branding with focus on different ethnic backgrounds**, Jakob Fenger, Superflex (Denmark)
- **Beg, steal and borrow - merging contradictory cultural influences**, Masoud Alavi, Creative Director of Timeline Design Studio (Denmark)
- **The web of life (a new way to view graphic design)**, Terry Irwin, Schumacher College (England)
- **Generational linking**, Gero Grundmann, Studio Bec (England)

Session 7 (Day 2): People coming together in the new era: Design and multicultural societies

With rather few exceptions, the social and political structures we live and work within are mono-cultural. We are mirrored in our peers - measured by values or beliefs, by behavior and by heritage - and we design for those who resemble us. However, the world is changing; there is a growing gap between our structures and the configuration of cultures from which these structures rely. This session addresses the vast opportunities and inspiration multicultural societies pose to professional designers and architects.

Speeches/Presentations

- **Megatrends and influencing factors**, Mario Gagliardi, Principal at Allevio Design (Austria)
- **Dealing with globalization**, Ole Vestergaard Poulsen, Lego (Denmark)
- **Post Colonial Culture**. Eunice Seng, Scholar at Columbia University, New York (USA), I. Shin Chow, Principal Architect (China)

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Session 8: For a better world, press one

Architects and designers have always aspired to make a difference - to contribute to a better world; some by addressing global issues and some by proposing a better, more beautiful or functional solution to remedy almost any problem. As the world grows more complex, the complexity of being a designer increases correspondingly. This plenary session presents internationally acclaimed personalities who work with complexity - as designers or architects, philosophers or writers - and their views on how architects and designers can pursue their aspirations of contributing to a better world within constantly changing and increasingly complex environments.

Speeches/Presentations

- **Massive Change**, Jennifer Leonard, Journalist (Canada)
- **Are we closing our eyes to the future?**, David Zach, Futurist and Author (USA)
- **Our responsibilities as individuals**, Slavoj Zizek, Professor of Philosophy (Slovenia)

Session 15 Day 3 : Exploring Change in design education

This session was developed by the University in Lund, Sweden. The focus will be on experiences and trends in design education, as well as in the politics of education.

Speeches/Presentations

- **Design Education and Research**. Patrick Whitney, Illinois Institute of Design (USA)
- **Design education from a European perspective**, Yrjö Sotamaa, Dean of University of Art & Design at Helsinki (Finland)
- **Design Education from a global perspective**, Lorraine Justice, Hong Kong Polytechnic University (China)

Parallel Sessions: Session 1

- Axel Thallemer, Kunstuniversität Linz (Austria)
- Mike Stott, Umeå Institute of Design (Sweden)
- Kristina Sahlqvist, School of Design & Craft, Gothenburg (Sweden)

Session 9: Presentation of Papers, Charlottenborg

The 10 winning papers from over 140 submissions in an international competition will be presented. Projects deal with current and future developments in communication design, industrial design and interior design and architecture.

Speeches/Presentations

- **Conflicts between Innovation and Sustainability**, Ian Walsh, Swansea Institute, University of Wales (Wales), John Henshall, School of Industrial Design, Swansea Institute, University of Wales (Wales)
- **Integrating Sustainable Product Design and Corporate Environmental Management**, Yilun Yang, Arizona State University (USA), Jacques Girard, Arizona State University (USA)
- **Design Management in Impoverished Countries**, Emma Presler, ESPN.com and Pratt Design Management Program (USA). Kari Litzmann, Graphic Designer (USA), Pauline Munga, Pratt Institute (USA)
- **Design and Innovation for Social Cause**, Avinash Shende, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati (India)
- **Design by People**, Ravi Poovaiah (India)., Ajanta Sen (India)
- **"Intelligent skin" – the fourth dimension**, Martin Wiedmer, University of Art and Design Basel (Switzerland)
- **The road before us: A Challenge**, Ian Grout (Scotland)
- **Creative Waves: a case study**, Vince Dziekan, Monash University (Australia), Rick Bennett, University of New South Wales (Australia)
- **Industrial Design and Humanism**, Wagner Braga Batista (Brazil), Luiz Eduardo Cid Guimaraes (Brazil), Erika Cabral Guimaraes (Brazil)
- **Design in two minds: East and West**, Gideon Loewy, Chao-Yang University of Technology, Scandinavian Design Consultant Company, (Taiwan)

6. General observations and conclusions

As stated above, the aim of the event was to examine the changing role of the designer; this is a very general scope aimed at an entire profession. The speeches and presentations did provide a good overview of the whole design field and the challenges that lie ahead.

However, sustainability and sustainable design were not explicitly addressed; not surprising perhaps, but when examining issues such as 'design for a better world', we hoped that sustainable development and design would be discussed more deeply. Social issues were addressed but the environment took a low

priority (excepting Terry Irwin's presentation on "The Web of Life" and a few of the presented papers)

For a designer who is interested in the changing dynamics in their profession, this was a unique opportunity to promote their activities, network (although it can be difficult at these large-scale events) and gain an overarching perspective on the field in general.

For this project, ERA gave a good background to the mainstream design profession, with positive signals of 'movement' in the field, in terms of addressing social issues and re-thinking the impact and role and responsibility of the design profession. The 'take-home' messages from the event did not, however, empower the individual designer role to change, but addressed the field in general.

Over the course of the three days, we had many interesting conversations with various designers, design educators and other professions. We had the opportunity to ask people from different countries what the status of the sustainable design education was in their respective countries, which fed into the mapping process. One interesting input was the impression that designers from developing countries felt that issues such as sustainability and environmental consciousness in design may not be something explicit in their design profession and particularly education. It seems that the relationship with nature in rural and developing countries may be closer and stronger; so environmentalism is part of their way of life and not something that they 'learn' about at design school. However, in the same way as western societies, there is also a clear need for knowledge and skills in sustainable development and dealing with the impact of 'modern life' in developing countries and cities.