

P / REFERENCES OF DESIGN

BRIDGING DESIGN AND ECONOMICS.

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DOI: 10.63442/FQOV2354

As new and systemic complexities continue to challenge our societal structures, the role of design in shaping and influencing spaces of governance, business, and innovation is becoming increasingly vital. Global challenges demand innovative approaches, and design, with its capacity to navigate and reframe these complexities, holds the potential to play a transformative role. This track explored the narratives of governmental policy design and the emergence of alternative economic frameworks. As governments struggle with new economic realities and businesses seek to innovate within shifting markets, design offers a unique toolkit for addressing these challenges.

The track was also a reflection on the evolving boundaries of today's creative industry, encompassing everything from corporate design initiatives to entrepreneurial ventures.

Our authors clearly stated that strategic, design-driven decision-making must play a more central role in shaping our collective future. For this to occur, it is essential to develop new, frameworks for evaluating design's impact. How can designers effectively influence business and policy decisions? Can we measure the tangible and intangible impacts of design? What methods and approaches are effective, and which fall short? Given the inherent agency in design, this discourse aims to address the evolving position of design in contemporary contexts, emphasizing its critical role in shaping the future of governance, business, and innovation. These topics are crucial, as they highlight design's growing responsibility in shaping the systems and structures that define our world.

While the track prescribed an approach focused on the systemic and strategic dimension of design, authors could choose the purpose to which such an approach is applied.

One area of focus was sustainability, which is an overarching issue that characterises much of the innovation efforts of the past decade across many disciplines.

Design is a profession responsible for defining desirable products (and services) and hence it is capable of promoting consumption, a reason why it has been criticised in the past from a sustainability perspective, but that is also why Design Research tackles mitigating negative impacts, as well as building design capabilities focused on environmental sustainability.

On the most immediate level, these capabilities can be focused on the threefold principles of “reduce reuse recycle”, exploring the necessary design approaches to optimise material use, adequate production technologies, as well as consumer behaviour changes that lead to longer product lifespans or more sustainable purchase choices.

However, design can tackle sustainability also at the level of organisations, from interventions in existing companies to setting up new enterprises, up until shifting values in an entire market segment. The four contributions in the “Designing for Sustainable Economies” session focused on integrating design principles with environmental sustainability in product design, circular economies, and premium markets.

Sustainable design practices can be challenging to implement in well-established enterprises with industrially relevant production and tight profit margins, and one of the contributions tackled these by analysing the practical challenges both based on a semi-systematic literature review and an interview campaign.

A fundamentally different approach was represented by an entrepreneurial project from the Amazon rainforest, experimenting with bioeconomy based on growing useful design objects on trees and, in particular, establishing a local community of artisans to manage production.

Another contribution argued that, conversely, shifting the high-end market might stimulate the diffusion of good sustainable design practices.

Finally, a critical reflection highlighted the potential oxymoron lying behind the term circular economy, proposing that there is a need for a regenerative economy, which requires not only a regenerative design approach, but also systemic policy changes in order to adapt to the Anthropocene.

Another group of contributions in the track, arranged in the “Local Design Strategies” session, have explored how design can act strategically to develop projects that are relevant to a specific geographic area.

The first one in this session focused on how to prepare the interdisciplinary students of a Master in Business Design for an entrepreneurial role, developing their skills at the “Entrepreneurship Through Design” workshop, which also allowed them to critically assess the effort distribution throughout the innovation process, confronting the double diamond model with its practice.

The other two contributions in this session reflected on the design strategies within a manufacturing company and a territorial system of manufacturers.

In enterprises, Chief Design Officers (CDO) have an increasing presence, but their position and roles are still not entirely well understood, therefore one of the presented papers has observed and analysed the CDO’s activities in a company, highlighting its mediator role between various organisational units and disciplinary backgrounds.

On the other hand, the success of design products often depends on the effectiveness of an entire industrial district, rather than a single manufacturer’s capabilities. The second contribution argues that beyond effective

supply chain management, for sustainable development it is essential to establish a “cultural value chain”, which considers local identity and community, thus leveraging and further enhancing cultural capital.

Finally, the session named “Perspectives of Innovation” examined design methodologies and cultural entrepreneurship, exploring new methods to foster innovation and deliver value. Design Thinking received some criticism recently, however, its influence remains and continues to impact how businesses operate. While its benefits are known, its role in promoting ambidexterity is less studied.

One paper presented case studies, identified key factors for successful Design Thinking implementation and its impact on organizational learning, particularly valuable for managers. Another contributor went beyond this methodology and explored how sensemaking and effectual thinking can enhance normative design thinking, presenting design as an imaginative, embodied practice that evolves through stakeholder collaboration, reflection, and learning.

The importance of a design-based approach, using design as a steering force in urban innovation processes was explored in another case study. Often overshadowed by administrative concerns, here, design’s value was demonstrated even in the procurement process.

To make sure, the track covered multiple dimensions of the market, it featured papers demonstrating design’s influence beyond corporations. A study explored crowdfunding’s potential at micro, meso, and macro levels, highlighting its role in innovation, and economic growth, especially for small- and medium-sized enterprises in light of recent regulatory changes.

Leaving the business world behind, one of our contributors presented a case for public services. In this scenario, the digital transformation of the public sector fostered collaboration and experimentation, making room for design practices such as design thinking and service design. The paper explored how the Design Research Lab (DRL) framework, rooted in the arts, and focused on public interest, can offer valuable insights for improving public sector innovation labs.

As track chairs, looking back at our track, we observed that case studies showcasing the relationship between design and the economy are highly important for Cumulus. This should be treated as a key topic, as design in the business world tries to assert itself within capitalism, in the face of numerous other dominant approaches.

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This contribution was presented at Cumulus Budapest 2024: P/References of Design conference, hosted by the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design Budapest, Hungary between May 15-17, 2024.

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ISBN Volume 1: 978-952-7549-02-5 (PDF)

ISBN Volume 2: 978-952-7549-03-2 (PDF)

DOI Volume 1: <https://doi.org/10.63442/IZUP8898>

DOI Volume 2: <https://doi.org/10.63442/TADX4016>

Conference Organisers

Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design Budapest (MOME)

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