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Emergence of FROGS (French design Researchers Oncoming Group Structuration)

New challenges for the French speaking design research community.

abstract

This text underlines the actual rise and structuring of a Francophone design researchers community.

It identifies some insights to understand the evolving French and French speaking context of design research.

Most of institutions in the international design research society come from English speaking countries. And while some researchers from non English speaking countries belong to their own robust design community, French researchers are not massively present in the research community. They neither do not have a strong team corpus.

Firstly, this text exposes three main hypothetic reasons for this weak participation: the organisation of postgraduate studies in design in France, a link with the unclear recognition for professional designers and the global national research structure.

Based on these three observed states of things, next chapter presents the evolution of the global situation especially in France and details positive trends detected for each context.

As a conclusion the text emphases how it is certainly time for new opportunities for people already involved in the discipline to be part of this structuring and rise within the international community.

A French design research community is emerging nowadays. This text outlines the historical and cultural French context and highlights the stakes of the current structuration of this design researchers community.

The background of the Design Research Society and other design research institutions founded in England (Cross, 2007) (Bayazit, 2004) may justify that the main community of researchers is coming from English speaking countries. This being said, it is not sufficient to explain why there are so few French speakers, institutional advisers in international academic and professional organisations (D.R.S., I.C.S.I.D., D.M.I.,...) with respect to other non-English speaking countries (Gasparski, 1995b). We also noticed few bibliographies integrating references from South of Europe (Koskinen, 2011), especially from France.

After describing the French context for design researchers with respect to the international history, we will recall that design research still does not exist officially within the French research organisation in spite of intents and of real people involved.

This lack of existence is linkable to the French design education organisation for two reasons: the too recent recognition of the design discipline into the education and the University system and the management of curricula shared by various national ministries.

Following the historical complexity of the design educational organisation, a confusion is also surrounding the professional activity of design with recent positive initiatives. The difficulty of the academic recognition will also be partly explained by the French research categorisation.

For each three hypothesis we studied evolutions and opportunities (higher education news, professional proposals and governmental programs, researchers meetings) that suggest that it is time now for the French design research community to reinforce its identity and structure.

Historical context

From the creation of the Design Research Society, in 1966, we can follow a continuum of exchanges on design definitions, design research definitions and boundaries (Frayling, 1993) (Jonas, 2012). It is a normal debate for such a recent discipline and "Because design research draws on knowledge from so many fields, the

construction of a research culture poses particular challenges that, one might argue, are almost without precedent."(Margolin, 2000)

Academics in design are part of a forty years old community coming from complicit disciplines (Cross, 2007): engineering researches in process modelling; creative process models developed by engineers and sociologists; design impact economists' evaluations; design skills definitions; historical, philosophical or marketing approach;... Into this young community, some foreign participants or groups are visible at an international level out of the English spoken teams but despite of the existence of a network for some years, it is hard to identify a strong group of French researchers.

Locally, in France, design researchers are not identified because research in design is not an official research discipline so far.

Following questions from the international research community, particular meetings as "Les ateliers de la recherche en design ®" in France illustrate the context of working on some reflections and anti-portraits of what design is not (Borja de Mozota, Findeli and Schambach, 2006), identifying boundaries with other disciplines involved in "projects building" (Hatchuel and Weil, 2008).

These meetings, voluntarily quite informal compared to the academic research colloquiums classic shape, were created by three Francophone "activists" coming from different design universes (Findeli, 2007). These "workshops" count with a hundred of participants each year from 2005, who can share material "linkable" to the group reflections: as at the beginning of design research in England and others countries, they are coming from complicit disciplines (Findeli, 2007) with individual background, either professional or theoretical.

At least four cultures

Into the French academic organisation, educational ways to learn "design" are numerous, involving four different ministries (Education, Higher Education and Research, Culture and Communication, Industrial Renewal) with different programs, ambitions (professional oriented, theoretical, art and craft or business oriented,...), type of teachers and methods. The result is a lot of design degrees with different meanings and values.

The University is not the main neither the historical place to learn "design" in France and not necessary the easier way to choose before a PhD. This complex landscape doesn't help to see the emergence of a research activity in design in France neither to clarify what a professional designer must be.

A profession?

Even if "designing is not a profession but an attitude" (Moholy-Nagy, 1947), designers' professional activities may be described and normalised as other professional categories such as doctors, professors or architects as it is the case in other countries. As a consequence of the diversity of degrees, there is not yet any official tittle for "Designer" in France even if institutions have been working on this subject these last years.
A research discipline is easier to understand when it is linked to a profession. Since the design professions are not strongly structured in France, the design research legitimacy is less evident.

A research discipline

The French National University Council (C.N.U.) is the only institution able to define Research disciplines in France. The design research "section" does not exist. Architecture is one of the exceptional added disciplines, in 2005, enlarging an existing section with arts, aesthetics, music (MCC, 2005). It reminds the Turkish architecture academic recognition,... in 1973 (Bayazit, 2004).

A conjunction of opportunities

The French higher educational program evolved recently to follow the European degrees organisations and some commissions work on standardisation of curricula and on the management of higher education by one institution.
At the same time, a recognition by the Ministry for Industrial Renewal is on discussion for the normalisation of NAF/NACE codes (European Industrial Activity Classification) for design activities. On another field, a national program was launched in 2013 with proposals for a strong French design policy developed with experts from a "Mission design" (Cadix, 2013).

Conclusion

Even if these French opportunities are recent, they let

us think that the academic community may evolve as the architects' experience: as the "ARD" will continue, as the pedagogical shape of design education may be clarified as well as professional classification, as the industrial Ministry will financially help the development of research programs, we are quite optimistic for the research community in France and hope that it can be a real stake-holder of the international design research community.

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