

DESIS NETWORK

Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability

1. DESIS

Design for Social Innovation towards Sustainability is a network of design labs, based in design schools and design-oriented universities, actively involved in promoting and supporting sustainable change.

PARTNERSHIPS

DESIS Network collaborates with other networks whose focus (such as social innovation, quality of everyday life, design for sustainability, and design school coordination) is complementary to their own. In this spirit, to date, formal agreements have been established with: *Social Innovation Exchange* (SIX), *Sustainable Everyday Project* (SEP), *Learning Network on Sustainability* (LeNS), *Partnership for Education and Research about Responsible Living* (PERL) and *International Association of Universities and Colleges of Design, Art and Media* (CUMULUS).

DESIS also establishes special partnerships with private companies, non-profit organizations, foundations and government agencies that share similar views and are willing to co-develop open projects on topics and areas of common interest.

DESIS is endorsed by the *United Nations Environment Program* (UNEP).

PAST AND PRESENT

DESIS Network originates from three main international activities in the 2006-2008 period: the European research EMUDE, 2005; the UNEP Program

CCSL, 2008 and the international conference *Changing the Change*, within the framework of Torino World Design Capital, 2008 .

In different ways, these activities introduced the notions of creative community and social innovation in several design schools worldwide and created favourable conditions to start an international network on these topics.

The main ideas behind it were that social innovation could be a powerful driver towards sustainability and that design schools could help in supporting and accelerating the process. In 2009, this network took the name of DESIS: *Design for Social Innovation towards Sustainability*.

In the 2009-2011 period, DESIS spread in several regions of the world, establishing partnerships with other entities and evolving towards the current organization and way of working: a network of Design Labs based in design schools and in other design-oriented universities and operating with local, regional and global partners to promote and support social change towards sustainability.

Within this worldwide framework, some DESIS Labs situated in the same area decided to connect and coordinate with each other to discuss regional specificities and develop regional programs. Currently (December 2011), there are operative DESIS Regional Networks in Africa, Brazil, China, Europe, U.S.A. Others are under construction in Australia, Colombia, India, Japan, Korea and the Middle East.

¹EMUDE, Emerging User Demands for Sustainable Solutions, 6th Framework Programme (priority 3-NMP), European Community, 2006

²CCSL, *Creative communities for sustainable life styles*, Task Force on Sustainable Consumption and Production, Swedish Ministry of Environment and UNEP, internal document

³*Changing the Change. Design Visions, Proposals and Tools*. International conference on design research, Torino World Design Capital, 2008.

2. VISION

In the complexity of contemporary society, social innovation is spreading and its potential, as a driver of sustainable change, is increasing. To facilitate this process, the design community, in general, and design schools, in particular, can play a pivotal role.

SOCIAL INNOVATION

“Social innovation is a new idea that works in meeting social goals” (Mulgan, 2006). In other words, social innovation can be seen as a process of change emerging from the creative re-combination of existing assets (social capital, historical heritage traditional craftsmanship, accessible advanced technology) and aiming at achieving socially recognized goals in new ways. A kind of innovation driven by social demands rather than by the market and/or autonomous techno-scientific research, and generated more by the actors involved than by specialists.

EMERGING SUSTAINABLE WAYS OF LIVING

Over the past decade social innovation has spread: a variety of social actors throughout the world (institutions, enterprises, non-profit organizations and, most of all, networks of collaborative people) have moved outside mainstream models of thinking

and doing, generating a variety of promising initia-

tives such as community-supported agriculture, co-housing, carpooling, community gardens, neighbourhood care, talent exchange and time banks. These initiatives propose viable solutions to complex problems of the present (e.g., social cohesion, urban regeneration, healthy food accessibility, water and sustainable energy management) and, at the same time, they represent working prototypes of sustainable ways of living.

DESIGN FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION

Today, social innovation is generating a constellation of small initiatives. Nevertheless, if favourable conditions are created, these small, local social inventions and their working prototypes can spread. They can be scaled-up, consolidated, replicated and integrated with larger programs to generate large-scale sustainable changes. To do that, new design competences are needed. Indeed, social innovation processes require visions, strategies and co-design tools to move from ideas to mature solutions and viable programs. . That is, they ask for new design capabilities that, as a whole, can be defined as design for social innovation.

DESIGN SCHOOLS AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

Design for social innovation can find in the design schools a major driver for its application and diffusion. In fact, design schools (and, more in general, all the design-oriented universities) can orient their didactic and research activities towards social innovation. That is, they can become design laboratories where new visions are generated, new tools are defined and tested and where new projects are started and supported. If a worldwide movement towards sustainability calls for the best possible use

of all existing resources, design schools, with all their potential in terms of students’ enthusiasm and faculty experience, should be considered a very promising social resource: a potentially powerful promoter of sustainable change.

3. AIM

DESIS Network aims at using design thinking and design knowledge to co-create, with local, regional and global partners, socially relevant scenarios, solutions and communication programs.

SCALING-UP SOCIAL INNOVATION

DESIS Network main aim is to use design thinking and design knowledge to trigger, enable and scale-up social innovation. That is:

- To enhance its potential by creating a more favorable environment (social, cultural, political, economic).
- To raise its visibility by searching for promising initiatives and communicating their existence and significance to a larger audience.
- To facilitate its transferability by developing enabling solutions to make existing initiatives more effective, accessible and replicable in different contexts

- ▶ .To increase its synergy by developing frameworks and platforms to connect the diverse local cases into larger regional projects.
- ▶ To stimulate new initiatives, by proposing visions and solutions as seeds to be developed in open, collaborative interactions with local communities and other involved actors.

CLARIFYING THE DESIGN POTENTIAL

DESIS Network's second aim is to clarify the design for social innovation potential both inside and outside the design community. That is:

- ▶ To make it clearer, inside the design community (designers, design researchers, design media and design schools), that social innovation is, and will continue to be at least for the near future, a fundamental field of application for all the design disciplines.
- ▶ To give social innovators tangible evidence of the potential of design thinking and design knowledge in supporting the processes in which they are involved.

PROMOTING AN OPEN DESIGN PROGRAM

DESIS Network's most ambitious aim is to promote a broad and flexible design program. A design program where several local, regional and global projects may converge, reinforce each other and generate innovative scenarios and solutions. Our desire is to produce knowledge with the contribution of different partners (open processes) and that can be used by all stakeholders (open results)

In short the DESIS Network's higher ambition is to generate an Open Design Program able to give different projects visibility, to facilitate their alignments, collaborations and synergies and, on these bases, to develop visions and proposals adequate to the great challenges of contemporary society.

4. LABS

DESIS Labs are groups of academics, researchers and students who orient their design and research activities towards social innovation.

They operate at the local scale with local partners and, in collaboration with other DESIS Labs, they actively participate in large-scale projects and programs.

ACTIVITIES

DESIS Labs are engaged in different kinds of design and research projects and in networking activities.

Local projects

- ▶ They are projects and research programs developed in collaboration with local partners in the framework of the ordinary design classes (that is, by students and their tutors) or as ad hoc initiatives promoted by the DESIS Lab (in collaboration with professional designers and researchers). Or they can be a combination of the two: articulated programs where student

work and professional activities are mixed.

Regional and Global projects

- ▶ They are projects and research programs promoted and supported by several DESIS Labs, dealing with complex problems, large systems or regional and global initiatives. Each Lab operates as a research partner who brings its specific competences and context sensitivity to the project.

Networking activities

- ▶ They are activities needed to establish mutually beneficial relationships between DESIS Labs and other possible partners (to initiate and coordinate large scale projects and research). They include active participation in the DESIS Website in terms of management and content providing (feeding it with relevant information and using it as an enabling platform to support large scale projects and research)

ORGANIZATION

DESIS Labs are teams of professors, researchers and students based in Design Schools and design-oriented universities, and officially in charge of promoting social innovation initiatives. They can be extensions of already existing entities (labs, institutes and centers) or brand new labs created for this specific purpose.

THE LABS



Tsinghua University DESIS Lab, China

Designmatters DESIS Lab (Art Center), USA

University of South Australia (UniSA) DESIS Lab,
Adelaide, Australia

Jiangnan University DESIS Lab, Wuxi, China

Tongji University DESIS Research Center, Shanghai, China

University of Botswana DESIS Lab, Gaborone, Botswana

StAD DESIS Lab, Nairobi, Kenya

ITU (Istanbul Technical University) DESIS Lab, Istanbul,
Turkey

UNIST DESIS lab, Ulsan, South Korea

UPB (Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana) DESIS Lab,
Medellín, Colombia

SNU (Seoul National University) DESIS Lab, Seoul, South
Korea

Parsons DESIS Lab, New York, U.S.A.

ID+ DESIS LAB, Aveiro, Portugal

UF RJ (Rio de Janeiro Federal University) DESIS group,
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

NAS DESIGN (Núcleo de Abordagem Sistêmica do
Design), Santa Catarina, Brazil

5. NETWORK

DESIS Network is a constellation of autonomous but interconnected DESIS Labs. Given this system architecture it offers the very unique possibility to integrate local and global points of view and to promote open design programs where a variety of projects converge, tackling complex problems and generating larger scenarios.

ACTIVITIES

DESIS Network's basic activity is to support DESIS Labs projects, to facilitate their collaboration and to inform a larger audience on the potential of design for social innovation. More precisely:

- It supports Local Projects promoting visibility and collaboration and enhancing the circulation of experiences, results and design tools.

- It facilitates Regional and Global Projects creating arenas where the discussion can freely start, where the best partners can be found and where promising ideas can be incubated
- It offers DESIS Labs and a larger audience relevant information on exemplary projects and case studies; programs of workshops, seminars and courses; calendars of cultural events and communication initiatives, as exhibitions, publications and broadcasts.

DESIS Network's second kind of activity is to promote and support regional sub-networks of DESIS Labs and thematic clusters of similar projects.

- Regional Networks connect and coordinate the DESIS Labs situated in the same area. Their role is to promote discussions on regional specificities and develop programs of initiatives at the regional scale.
- Thematic Clusters connect and coordinate the DESIS Labs dealing with similar topics in similar ways. Their role is to facilitate the exchange among on-going projects, to start new research proposals and to outline and communicate thematic scenarios.

ORGANIZATION

DESIS Network is largely based on self-organization at the local level and on network-wide distributed responsibilities and administrative roles**. In this spirit, it is coordinated and directed by a Council (the DESIS Council, with one representative for every DESIS Lab).

On the administrative side, each DESIS initiative is managed, and administrated, by a partnership of DESIS Labs. Therefore, the administrative responsibility of DESIS Network is limited to international coordination and website management.

6. PARTICIPATE

CONTRIBUTORS

Individuals who want to contribute to the DESIS Network, but cannot establish a DESIS Lab, can become a DESIS Contributor. This means to support different DESIS initiatives and make use of the DESIS toolkits to collect case studies, projects and organize local events. Please contact a Regional Coordinator (see section “Contact us”) to be acknowledged as a regular DESIS Contributor .

PARTNERS

Private companies, non-profit organizations, foundations and government agencies who want to contribute to the DESIS Network can become a DESIS Partner. This means to collaborate, at the local, regional or global scale, with one or more DESIS Labs in research programs and projects. Please contact a Local, Regional or international Coordinator to become a DESIS partner (see section “Contact us”).

7. CONTACT US

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