

Summary

1. Discussion in Gmund/Tegernsee, 13 -15 March 2019

What will professional practice in design look like in the future? What do designers need to know and be able to do to be successful? What training do they need? And what does this mean for colleges in order that they can facilitate this training?

These questions on the future of design education were the focus of the first iF Design Foundation discussion round. 30 people from German-speaking countries were invited to share their assessments and experience. The participants were drawn from the worlds of business, teaching and research.

The aim of this event was to allow different perspectives to be voiced and provide a platform to discuss each of the arguments in the form of a discussion round: No lectures were held; spaces for discussion in different constellations were created.

Core statements and topics

The participants agreed that the professional practice of design in the future will differ substantially from conventional practice today.

The change will affect not only the fundamentals of design practice. It will also include attitudes and positions (e.g. taking on social responsibility, critical reflection), values and aims (e.g. humanity, diversity, sustainability, creativity, interdisciplinarity and/or transdisciplinarity, striving for improvement, support for forming personality, dealing with increasing uncertainty and complexity). All of these elements have belonged to the ethos of design for over 150 years, ever since it established itself in western industrial societies. This is something that design shares with all other scientific and economic practices.

The specific expressions of design practice, however, differ significantly from other activities. Here, the changes have had consequences for professional life for a long time. Digitalisation represents the central driving factor behind this comprehensive change. This transformation will only become stronger in the near future. It particularly affects specific knowledge and abilities that will be necessary for successful professional practice.

The participants discussed this point in depth because different points of view were expressed, for example:

- Whether fundamental design skills should be a prerequisite for design studies.
- Which fundamental skill should be conveyed at the beginning of a course of studies. On the one hand, the importance of traditional skills and experiences rooted in the arts and crafts was emphasised. On the other, it was suggested that such skills cannot directly be conveyed propaedeutically, but rather only when the actual need emerges.
- The role of analogue and/or manual skills and what role digital skills should have in training. The danger of overloading a course of studies was indicated if designers need to know and indeed master e.g. analogue production techniques trained in workshops (print, plaster, metal, wood) and at the same time have to learn programming skills.
- What proportion of a course of studies should be devoted to topics from design theory and history, research, criticism and self-reflection as well as verbal expression.

- How the political aspect of design in the past has fallen out of focus and to what extent design should be re-politicised.
- What proportion of a course of studies should be devoted to scientific topics (biology, physics, chemistry).
- What social and communicative competences are necessary in order that intercultural cooperation in increasingly international, interdisciplinary and hierarchy-overarching projects are successful.
- How a designer's self-awareness can be strengthened and how it is possible to better convey business and social aspects in a way that is not superficial, but about the processing of complex problems and the development of new questions.
- What space colleges should provide for free appropriation, development and confrontation and what space colleges should receive for this from society.

There was agreement on the description of design practice as the interaction of thinking and drafting; as the integration of mental and physical, iterative development processes. The idea of the 'thinking hand' appears appropriate for this. This ties into the current international discourse under the title of 'thinking with hands' whose roots can be traced back to art historical ideas of the Renaissance around the term 'disegno'. The early generation of creative illustrative material and/or prototypes e.g. in the form of sketches, experiments or models that follows from this are characteristic for design practice. The participants suggested the term 'visionation' for this.

Starting point of the discussion

The starting point of the discussion was provided by an international study by the iF Foundation on the future of design education, which was based on the systematic evaluation of written sources and 150 interviews. The findings of the study led to the formulation of 80 questions. These questions will be put to participants in a number of regional discussions in order to relate the study's findings to differences in each regional context.

The next steps

Following the kickoff discussion for German-speaking participants, further discussions will be held in Europe, North America, South America, Africa and Asia in 2019 and 2020. The findings will be presented at a global conference in 2021 as a white book and made available to the governments, ministries of education and arts of each country and other interested parties.