

The design system of Mexico City, past, present and future: Preliminary results of a research based on the model of the Barcelona design system

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Abstract

The need for a study such as this, arises when after the public presentation of a design policy for México (April 23th 2008) to the Honourable Chamber of Deputies, more efforts are needed to understand the real scope and potential of design infrastructure in Mexico City and consequently to count with the necessary elements to outline the future design scenarios and develop strategies that may support the policy on national design. The proposal of this study and the decision to carry it out starts from the premises derived from the international debate on the role of design as engine for innovation and social development. Besides it is based on the concept of design system that other countries have adopted to impulse their own design policies.

The study was developed starting out from the experience of the project "Disseny_Cat: Elements for a Design Policy in Catalonia", their general objectives were to model the Barcelona design system and come up with action plans in favour of this sector. It set off from the initial hypothesis that the methodology proposed for the project was a trustworthy instrument that will facilitate to achieve the purpose of this study in an adequate manner. To visualize the system and identify its main functions and the role played by the different actors, a group of design experts was conformed, and to whom initially it was asked on the actual situa-

tion about the design system of Mexico City.

Amongst some of the findings of this research it was identified that some of the institutional agents in the design system of Mexico City are diverse, atomized, fragmented and with no articulation between them. This situation allows the assumption that the lack of a real demand of professional demand services respond among other factors to the incomprehension of the design discipline within the sphere of competitiveness and the innovation processes, besides it is indispensable a joint effort by the different actors of the system to establish a national policy that might impulse design as strategic factor in the economic development of the country.

It is recognized that the design system of Mexico City counts with a series of institutions that even though they do not work as desired, by the only fact of existing they endow the system with solidity and permanence, because all OF THEM give strength to the system and have allowed it to survive, in spite of the indifference and neglect of those dedicated to design. During the last few years, many of these institutions besides grouping themselves in associations have entered into a diagnosis of self evaluation, and more recently into a process of accreditation through external evaluation.

Summing up, this work presents some of the obstacles that obstruct the interaction between the different actors of the design system of Mexico City. In the future, it will be necessary to develop different strategies and action plans to contribute so that design may be transformed into an engine of the national economy and the Mexican society.

Keywords: Design System, Design Strategy, Design Lead Innovation.

1. Research work: Profile and objectives

The project “Modelado del Sistema Diseño de la Ciudad de México” (Modelling of the design system of Mexico City) is a research proposed jointly by the Sciences and Arts Division (División de Ciencias y Artes para el Diseño CYAD) of the Autonomous Metropolitan University (Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana) in Mexico City, Mexico, and the Multimedia Applications Laboratory (Laboratorio de Aplicaciones Multimedia) of the Polytechnic University of Catalonia (Universidad Politécnica de Cataluña) in Barcelona, Spain; it was conducted by an ad hoc research group and managed by some of the authors of this report.

The initial objective of this research has been to model the Design System of Mexico City (for its Spanish acronym SDCM) starting from the identification of its main actors, their roles, and the level of interaction amongst them. The model that is presented in this report will serve, subsequently, to identify its strengths and weaknesses in the actual context and its future perspectives.

To achieve this objective, it was adopted and adapted the same research methodology utilized in the original study named: “Disseny_cat: elements per a una política de disseny a Catalunya” (Calvera and Monguet, 2006), whose objectives were to model the Barcelona Design System and outline action plans in favour of this sector. It set off from the initial hypothesis that the methodology proposed for the project was a trustworthy instrument that has been probed, that will facilitate to achieve the purpose of the study in an effective and efficient manner.

The initial steps of this study implied to develop a research based on documents on the antecedents and the actual situation of design in Mexico as well as to obtain the state of opinion amongst the different actors that conform the design sector in Mexico City. In this sense the collaboration and positive answer given by the designers, enterprises and design institutions whose opinions

have been captured through interviews or debates, have been very valuable for this research.

2. Methodology and research process

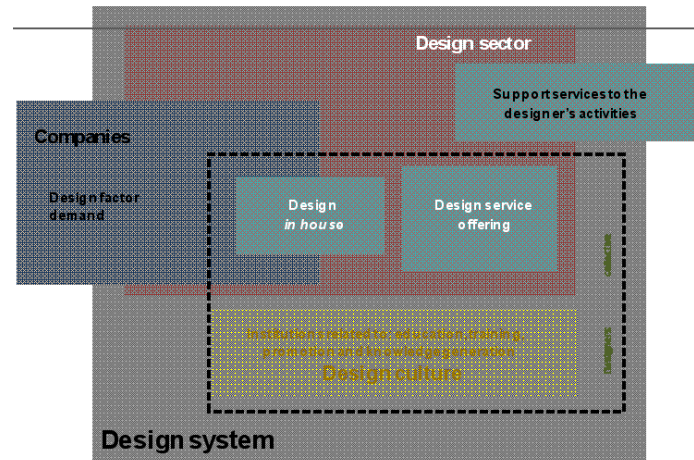
The methodology followed different steps:

The first step was the diagnosis, its objective was to identify and group the different actors that represent the SDCM starting from a model of a system adopted and adapted. Besides there was interest to understand their situation in the system and the functions they practice. The actors were arranged according to the following subsectors: offering, demand and culture. To achieve this, a group of academics coming from different design disciplines such as industrial and graphic design, architecture and communication was composed.

The model to visualize the SDCM was based on the concept of design system proposed by Italians, which was also used to model the Catalan Design System. The concept of the Milan design system (in Calvera and Monguet, 2006: 137):

...“makes reference to a theoretical model from which it is possible to organize a complex set with different actors in a single representation that, within a well delimited economically and geographically territory, interact and maintain relations, its object is the professional activity of design and its economic impact. The design system of a region, city or country, is the one who explains the design that is made within the space, and determines the elements that makes them identifiable and conditions its capacity of evolution and development in the future”

Concerning the Catalan Design System, its methodology facilitates to obtain relevant information regarding the interaction activity within an area of design. The following Figure 1 represents the components of a design system.



- Design System = Design sector + Design culture
- Design Sector = demand + offer + providers offering
- Design culture = institutions and persons dealing with Design
- Designers collective = Design service offering
- Design community = Designers collective + Design culture

Figure 1. Design System (originally published in “Disseny_cat: elements per a una política de disseny a Catalunya” by Calvera and Monguet in 2006). Translate it to english by the authors of this paper.

During the second phase, the diagnosis, a group of experts was consulted; they were representative of the different structures of design, well known and with experience within the areas of expertise, with the purposes of evaluating the proposal of SDCM elaborated by a group of academics and identify its weaknesses, strengths and the assets in the actual situation of the whole sys-

tem. The intention was to obtain their state of opinion and conscience regarding the SDCM; they were invited to evaluate the state as a whole. The question to answer was: How well are we doing?

According to the set out of the Disseny Cat study, the diagnosis of the system was divided in three fields:

- Culture: understood as the set of people and/or entities dedicated to forming designers, as well as the dissemination and promotion of the culture of design.
- Offering (supply): understood as the set of people and/or entities that offer design services.
- Demand: understood as the set of people and/or entities that demand design services so they may offer their products in any economic sector. They may subcontract design services to design studios not related to the company, or they may count with in-house design services.

With respect to this point, qualitative and quantitative data has been obtained regarding the above design sectors in Mexico City. These data have been used to verify the state of opinion that the actors had.

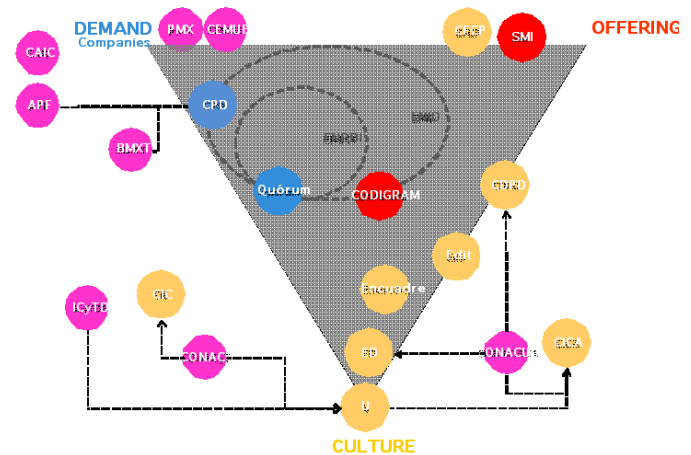
3. Modelling of the Design System of Mexico City

It may be said that the lack of articulation between supply, demand and culture, together with the lack of a national policy on design, have limited the recognition and the acceptance of design as a strategic factor in the value chain. For most people, design is something that is merely artistic or technical, not seen as an indispensable element in innovation that may counterbalance the generalized assumptions.

To visualize the SCDM, a documental revision was centred in the evolution of design in Mexico, starting from the early industria-

lization in the 20th century. In this phase there were identified several aspects: the educative structure in Mexico, the supply of design services in Mexico from the moment of the creation of several organizations representatives of the design trade; institutions dedicated to the promotion and dissemination of design; to those institutions that demand design services, and also to those that really try to boost the design factor as strategic axis in the economic development of the country regarding research, development and innovation (R&D+ i).

The way the actors of the SDCM was located in the Figure 2, was based on the opinion of the above academic group mentioned and then it was subsequently evaluated by a group of experts taking as reference the classification proposed by the Disseny_Cat study.



CPD	Centro Promotor del Diseño (Design Promotion Center)	CIC	Centros de Investigación de CONA-CyT (Research Centers at CONA-CyT)	Edit	Editorials
QUORUM	Asociación de empresas y profesionales de Diseño (Association of businesses and design professionals)	CICA	Centros de Investigación para la Cultura y las Artes (Research Centers for Arts and Culture)	ED	Escuelas de Diseño (Schools of Design)
CODIGRAM	College of Industrial and Graphic Designers in Mexico (Colegio de Diseñadores Industriales y Gráficos de México)	CDPD	Centros de Difusión y Promoción del Diseño (Design dissemination and promotion centers)	U	Universities
SMI	Sociedad Mexicana de Interioristas (Mexican Society of Interior Designers)	CFCP	Centros de Formación y Capacitación Profesional (Training Centers)	ENID	Entidades Integradoras de Diseño (Entities that offer design services)

BMXT	Banco Mexicano de Comercio Exterior (Mexican Foreign Trade Bank)	ICyTDF	Instituto de Ciencia y Tecnología del Distrito Federal (Institute of Science and Technology of Mexico City)	ENDDI	Entidades con Departamentos de Diseño In-House (Entities with Design departments)
PMX	PRO-MEXICO	CEMUE	Centro Empresarial México-Unión Europea (Entrepreneurial Center Mexico-European Union)	CONA-CyT	Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (National Council for Science and Technology)
CAIC	Cámaras de la Industria y el Comercio (Chambers of Industry and Trade)	APF	Administración Pública Federal (Federal Public Administration)	CONA-CULTA	Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (National Council for Arts and Culture)

Figure 2. Design System Actors in Mexico City.

4. Identifying the main actors of the Design System of Mexico City

4.1. Concerning institutions dedicated to execute design policies in Mexico

With regard to the institutions dedicated to the execution of the policies on design in Mexico, it may be said that there are no institutions dedicated exclusively to execute policies for the promotion of design, although there is interest and effort from different institutions to create them; nevertheless it has been observed that these are still independent efforts, disconnected amongst them, that are even subjected to the reach of their immediate context without a will to add and share knowledge.

4.2. Concerning institutions that offer design services to companies

At least two institutions have been identified that are dedicated exclusively to support companies: Design Promotion Center (Centro Promotor del Diseño) and the Entrepreneurial Center Mexico- European Union (Centro Empresarial México- Unión Europea), these are organisms dedicated to stimulate and boost the positioning of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the national and international markets.

Regarding commercial shows It is possible to identify the ones organized in the World Trade Center, Banamex Center, Expo Bancomer Santa Fe, the Expo gift (Expo Regalo), and the Palace of Sports (Palacio de los Deportes), all of them located in Mexico City, they have organized design related events, such as publicity, art, gifts, promotional articles and electronic computer equipment.

There are a group of enterprises dedicated to promote and consolidate the market for design; one of them is Quorum whose function is to promote Mexican design. They are an association of

companies and design professionals that operate and develop their work in Mexico

Amongst the specialized museums and exhibit galleries have been identified: The Mumedí Foundation, a design museum (Fundación Mumedí A.C.); the Mexican Gallery of Design (Galería Mexicana del Diseño), and the Center for Architecture and Design (Centro de Arquitectura y Diseño).

4.3. Concerning institutions engaged in the generation of design knowledge

At present no specialized centers have been identified whose main function be the research of / or for design. The closest to this activity is the Research Center for Industrial Design of the National University (Centro de Investigaciones de Diseño Industrial (CIDI) de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México), whose principal function more than research and generation of knowledge in the field of design, is the professional education of undergraduate and graduate design students.

Encuadre A.C. is a group of higher education institutions on graphic and visual communication design. They have been formed as the only group dedicated to the promotion and management of research and teaching of design.

In Mexico there exists a wide variety of publications on design, but national books and magazines on this discipline are scarce and lack continuity. That is why most of the publications that are distributed are foreign, mainly coming from Spain, Argentina and the USA. The Mexican publications that are better known are magazines such as: *al Diseño*, *REDiseño* (originated in the State of Jalisco but distributed at the national level); *Arquine*; *Casa Viva Decoración* (Editorial Televisa, Mexico's main broadcaster); *Diseño y ArquitectuRa*; *Ambientes*; *Encuadre* and *ATK Monográfico*. The most important publishing houses that are dedicated exclusi-

vely to design are: Designio, Arquine and AM editors.

The most representative institutions dedicated to generating and maintaining the culture of design are: Guía del Diseño Mexicano ; Trama Visual; Museo Franz Mayer; and the Centro Cultural Española. These are considered in Figure 2, as centers of dissemination and promotion of design (CDPD for their acronym in Spanish).

With regard to the institutions dedicated to represent and protect professionals, two were identified. The College of Industrial and Graphic Designers of Mexico (CODIGRAM Colegio de Diseñadores Industriales y Gráficos de México), this is the only official organism, depending on the Ministry of Public Education (SEP for their acronym in Spanish), they group the trade of designers in Mexico City's metropolitan area. Other organism that was identified is the Mexican Society of Interior Designers (Sociedad Mexicana de Interioristas), they are the link between professionals, academics, suppliers, and the media dedicated to cover interior design in the whole of Mexico.

4.4. Concerning other potential institutions that may strengthen the Design System of Mexico City

Other institutions are considered as axis capable to boost the design system to the extent that they have a significant demand of design products and services, either directly or indirectly, through companies and/or public organisms, that due to their quantity and diversity cannot be listed here, but they have direct impact in the design system. Some of them are the diverse chambers of commerce throughout the country, the federal government or Federal Public Administration (APF for their Spanish acronym), Mexico's Bank for Foreign Trade (Bancomext), and Promexico (PMX) in charge of promoting the internationalization of Mexican companies.

4.5. Concerning institutions that integrate the education subsystem

Historically the teaching of design had its origins at the undergraduate level during the decade of the 1960s, alongside the stabilizing model based on the substitution of imports. Amongst the first schools that offered a design program, either industrial, graphic or textile, some institutions were identified such as: Iberoamerican University (Universidad Iberoamericana), Mexico's National University at the Faculty of Architecture (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Facultad de Arquitectura), the School of Design of the National Institute of Fine Arts (Escuela de Diseño del Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes), and the Autonomous Metropolitan University, at their Azcapotzalco and Xochimilco campuses (Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana).

Regarding the different design programs that there exist at the undergraduate and postgraduate level, there is ample supply that includes the careers of graphic, industrial, interior, textiles and fashion design.

The most abundant offer of design programs at the higher education level comes from private schools and universities, some of them pioneers have been already mentioned, and others such as The Monterrey Technological Institute of Higher Studies (Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores Monterrey), the University of the Valley of Mexico (Universidad del Valle de México), and the Technological University of Mexico (Universidad Tecnológica de México).

At the professional level, in Mexico City and its metropolitan area there are two schools: The School of Design at the National Institute of Fine Arts, and Centro as institutions that are dedicated exclusively to teaching programs of design. Postgraduate's courses on design may be divided in two: those who have recognition of its quality from CONACYT (Mexico's Council for Science and

Technology) with 6 programs at different levels, such as specialization, and master and doctoral levels; and those who have not recognition with 11 programs at the specialization and master levels.

Finally, it is possible to identify institutions that have incidence in forming designers at the technical level, either for training, to update their skills, for certification, or for training with that does not need official recognition.

4.6. Concerning the linking of design with Mexico's Innovation, Research and Development (R + D + i) system

Several countries of the world have taken note of the importance to invest in research and innovation as fundamental engines to achieve economic growth and competitiveness. Nevertheless, in spite that during the last decade the Mexico's R&D+i system is positioned well behind developed countries in the ranking, and even behind some of the most important emerging countries. Some of the reasons for this poor showing is due that most of the R&D is still carried out by the public sector; that there is a weak connection between R&D and industry; there is low activity for the creation of and exploitation of patents and other intellectual property products; the lack of investment of human resources; and the lack of coherence amongst the established goals in the national public policies for innovation and the efforts to obtain them.

Some of the institutions that are in charge to boost the R&D+i system in Mexico City's metropolitan area are: CONACYT (Mexico's Council for Science and Technology), and their Public Centers of Research (CPI); the Centers and Research Institutes managed by Institutions of Higher Education (CPI for its Spanish acronyms); the Institute of Science and Technology of the Federal District (ICyTDF Instituto de Ciencia y Tecnología del Distrito Federal); as well as the Incubation System for Companies (SNIE Sistema de Incubación de Empresas), the latter depending on the

Ministry of Economics (Secretaría de Economía)..

5. Diagnosis: Particularities of the Design System of Mexico City

Some of the characteristics of the SDCM are:

The SDCM is a centrifuged model that tends to the entropy because it is formed by diverse agents without connections amongst them, found in the periphery moving away from the center. This model is added to the short-term vision of politicians that do not offer sustainable programs that boost the design in Mexico; this situation derives in poor mechanisms to connect the supply, the demand and culture in design, in comparison with other systems in the world.

The SDCM does not have a defined identity, due to the confusion and disinformation in the very same official institutions that are entitled of granting denominations and classifications of activities.

There is a lack, or they are not available, of formal studies on the demand and supply of design products and services in Mexico, especially regarding small and medium-sized enterprises and the public sector.

The design sector does exist, but there is no concrete data on the demand of design services. The owners and general directors of companies consume these services, but they do not recognize them, as they seem not to have a special place in the value chain, as they hire the services of companies, that they themselves subcontract designers in the development of products or services. There is no a wide and shared conscience of the strategic value of design to face the local and regional development, or to be used for the export of products and services.

There is no articulation between the design system design and the R&D+i system.

In Mexico there are no public policies for the promotion of design (at this moment, there are only some formal initiatives), that is why there are no official institutions that are dedicated to that; however, there are some public and private organisms that are dedicated to promoting and disseminating design at the local, national, and even international level.

Even though there is not yet a national policy on design, there exist different initiatives to carry this out, especially from social and academic initiatives.

There is no vinculation amongst the different subsystems of supply, demand, and culture in design, as a disequilibrium has been detected in the wide variety of culture in comparison with the supply and demand.

Industrial Design, as opposed to graphic design, it is not recognized as an occupation by part of the Ministry of Work and Social Prevision (Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social), as they probably have not detected the need to be incorporated to the productive sector. Therefore it is not a priority for them to consider its inclusion.

There is a higher presence of agents in the cultural subsystem. The opposite situation is what it happens in the supply and demand subsystems as there is a lack of agents that drive them.

The majority of the members of the design community feels that are not represented by the actual institutions.

As opposed to what it has happened in other countries, we cannot overcome the didactic phase in the discourse of design. In Mexico design has not been democratized or socialized, that is why there

is a gap in the country in comparison with other countries when it comes to understanding design as strategic factor.

6. Conclusions

First, the original methodology used to model the Barcelona Design System allowed us to understand the real scope and potential of design infrastructure in Mexico City and consequently to visualize the system and identify its actors and their functions and role played in the system. It is a potential instrument that facilitates modelling design systems. Regarding the methodology, in the future we will continue using this methodology to complete our research.

In relation to the Design System of Mexico City, the institutional agents identified are diverse, atomized, and disarticulated amongst them. This situation allows the assumption that the lack of demand of professional services respond amid other factors to the in definition and incomprehension of the discipline in the sphere of competitiveness and in the innovation processes, of the same form, it is possible to say that is indispensable the united work of all different actors part of the design system through a collective effort, and not only from a few, to stimulate and boost design as strategic factor in the economic development of the country.

Structurally speaking, it is recognized that the Design System of Mexico City counts with a series of institutions that in spite that they do not work as desired, just by the fact of existing they endow the system with permanence and solidity, as all these institutions give strength to the system, as they have survived the indifference and neglect of those dedicated to design. In particular, the institutions of the culture subsystem present special.

Finally, this research will continue with the elaboration of different strategies and action plans to improve the Design System of Mexi-

co City so that design can be consider in our region as an engine of the national economy and the Mexican society. Also, we are interested in modelling the whole National Design System, overall, considering that there are other important regions for the industry and trade of Mexico.

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