



SHARING EXPERIENCE EUROPE
POLICY INNOVATION DESIGN

Case Studies in Design Policy & Programmes

This case study was developed as part of the SEE project. SEE is a network of eleven European partners sharing experience and stimulating debate on how to integrate design into innovation policies at regional, national and European levels.

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Design 2005!

Finland

The 1990s was a decade of transformation for Finland. The country was experiencing a severe economic recession characterised by a major banking crisis, rising unemployment, escalating government debts and inflation. International market pressures required strategic action at ministerial level. The country then started a process that brought it to the head of the list of competitive countries in the World Economic Forum. A unique aspect of this strategy was investment in measures with long-term impact instead of immediate solutions. One of these measures was the ambitious aim of building a knowledge-based country by investing in R&D. Design policy was also part of this movement.



The work started in 1996, when the Finnish National Fund for Research and Development (SITRA) invited a group of representatives of the design community to discuss how design could contribute to innovation and economic development in Finland. The discussion identified the need for a more formal investigation. As a result, a survey was conducted and in October 1998 a new report (Designed Asset I-II – Design, Industry and International Competitiveness) was published. The establishment of a national system of design to operate alongside the national system for innovation was an important and visionary recommendation in this report.[1] It also included a thorough written 'diagnosis' of the situation of design in Finland, described the history of Finnish design and discussed its future.

The next stage of the initiative was led by the National Council of Crafts and Design when a second report was published in 1999, which served as the basis for the Finnish design policy Design 2005! This report was to a large extent the 'vision of what the Finnish design system should be in 2005. It clearly defined what impact the policy should have in quantity and quality of Finnish industrial design.' [2] After a broad consultation, the official policy was agreed by the Council of State and published in June 2000. The three main goals were to improve design quality, to promote the extensive use of opportunities inherent in design with a view to improving competitiveness and employment, and to develop the quality of the living environment and promote a distinctive national culture.

Design 2005! was a response to the opportunities and problems identified in the 'diagnosis', explains Mr Krister Ahlstrom, one of the key coordinators of the policy. The team that developed both publications and also implemented the policy was formed of representatives from government ministries, design organisations, professionals and volunteers. Mr Ahlstrom adds that 'all these individuals contributed to the process with great motivation, and all embraced the same vision: make design (thinking) part of the Finnish Innovation System – not just an outgrowth of art and craft. Design 2005!, above all, created a lot of positive excitement and activity in education, in industry, in research and among design consultants.'

A key factor in the success of Design 2005! was the setting of clearly defined targets and roles. For example, the document stated that 'under the direction of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, regional and national development bodies will jointly launch a project with a view to encouraging 200 enterprises annually to integrate design into

their core operations'. [3] In this way, Finland was able to make the widespread application design central to business know-how. The document also stated that the Ministry of Education and the University of Art and Design were responsible for setting up the design innovation centre Designium: 'Designium will combine research, education, corporate product development, support for business development and internationalisation in the design field, research data services for design firms and business enterprises, a business hatchery and the internationalisation of design know-how.' [4] The close interaction between research centres and industry with clear goals made Design 2005! one of the most effective design policies at the time.

However, the absence of appraisals to evaluate the success of the policy meant that no further proposals directly succeeded Design 2005!. Nevertheless, design has now become a valuable tool for industry where previously the merits of design were not so widely apparent. Also, the close collaboration between key actors, including research centres, private companies and government ministries, has furthered the capacity of design in innovation and national competitiveness. [5]

Thanks to policies such as Design 2005!, Finland left an essentially natural resource-based industry to become a competitive knowledge-based economy with the highest investment rate in R&D in Europe – 3.5% of GDP [6] – and specialised in high-tech industry with important global brands being established in Finland in the 1990s such as Nokia, Suunto, Metsopaper, Ponsse and Polar.

From 2000 to 2005 Finland implemented a visionary design agenda: Design 2005! A central component of the policy was that design should be more closely integrated into research, education, corporate product development, support for business development and internationalisation. A unique aspect of this strategy was the investment in measures with long-term impact and the inter-connectivity of various stakeholders in Finland. Design 2005! contributed to Finland becoming one of the most competitive countries in Europe. As a result, the Finnish example has become a policy reference for potential design policies across the EU.

Four years since the implementation of Design 2005!, discussions are now taking place between the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, the Ministry of Education, Creative Industries Finland and the Design Forum Finland to devise a design strategy spanning the next decade.

References:

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